



The Shift in the Value of Geuchik Leadership in Aceh: An Analysis of the Transition from Charismatic to Formal Leadership

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A B S T R A C T

This study aims to analyze the shift in the value of Geuchik leadership in Aceh from a charismatic and culturally grounded model toward a formal and procedural model of village governance. In the traditional Acehnese gampong system, the Geuchik was not only an administrative leader but also a respected social, cultural, and religious figure whose authority was built on charisma, maturity, community trust, and mastery of local customs. This study employs a descriptive qualitative approach through observation, semi-structured interviews, and documentation, supported by a literature review and field data. The findings show that contemporary Geuchik selection increasingly prioritizes formal administrative requirements, such as age, educational certificates, and electoral procedures, rather than social stature, customary knowledge, and charismatic authority. This change has expanded democratic access to village leadership, including for younger and formally educated candidates. Still, it has also created a value gap between legal legitimacy and socio-cultural legitimacy. The decline of charismatic authority affects public respect, community compliance, dispute resolution, and the preservation of local wisdom. Therefore, the study argues that effective gampong leadership in Aceh requires a balance between formal governance capacity and culturally rooted leadership values.

INTRODUCTION

The Geuchik is a leader at the lowest level of Aceh's governmental structure. In Indonesian administrative terminology, this position is comparable to the village head (kepala desa), although the term *Geuchik* or *Keuchik* reflects Aceh's distinctive gampong governance tradition. The position is therefore not merely administrative, but also political, social, and cultural because it connects formal village government with local norms and community life. The distinctiveness of Aceh's local governance is also shaped by special autonomy and local political institutions, which have been discussed in relation to Aceh's decentralization and the institutionalization of local political parties (Karsayuda, 2016). Statistical publications on Aceh and Banda Aceh further show that gampong governance operates within a dynamic provincial and urban context where formal administration, population development, and local identity intersect (Badan Pusat Statistik Provinsi Aceh, 2025; Badan Pusat Statistik Kota Banda Aceh, 2025).

Historically, the selection of a Geuchik in Aceh was closely tied to social legitimacy. Community members tended to recognize elders, respected figures, and individuals with strong customary, religious, and social authority as suitable leaders. This pattern is consistent with the understanding that village communities are not merely administrative units, but also cultural and socio-political entities rooted in local relationships and territorial bonds (Bintarto, 1989; Widjaja, 2003). Their authority was shaped by involvement in collective activities, including gotong royong, funerals, mediation of disputes, cultural ceremonies, and religious events. In this context, the Geuchik

became a figure whose instructions were heard because leadership was grounded in trust and charisma.

The contemporary selection mechanism has changed this pattern. Village leadership is now primarily obtained through direct elections and formal administrative requirements. National village regulations, including Law Number 6 of 2014 and Law Number 3 of 2024 concerning Villages, as well as Aceh Qanun Number 4 of 2009 concerning the election and dismissal of Keuchik, open broader opportunities for citizens who meet legal requirements to become candidates. This development strengthens democratic access, but it also shifts the basis of leadership legitimacy from cultural recognition toward procedural legality.

Previous studies have examined Keuchik performance, community participation, village development, Covid-19 prevention, economic empowerment, local elite strategy, and restorative justice in gampong institutions (Arifin, 2021; Fuady, 2025; Marlina et al., 2024; Mursyidin, 2022; Pakeh, 2017; Raihan, 2020; Subarni, 2022). These studies are valuable, but they rarely focus on the transformation of leadership values from charismatic authority to formal-procedural legitimacy.

The urgency of this research is strengthened by current village governance problems. Masyarakat Transparansi Aceh (MaTA) reported that village fund cases dominated corruption cases in Aceh in 2024, with 16 of 31 recorded cases, or 51.61 percent, occurring in the village fund sector (Aceh Government, 2025; RMOL Aceh, 2025). This quantitative indication does not mean that every contemporary *Geuchik* is problematic, but it shows that formal electoral and administrative mechanisms do

not automatically guarantee accountable and socially legitimate leadership.

The research gap in this study lies in the limited discussion of leadership value transformation in Acehne gampong governance. Most studies focus on performance, administration, public service, participation, local elite strategy, or community empowerment (Arifin, 2021; Fuady, 2025; Mursyidin, 2022; Subarni, 2022), while fewer studies analyze the symbolic, cultural, and charismatic dimensions of the *Geuchik* position. This study, therefore, focuses on the value shift that occurs when leadership is increasingly judged through formal requirements rather than through long-standing social recognition.

Based on this background, the research problem can be formulated as follows: how has the value of *Geuchik* leadership in Aceh shifted from charismatic leadership to formal leadership, what factors encourage this transformation, and what implications does it have for gampong governance and local wisdom? The objective of this study is to analyze the forms, causes, and implications of the leadership value shift in Aceh's village governance system.

In essence, culturally grounded village leadership tended to function as a protective and problem-solving mechanism within the village. This study is therefore important because it seeks to explain how formal governance can be strengthened without neglecting customary values, religious sensitivity, and community-based authority that remain significant in Acehne society.

METHOD

This study uses a descriptive qualitative design with a case study orientation. This design was selected because the research focuses on understanding meanings, perceptions, and social practices related to the shift in *Geuchik* leadership values in Aceh. A qualitative approach is appropriate because the issue under study is not limited to measurable administrative change, but also concerns cultural legitimacy, charisma, local wisdom, and community recognition. This approach follows the logic of qualitative inquiry, which emphasizes contextual meaning, interpretation, and the relationship between social actors and their environment (Danim, 2002; Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Creswell & Poth, 2018; Neuman, 2014; Yin, 2018).

Data were collected through observation, semi-structured interviews, and documentation. Observation was used to understand the social role of the *Geuchik* in gampong life and the interaction between village leaders and community members. Interviews were conducted with informants who understand village governance, customary practices, and socio-political dynamics in Aceh, including community leaders, cultural activists, youth figures, and individuals familiar with gampong administration. Documentation was carried out by reviewing laws and regulations, qanun, relevant literature, media reports, and documents related to village governance and village funds. The combination of interviews, observation, and documentation is relevant for qualitative research because it allows the researcher to compare lived experience, institutional documents, and contextual evidence (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018; Patton, 2015).

The data analysis followed the interactive model of Miles, Huberman, and Saldana (2014), which consists of data collection, data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing. The interview and documentation data were reduced by identifying themes related to charismatic leadership, formal requirements,

age, education, legitimacy, village funds, local wisdom, and public obedience. Thematic identification was also informed by the principle of thematic analysis, which emphasizes careful coding, pattern recognition, and interpretation of meaning across qualitative data (Braun & Clarke, 2021). These themes were then compared across informants and documents to obtain a coherent interpretation of the leadership value shift.

To maintain data validity, this study used source triangulation, technique triangulation, and member checking. Source triangulation was conducted by comparing information from different informants, while technique triangulation compared interview data with observation and documentation. Member checking was used to confirm the meaning of important interview statements. These procedures were applied to ensure that the findings were not based solely on personal impressions, but on consistent patterns found in the field and in relevant documents, in line with the emphasis on credibility and systematic evidence in qualitative research (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Patton, 2015).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Village Governance (*Gampong*)

Etymologically, the term village originates from the Sanskrit word *deca*, meaning homeland, place of origin, or birthplace. In the Indonesian dictionary tradition, a village is understood as a territorial unit inhabited by a number of families that has its own system of governance or as a cluster of houses outside urban areas forming a unified entity (Kamisa, 1997). Villages are formed through the initiative of several families who have settled in a particular area, taking into account the region's origins as well as linguistic, customary, economic, and socio-cultural conditions of the local community, which ultimately leads to the establishment of a village.

The term *desa* (village) is commonly used in Java, while outside Java, such as in Sumatra, Kalimantan, and Sulawesi, different terms are used to refer to similar territorial units. These variations are influenced by the historical formation of the village, whether based on genealogical ties, territorial bonds, or specific functional purposes.

The leader of village governance is generally referred to as the village head. Across Indonesia, this position is known by various customary titles, such as *Lurah*, *Kuwu*, *Penghulu*, *Keuchik*, *Klian*, and other local terms. These differences reflect the historical formation of villages through genealogical, territorial, and functional traditions. The village, or its equivalent, is therefore not merely a geographical unit, but also a cultural, economic, and political entity with original forms of self-governance (Bintarto, 1989).

According to Widjaja (2003, p. 3), in his book *Village Autonomy*, a village is defined as a legal community unit with an original structure based on traditional rights that are distinctive in nature. The foundational principles of village governance include diversity, participation, original autonomy, democratization, and community empowerment. A village, including customary villages or those referred to by other names, is a legal community unit with defined territorial boundaries that has the authority to regulate and manage governmental affairs and the interests of the local community based on community initiatives, original rights, and/or traditional rights recognized and respected within the system of the Unitary State of the

Republic of Indonesia (Law Number 6 of 2014 concerning Villages, Article 1 Paragraph 1).

Conceptually, village governance is an institutional system that regulates various village affairs and is equipped with structures and administrative apparatuses to carry out governmental functions. Hierarchically, village governance is part of the formal governmental structure regulated by laws and village regulations. Institutionally, village governance is led by a village head who is elected by the community through a local electoral process. This indicates that the village head is not appointed by higher levels of government but is chosen directly by the people, making it a political position rather than a purely bureaucratic one (Law Number 6 of 2014; Law Number 3 of 2024).

According to Ihsan Fauzi, village leadership or the position of village head is fundamentally a political office, as it is filled through community elections and requires administrative qualifications, such as formal educational certification. There is essentially no issue if the *Geuchik* is elected from among ordinary citizens rather than traditional figures or individuals deeply knowledgeable about customary practices, as was more common in the past. The perception that younger leaders lack experience may arise; however, such views contradict democratic values and established regulations. In practice, this is not problematic because village governance already includes various institutional roles, such as *imum*, *petua*, and other officials, who collectively address the diverse challenges faced by the community (Ihsan Fauzi, personal communication, October 12, 2025).

The *Geuchik* in Village Governance in Aceh.

The *Keuchik* within the structure of governance in Aceh represents a village (*gampong*) leadership institution. Based on the Law on the Governing of Aceh (UUPA) Number 11 of 2006, Article 115 states that a *gampong* is led by a *Keuchik* who is directly elected by and from members of the community for a term of six years and may be re-elected for only one additional term. Furthermore, Article 116 explains that in carrying out their duties, the *Keuchik* is assisted by *gampong* officials, consisting of a *gampong* secretary and other administrative staff. The *gampong* secretary, as referred to in paragraph (1), is appointed from civil servants who meet the requirements in accordance with prevailing laws and regulations. In performing their duties, the *gampong* secretary and other village officials are accountable to the *Keuchik*. The recognition of *gampong* in Aceh's legal order has implications for village governance because it connects national village administration with Aceh's distinctive institutional arrangements (Iskandar, 2019).

Within the local or cultural governance system, there is a recognition of figures who possess broad influence within the community and act as mediators in various social issues. In addition to holding authority within the formal village governance system in Aceh, the *Keuchik* is also actively involved in matters related to customs and local culture. This cultural function is relevant to bottom-up justice mechanisms in Aceh, where *gampong* institutions may contribute to dispute resolution and community-based restorative practices (Marlina et al., 2024). For example, in customary affairs, the *Keuchik* traditionally led and managed cultural ceremonies, such as marriage rituals. During the 1990s, many *Keuchik* were well-versed in such traditions, even though they may not have had high

levels of formal education; nevertheless, they possessed strong mastery of customary practices.

However, in the present era, many *Keuchik* in Aceh lack sufficient understanding of customary ceremonial processes and instead rely on elders or respected senior figures in the village to carry out such roles. This is largely because many contemporary *Keuchik* are relatively young. Moreover, there is a prevailing perception that the requirements to become a *Keuchik* are primarily administrative in nature, particularly during the candidacy process. There are no formal regulations mandating a deep understanding of customary practices. Additionally, some view the position of *Keuchik* as a political office obtained through democratic elections by the community.

This perspective has contributed to a shift in the governance system, where the role of *Keuchik* is increasingly seen as a formal political position rather than a culturally grounded leadership role rooted in local wisdom, values, and traditions. According to Burhanudin (Aman Putri), a village head (*Keuchik*) in the Gayo context was traditionally someone who truly understood the social order of community life, particularly its social aspects, and not merely its governmental functions. However, today, the role of the *Keuchik* tends to focus more on administrative and bureaucratic matters. This is evident in the fact that many current *Keuchik* lack understanding of customary practices and show limited sensitivity to religious and other social issues (Burhanudin, personal communication, October 10, 2025).

This condition is largely attributed to the selection process, which emphasizes the fulfillment of formal requirements, such as possession of educational certificates, rather than selecting individuals who deeply understand the social, cultural, and religious values inherited from previous generations. Furthermore, many *Keuchik* now come from younger generations, resulting in limited experience in addressing community issues. Their expertise is often confined to bureaucratic matters. This represents a regression in the cultural dimension of village governance.

The Role of the *Keuchik* in the Village

The presence of the *Keuchik* in the village plays a significant role in various social activities within Acehnese rural communities. The influence of the *Keuchik* in the *gampong* is not limited to handling bureaucratic matters but also extends to social and even personal issues within the community. Moreover, a *Keuchik* who is regarded as charismatic and recognized as a community figure tends to find it easier to implement various *gampong* government programs, as community members are more willing to listen to and follow their directives and policies. This finding is consistent with studies showing that *Keuchik* leadership affects community participation, village development, and collective action within *gampong* life (Fuady, 2025; Pakeh, 2017; Raihan, 2020).

In contrast, younger *Keuchik* are often less respected and less listened to, as they are perceived as lacking experience and being less socially engaged with the community, even though existing regulations allow them to hold the position.

The *Keuchik* holds an important role in *gampong* governance, particularly in influencing community-based decisions. For instance, in villages where most residents depend on agriculture, especially rice farming, the *Keuchik* plays a role in establishing rules or agreements through *gampong* meetings involving village officials, the imam *gampong*, *petua* syik, and youth leaders

regarding synchronized planting seasons. Additionally, regulations are set to prohibit villagers from releasing livestock during planting and harvesting periods. These measures are implemented as part of collective or public interests that must be upheld, as they directly relate to the livelihood and economic resilience of the community, which is also linked to the leadership role of the *Keuchik* in community economic empowerment (Subarni, 2022).

However, over the past few decades, the role of the *Keuchik* in matters related to customs and traditions, or local wisdom, has gradually declined. The role has shifted more toward handling formal administrative matters, such as bureaucratic processes, policy implementation, and government programs. Today, *Keuchik* or village heads are also required to implement various central government programs, such as the Village Fund (*Dana Desa*), *Koperasi Merah Putih*, and other initiatives, which must be carried out in accordance with directives from the central government.

Contextually, in Aceh, a *Keuchik* is traditionally perceived as a leader who understands various community issues, including religious, social, and cultural matters. Furthermore, *Keuchik* are expected to possess strong authority and charisma, as their dedication to the community and personal influence encourage people to follow their guidance and decisions.

The Shift in Values: From Charismatic Leadership to Formal Leadership

Leadership of the *Keuchik* in Acehnese society has traditionally been viewed as highly charismatic, not merely as a formal administrative role within village governance. According to Shapten J. Carroll and Henry L. Tosi, charismatic leadership is a type of leadership in which followers demonstrate strong loyalty to the leader due to the leader's special abilities and position. Followers respond individually, recognizing the leader as possessing unique competencies (Sukanto, 1999, p. 22). These special abilities create a sense of admiration among followers, while charisma itself cannot be transferred to others.

Similarly, Wursanto (2002, p. 197) states in charismatic leadership theory that an individual becomes a leader because they possess charisma, defined as a powerful influence. Such leaders typically exhibit strong authority, attractiveness, and significant influence over others.

However, the current regulatory mechanism for selecting village heads or *Keuchik*, which emphasizes formal educational background as evidenced by academic certificates, has contributed to the erosion of sacred and charismatic values in leadership. Consequently, individuals selected as *Keuchik* are no longer required to possess strong social standing, elder status, or significant influence within the village. Instead, the community is given broader rights both to vote and to be elected.

This condition reflects a shift in values and transformations within the local leadership system that was previously deeply rooted in cultural legitimacy. Today, virtually anyone can assume the position of *Keuchik* in Aceh. This transformation is a natural outcome of dynamic social conditions. Wilbert Moore defines social change as significant transformations occurring within the overall social structure, patterns of behavior, and systems of social interaction, including changes in norms, values, and cultural phenomena. Thus, social change encompasses all aspects of societal life and includes all social phenomena (Narwoko & Suyanto, 2004, p. 362).

In the context of leadership, the shift in the value of *Keuchik* leadership in Aceh, from charismatic leadership to formal leadership, can be further analyzed through the framework illustrated below.

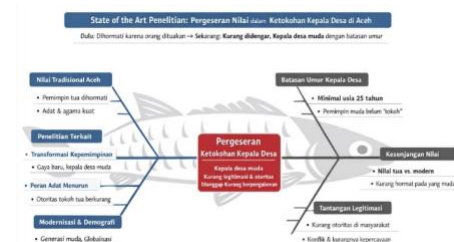


Figure 1. Framework of the shift in *Keuchik* leadership values in Aceh. Source: Author's analysis, 2026.

The shift in the values of the *Keuchik* or village head in Aceh can be observed through various factors influencing village leadership.

First, traditional Acehnese values show that local leadership was once regarded as sacred by the community. The *Keuchik* was considered an elder, a respected figure, and an individual with strong charisma. The *Keuchik* was also expected to handle matters related to customary law and religion.

Second, modernization and demographic factors have increased the participation of younger generations in *Keuchik* leadership in Aceh. This reflects broader processes of modernization and globalization. Youth also represent an important part of the demographic bonus. Sutikno (2020, p. 430) explains that Indonesia's large youth population is expected to become a driver of national development during the demographic bonus period. However, a societal stigma remains that contemporary village leadership is sometimes viewed merely as employment, where candidacy depends more on educational certificates than on merit, propriety, or leadership suitability.

Third, age requirements provide formal opportunities for younger individuals to run for the position of *Keuchik*. The minimum age requirement of 25 years enables candidates who meet legal requirements to participate, even if they are not traditional figures or elders, as in earlier leadership practices. This condition reflects a shift toward formal leadership criteria under national village regulations and Aceh Qanun Number 4 of 2009. However, it may also weaken customary roles and reduce the authority of elder figures within the village (Law Number 3 of 2024; Aceh Qanun Number 4 of 2009).

Fourth, legitimacy has become increasingly formal and political. Contemporary *Keuchik* or village governments tend to be oriented toward holding office and managing programs, including village fund administration. In some cases, legal issues related to village fund mismanagement have strengthened public skepticism. The direct election system has also contributed to the weakening of leadership charisma and social stature compared with previous practices in which leaders were selected based on recognized standing in society.

According to Amrul Badri, the current village head election system differs significantly from previous practices. In the past, village heads were respected protectors who led social, customary, religious, cultural, and governmental affairs. Selection was commonly based on deliberation among customary elders, religious leaders, and community figures. Today, direct elections and broader legal access have changed this pattern, sometimes creating political divisions and shifting leadership criteria toward

competition for projects and power rather than inherited social legitimacy (Amrul Badri, personal communication, January 8, 2025).

Furthermore, leadership that lacks charisma and social stature tends to have a limited understanding of social control mechanisms such as *pageu gampong* (customary norms passed down through generations) and the gradual erosion of *reusam* (deeply rooted Acehnese social customs).

Conceptually, village leadership or the *Keuchik* in Aceh represents a dual model of leadership. The *Keuchik* is responsible for formal public service and also performs a cultural leadership role. Cultural leadership remains essential for sustaining local governance. Before the Village Law was enacted, Aceh had already developed strong local leadership systems such as *sagoe*, *mukim*, and *gampong*. Previously, village leaders possessed strong charisma and were highly respected within the community. With the introduction of direct elections and formal requirements, several issues have emerged, including the limited understanding of cultural, customary, religious, and social matters among some village heads. This condition also shows that legal enforcement of *gampong* institutions must be balanced with local legitimacy and community recognition (Iskandar, 2019; Law Number 11 of 2006).

Although some argue that younger, formally educated leaders tend to be more innovative, in practice, the opposite has often been observed. Many *Keuchik* in Aceh have been implicated in cases of village fund mismanagement. This is supported by data from Masyarakat Transparansi Aceh (MaTA), which reported that the village fund sector was the largest contributor to corruption cases in Aceh in 2024. According to Alfian, the majority of corruption cases handled by law enforcement agencies occurred at the village (*gampong*) level, accounting for 51.61% of total cases (Aceh Government, 2025; RMOL Aceh, 2025).

In addition, the shift in village governance values indicates that it is increasingly perceived as a political institution. The presence of the Village Fund has motivated some individuals to pursue the position of *Keuchik* (village head) without adequate consideration of competence, capability, personality, or social standing. The substantial size of village fund allocations has become a key factor attracting individuals to seek the position, further reinforcing the transformation of leadership motivations. This tendency also needs to be read within broader studies of local elite strategy and the political use of village institutions in Aceh (Mursyidin, 2022).

Transformation of Leadership and Value Gaps

a. Leadership Transformation

Leadership is the ability or skill to influence others to carry out tasks in accordance with one's intentions. In other words, leadership is the capacity to direct and influence others to perform certain activities in order to achieve predetermined goals. Essentially, changes in leadership within governmental systems and institutional bureaucracies are natural, as they are influenced by socio-cultural conditions as well as developments in technology and information in the era of globalization. Leadership studies emphasize that the capacity to influence others must be connected to motivation, vision, and organizational goals (Armansyah, 2022; Iswahyudi et al., 2023).

Over time, the system of village governance or *Keuchik* leadership in Aceh has undergone a fundamental transformation

from a traditional system to a modern leadership system. Previously, the traditional leadership system was more oriented toward authority and social recognition. Village heads or *Keuchik* in Aceh were selected based on social stature, elder status, and recognition as respected figures within the village. The selection process was not based on direct democratic procedures, but on consensus among influential elders and community leaders. In this sense, the shift can be understood as a transformation from culturally accumulated social capital toward formally regulated political access (Bourdieu, 1984; Weber, 1922).

At that time, traditional village leadership was primarily focused on matters related to customs, culture, and religion, while public services and administrative or bureaucratic affairs received less attention and were less developed. This constituted a limitation of traditional leadership. In contrast, modern leadership is characterized by its adaptability to changing times. Contemporary village heads or *Keuchik* are expected to adopt a transformational approach, adjusting their leadership styles and practices to meet evolving demands. This includes a stronger orientation toward bureaucratic systems, regulatory frameworks, and public service delivery.

In the present era, many *Keuchik* come from younger generations who have undergone formal education and possess academic qualifications. As a result, they tend to have stronger conceptual understanding, knowledge of governance systems, bureaucratic processes, and public services, as well as competencies in technology and information. These attributes represent clear advantages of modern village governance systems.

However, on the other hand, they often lack a deep understanding of cultural aspects that have long been embedded within village communities. Modern leadership tends to place less emphasis on social stature, allowing virtually anyone to become a village leader. Nevertheless, there is increasing representation from younger individuals who aspire to become village heads, often driven by motivation and innovation.

Contextually, modern leadership is closely associated with transformational leadership orientation. According to Armansyah (2022, p. 3), transformational leadership refers to leaders who clearly communicate the vision and goals of the organization, enabling subordinates to identify with them and generating strong influence over followers. Such leaders motivate subordinates and stimulate creativity to work more effectively toward achieving organizational goals. Through transformational leadership, followers develop trust, admiration, loyalty, and respect for the leader, and are motivated to exceed initial expectations.

Similarly, Iswahyudi et al. (2023, p. 99) explain that transformational leaders must also possess the ability to align their subordinates' vision with future goals and elevate their needs to a higher level than their initial expectations.

b. Value Gap

Within the village leadership system in Aceh, there exists a value gap between village heads originating from respected or charismatic figures and those elected through direct elections. In Acehnese rural communities, the ideal *Keuchik* (village head) is typically one who possesses strong social standing and charisma, as such leaders are more likely to be obeyed, respected, and held in high regard.

In contrast, *Keuchik* who are elected through direct elections, often not from traditional or charismatic backgrounds and

frequently representing younger generations, tend to receive less respect and recognition. They are often perceived as lacking influence, social roles, and experience within the community. This stigma is prevalent in village leadership in Aceh. Moreover, younger leaders are frequently associated with limited social engagement, weak communication with elders, and insufficient understanding of customary practices, cultural values, and religious traditions in the village.

These conditions contribute to a widening value gap between formal leadership and charismatic leadership. Charismatic leadership is more closely associated with traditional leadership systems that emphasize authority, while contemporary governance increasingly emphasizes egalitarian and procedural values. This paradigm reinforces the perception within the community that younger individuals are not always considered suitable to become village leaders, despite the absence of legal restrictions in government regulations. Consequently, social norms and cultural values may be perceived as more authoritative than formal regulations.

This phenomenon also reflects hierarchical power relations and social inequality. Status, power, and capital shape how authority is recognized in society; unequal access to economic, cultural, and social capital may produce rigid hierarchies and visible social gaps (Abad Badruzzaman, 2009, p. 284; Bourdieu, 1984; Fabela & Khairunnisa, 2024; Weber, 1922). Thus, the value gap between charismatic figures and formally elected leaders is not only a leadership issue, but also a reflection of social stratification in village life.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that Geuchik leadership in Aceh is undergoing a fundamental transformation from a leadership model rooted in charismatic authority, customary knowledge, and community trust toward one increasingly shaped by formal administrative qualifications and procedural electoral mechanisms. Although this transition has broadened democratic participation by enabling younger and formally educated individuals to assume leadership positions, it has also generated a growing gap between legal legitimacy and socio-cultural legitimacy. As a result, the authority of the Geuchik is no longer derived primarily from moral influence, cultural competence, and public trust, but increasingly from compliance with formal governance requirements. The findings further reveal that this transformation is driven by the interaction of institutional reforms, modernization, demographic change, direct electoral mechanisms, and the expanding administrative responsibilities associated with village fund management. Consequently, the role of the Geuchik has shifted from serving predominantly as a customary, religious, and social leader toward functioning as a bureaucratic manager responsible for public administration and development programs. While this institutional transition strengthens procedural accountability, it simultaneously weakens the cultural foundations that traditionally supported public respect, social cohesion, conflict resolution, and community compliance within the gampong.

This study contributes to the literature by demonstrating that the modernization of village governance should not be interpreted simply as a replacement of traditional leadership with formal institutions. Instead, effective local leadership emerges from the interaction between administrative competence and culturally embedded legitimacy. The findings therefore suggest

that governance reforms in Aceh should move beyond procedural compliance by incorporating leadership values rooted in local wisdom, moral integrity, customary knowledge, and community trust. Such an integrated approach is essential for sustaining democratic governance while preserving the socio-cultural functions of the gampong as an indigenous institution. Future research should examine whether similar leadership transformations occur across different socio-cultural contexts within Aceh, particularly between rural and urban gampong. Comparative studies may also explore the leadership performance of younger *Geuchik*, women's participation in village leadership, and the relationship between leadership legitimacy, village fund governance, and community trust. These directions would contribute to the development of a more comprehensive model of village leadership that integrates democratic governance with culturally grounded legitimacy.

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