



Political Tolerance and Conflict Reconciliation Practices: Lesson Learnt from Mamasa, Eastern Indonesia

Mahyuddin^{1*}, Mohd Azmir bin Mohd Nizah², Abd. Hakim Mohad Ramli²

¹Doctor of Philosophy in Social Science, Centre for Core Studies Universiti Sains Islam Malaysia

^{1,2}Centre for Core Studies Universiti Sains Islam Malaysia
Bandar Baru Nilai, 71800 Nilai, Negeri Sembilan, Malaysia

*Email: mahyuddin@iainpare.ac.id

Abstract

Political conflicts involving religious identities have remained a persistent challenge in Indonesia, where social diversity often intersected with political contestation. This study examined ethnoreligious reconciliation mechanisms and practices of political tolerance observed during regional head elections (Pilkada) and in everyday interfaith relations in Mamasa, West Sulawesi. Although Mamasa experienced electoral polarization and episodes of political tension in the post-reform era, local wisdom and customary law have played a central role in promoting more peaceful and inclusive democratic practices. This research employed a qualitative case study design, collecting data through in-depth interviews with 12 key informants—religious leaders, customary authorities, local government actors, and voters—supplemented by secondary sources. Data were analyzed using an inductive thematic approach that involved coding, categorization, and cross-case interpretation to understand how customary values shaped political behavior and conflict management. The findings have shown that Mamasa's socio-cultural structure—rooted in inclusive dialogue, religious plurality, and customary mediation—has provided an effective informal mechanism for maintaining social harmony. Communities consistently elected interfaith candidates to regional leadership positions and created spaces for interreligious interaction that have supported processes of conflict reconciliation. These locally grounded practices reflected broader discourses on identity politics, peacebuilding, and democratic resilience. The practical significance of this study lies in demonstrating that culturally rooted reconciliation models can complement formal governance structures. Such approaches offer policymakers, local governments, and peacebuilding practitioners actionable insights for managing ethnoreligious tensions and strengthening democratic stability in pluralistic and post-conflict regions.

Keywords: *Political Tolerance, Conflict Reconciliation, Peacebuilding, Mamasa*

1. INTRODUCTION

Regional elections (Pilkada) have become one of the most important democratic arenas in post-reform Indonesia (Suharto, Wulandari, and Rosyadi 2024). However, in many regions, these elections have generated polarisation, social fragmentation, and even violence (Krismono, Abdi, and Syahmirwan 2025), (Fernando et al. 2024). Such tensions are often

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intensified by ethnic identities, religious differences, and unresolved local conflicts. Since the adoption of regional autonomy, local democracy has expanded opportunities for citizen participation but has also created new challenges, particularly with the rising use of identity politics. Pilkada functions not only as a mechanism for selecting leaders but also as a platform where ethnic, religious, and kinship identities are mobilised. Numerous studies show that political elites frequently use identity markers to consolidate electoral support, resulting in polarisation and, at times, violent conflict. This democratic paradox—where broader participation coexists with heightened identity mobilisation—poses a major issue for democratic consolidation in Indonesia.

In this context, Mamasa in West Sulawesi offers an important example of how identity politics can take a different trajectory (Subhan 2023), (Arsyad and Sari 2020). Mamasa consists of a predominantly Christian population with a significant Muslim minority, creating potential for religious tensions. Following its administrative separation from Polewali Mamasa in the early 2000s, the region experienced social tension and disputes over representation (Mustafa 2016), (Abdullah 2016). Yet, instead of escalating conflict, the community gradually developed local mechanisms of tolerance and reconciliation, which became visible in their electoral practices.

One notable feature of local elections in Mamasa is the recurrent emergence of candidate pairs from different religious backgrounds—most commonly Christian–Muslim partnerships (Mahyuddin and Febry 2023). This pattern is deeply symbolic and demonstrates a deliberate effort to promote coexistence and fair representation. Unlike in other regions where religion has been used to mobilise exclusion and where Pilkada often results in religious polarisation (Parinduri and Pujiati 2023), (Shindyawati and Raffiudin 2019), (Mahyuddin 2019), Mamasa has shown that identity can be used to support inclusivity and peacebuilding. Identity politics in Mamasa has not disappeared; rather, it has been transformed into a mechanism for inclusion that prevents the marginalisation of minority groups. Cross-religious representation in electoral politics enables the community to treat identity as a source of balance and recognition. This demonstrates that identity politics, often associated with division, can also foster democratic inclusion. This cultural framework emphasises harmony, collective responsibility, and respect for differences—all essential for managing electoral competition.

Reconciliation in Mamasa is not produced solely through formal government. Instead, it is grounded in informal practices, traditions, and customary institutions (Stepanus 2020). Customary leaders play a central role in mediating dialogue and representing collective interests. Their legitimacy and authority strengthen social stability and help mitigate identity-based tensions (Ampulembang and Tampake 2023). As a result, elections, though competitive, also serve as moments of reconciliation that reinforce social cohesion. Despite its relevance, Mamasa has received less scholarly attention than regions with histories of violent conflict such as Ambon, Poso, or Papua (Burhanuddin 2024) (Ismail, Wakano, and Leasiwal 2022), (Machali and Rosyadi 2022). Existing studies on political tolerance and identity politics (Hidayat 2024), (Mahyuddin and Febry 2023), (Arsyad and Sari 2020) provide important contributions, yet they often lack integration with conflict resolution frameworks.



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A deeper analysis is needed to position Mamasa within broader debates on democratic resilience, conflict transformation, and peacebuilding.

The relevance of this case extends beyond Indonesia. Many societies in regions such as the Middle East, Africa, and South Asia continue to struggle with identity-based conflict (Barua 2023), (Okpevra 2023), (Elfverson 2019). Much of the literature assumes that identity politics inevitably leads to fragmentation. The Mamasa case shows an alternative path: when identity is managed through inclusive representation and supported by cultural reconciliation mechanisms, it can promote political tolerance and prevent conflict. Mamasa thus represents a model of “local peace” that offers broader lessons for divided societies. It demonstrates that reconciliation can be cultivated proactively through inclusive political arrangements, even in areas with latent conflict.

This study therefore examines political tolerance practices in Mamasa using the combined theoretical lenses of identity politics and conflict resolution. The aim is to show how identity can be used constructively in routine political processes, rather than being treated solely as a source of division. The analysis challenges assumptions about the inherently divisive nature of identity politics and highlights the potential of local cultural frameworks to support peace. At the same time, it contributes to global discussions on democratic resilience by illustrating how insights from an eastern Indonesian regency can inform debates on managing diversity in fragmented societies

2. METHOD

This study employed a qualitative case study approach to examine the dynamics of power-sharing and conflict reconciliation during the 2024 regional elections (Pilkada) in Mamasa, Indonesia. The case study design was chosen because it enables an in-depth understanding of sociopolitical phenomena within their real-life (Arifianto 2018), particularly the interaction between identity politics, cultural traditions, and interreligious relations in a plural society. Fieldwork was conducted in Mamasa Regency, West Sulawesi—specifically in Mamasa Town, Sumarorong, and Tawalian—between March and November 2025, aligning with the preparation and campaigning period of the local elections and allowing the researcher to directly observe political and communal interactions as they unfolded. However, researchers conducted interviews again in 2025 to obtain more complete data. Participants were selected using purposive sampling to ensure the inclusion of actors with direct involvement in or deep knowledge of electoral processes and community dynamics. Twelve informants participated in the study, consisting of political candidates, customary leaders, Christian clergy, Muslim religious leaders, youth representatives, and civil society activists.

Data were collected through semi-structured in-depth interviews and participant observation. Interviews, followed a flexible guide that allowed exploration of participants' experiences with identity mobilisation, customary mediation, and interfaith cooperation; they were conducted in homes, offices, and community meeting areas, and recorded with consent. Participant observation took place during campaign events, customary ceremonies, religious gatherings, and community meetings. This method enabled the

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researcher to observe interactions, symbols, and informal negotiations in natural settings, and field notes documented spontaneous conversations and contextual behaviours that complemented interview.

The two methods were integrated using a triangulation strategy: interviews provided individual narratives, and participant observation captured real-time practices and social cues, allowing a comprehensive reconstruction of identity negotiation and reconciliation mechanisms. All interview transcripts, and field notes were coded manually using thematic analysis (Neuendorf 2018). Open coding was conducted to identify recurrent concepts such as identity-based contestation, customary authority, and interfaith cooperation, which were then grouped into analytical themes. These themes were interpreted using the theoretical frameworks of Fukuyama (2018) on identity, Sen (2016) on pluralism and recognition, and Lederach's conflict transformation approach, which emphasises cultural resources, relationship-building, and long-term reconciliation. Research rigor was ensured through prolonged engagement in the field, method and source triangulation, peer debriefing, and member-checking with selected informants to validate interpretations. The methodological procedure presented here provides sufficient detail for replication in similar studies on electoral contestation and conflict reconciliation in multicultural contexts.

3. Results and Discussions

3.1. Power-sharing between Islam and Christianity in Regional Elections

The dynamics of power-sharing between Islam and Christianity in regional elections in Mamasa illustrate how interreligious cooperation operates as a stabilising force in a plural society. Political actors from both communities engage in collaborative arrangements that prioritise consensus-building and the preservation of social harmony (Juli, Sabudin, and Sius 2022). This cooperative approach reduces the likelihood of electoral tensions escalating into conflict and demonstrates how cross-religious partnerships strengthen the legitimacy of local governance. In this context, power-sharing functions as a deliberate political strategy that reflects broader societal commitments to coexistence and mutual recognition.

The political landscape of Mamasa is characterised by a stable balance of authority between Muslim and Christian representatives within regional leadership structures. This pattern indicates that electoral outcomes are shaped not only by formal democratic procedures but also by long-standing interreligious relationships. In this setting, both the Christian majority and the Muslim minority play strategic roles in forming inclusive political coalitions. Such arrangements reflect an informal power-sharing practice designed to accommodate the aspirations of different religious communities. Power-sharing in local politics has been widely recognised as an effective strategy for reducing conflict potential and enhancing political legitimacy (Wolff 2007). *In Mamasa, there is unwritten yet consistently observed political agreement allocates key leadership positions to both Christian and Muslim figurer.* This practice resembles elements of consociationalism, particularly proportional representation and the deliberate distribution of authority across

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identity groups. Since the establishment of Mamasa Regency, regional leadership has repeatedly alternated between candidates of different religious backgrounds. As a result, local elections in Mamasa function not only as a mechanism for selecting political leaders but also as an institutional process that reinforces social reconciliation and intergroup trust.

Regent	Vice-regent	Period	Combination of religions
M. Said Saggaf	Victor Paotonan	2003-2008	Islam-Christianity
Obed Nego Depparinding	Ramlan Badawi	2008-2011	Christianity-Islam
Ramlan Badawi	-	2011-2012	
Ramlan Badawi	Victor Paotonan	2013-2018	Islam-Christianity
Ramlan Badawi	Bonggalangi		Islam-Christianity
Ramlan Badwai	Marthinus Tiranda	2018-2023	Islam-Christianity
Welem Sambolangi	H. Sudirman	2024-2029	Christianity-Islam

Table 1. Interfaith Regent Pairs in Mamasa from 2003-2025

Decades since the cessation of conflict in Mamasa, these findings have suggested that religious power-sharing serve as an effective reconciliation strategy for identity-based conflicts. Prior to Mamasa's separation from Polewali Mamasa, inter-religious relations were marked by tension due to divergent views among political elites (Hasanuddin 2005). However, after the administrative expansion, cross-religious political coalitions have enabled more sustainable political stability to emerge. This finding aligned with the conclusions of Seymour et al. (2016), who argued that elections in highly heterogeneous regions required coalition-building strategies to overcome identity fragmentation (Seymour, Bakke, and Cunningham 2016).

The Mamasa regional election reflected the interplay between identity politics and consensus-building. Although religion remained a primary means of political mobilisation, power-sharing arrangements have transformed identity politics into an instrument of integration. Studies on religious politics in Indonesia confirmed that religion has functioned both as a driver of polarisation and as a tool for reconciliation (Kammen 2023),(Diprose and Azca 2019),(Hefner 2017). Mamasa fell into the latter category, where religious legitimacy supported social cohesion through informal electoral agreements. The coexistence of religious communities created mutual dependence, fostering socio-political stability. Power was understood not only as domination but as a mechanism for maintaining intergroup balance. This supported the hypothesis that Mamasa's elections were not merely



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political contests but also arenas for social integration where institutional role-sharing occurred.

Contemporary literature on Indonesian local politics has frequently identified practices such as those in Mamasa as a localised model of peacebuilding. Bräuchler (2022) emphasised the wide variation in how local democracies manage diversity, and Mamasa offered a paradigm where religion served not as a source of conflict but as the foundation for an agreed power-sharing formula. This strengthened the proposition that local institutions possessed the capacity to produce political innovations relevant to multicultural societies (Bräuchler 2022). Nevertheless, the distribution of authority between religious groups in Mamasa was not without challenges. Although the arrangement promoted stability, it also risked creating rigidity in political representation and limiting meritocratic competition. Several studies have demonstrated that overly formalised power-sharing could weaken democratic processes and reinforce patronage politics (McCulloch 2020), (Nyankieya 2014). Therefore, the Mamasa case must be viewed as a continuous effort to balance identity-based consensus with democratic competition.

The power-sharing system between Muslim and Christian communities in Mamasa played a crucial role in preventing political conflict. The mechanism operated both pragmatically and symbolically, reflecting a shared understanding that stability could only be maintained if all religious groups felt represented. This created a political environment capable of producing reconciliation through inclusive representation. These findings have shown that, in the Mamasa context, identity politics was practiced as a strategy for integration rather than exclusion. The model was not only relevant for local stability but also offered broader insights for democratic governance in plural societies

The current power-sharing arrangement can be interpreted through Fukuyama's framework on identity recognition as a source of political legitimacy (Fukuyama 2018). In Mamasa, the presence of religious leaders in public office functioned as a tangible form of recognition that mitigated alienation among both majority and minority communities. This demonstrated the capacity of local politics to adapt to complex social needs by ensuring that power distribution was both procedural and symbolically meaningful. This perspective aligned with Amartya Sen's argument that equitable accommodation of identities helps prevent social fragmentation. Sen noted that identity-based conflict emerged when one group attempted to dominate others (Sen 2016). In Mamasa, the practice of power-sharing reflected a political awareness of the need to maintain identity diversity through balanced institutional mechanisms, making it a pathway toward sustainable reconciliation.

From Lederach's (1997) perspective, Mamasa's model could be viewed as a multi-layered approach to peacebuilding. It has not only addressed short-term conflict reduction but has also laid the foundation for long-term social stability by ensuring political space for each religious group (Lederach 1997b). This illustrated that local politics could serve both reconciliation and competition. Such findings were consistent with research in other Indonesian regions, such as Maluku, where Muslim-Christian division of political positions has effectively maintained peace since the communal violence. Thus, the Mamasa experience

was not unique but contributed valuable evidence to the broader literature on power-sharing as a diversity management strategy in multicultural societies.

3.2. Cultural and Customary-Based Reconciliation Mechanisms

In the pursuit of conflict resolution, cultural and customary practices have played a pivotal role in the reconciliation process in Mamasa. The utilisation of customary norms as a strategy for easing political tensions has been evident in inclusive customary deliberations that involve all relevant parties, including religious groups (Milenkovic 2024). This mechanism has fostered stronger communal solidarity and provided moral legitimacy to political outcomes. In this regard, non-political cultural factors have contributed significantly to the management of tensions arising during regional elections.

The process of social reconciliation in Mamasa has undoubtedly been facilitated by formal institutions; however, culture-based and customary mechanisms have further strengthened conflict reconciliation. The philosophical meaning embedded in the name “Mamasa”—derived from *mamase* (mutual love), *sitayuk* (brotherhood), and *misa' kada dipotuo* (unity for life)—has continued to serve as the normative basis for customary institutions in resolving disputes. *MT explained that Ada' Tuo is a Mamasa legal principle that emphasizes deliberation, peaceful paths, and respect for human dignity. It embodies universal values such as Ma'bisara (deliberation for peace), Sitayuk Sikamasei Sirande Maya-maya (mutual respect and love), and Mesa Kada di Patuo, Patang Kada di Pomate (unity brings life; division brings destruction (MT, Interview 2025). Customary rituals such as ma'renden tedong (a sanction requiring the offering of a buffalo) and mebulle bai (a sanction requiring the offering of a pig) also have also functioned as symbolic yet effective means of resolving conflicts (MTK, Interview, 2025). These traditional practices have been consistently performed whenever social tensions arise, reinforcing their relevance in contemporary conflict resolution. A study by Stepanus et al. confirmed that these rituals serve as established mechanisms for addressing various forms of conflict in Mamasa (Stepanus 2020). These practices are not merely symbolic; rather, they operate as performative instruments that mitigate collective emotions and strengthen communal cohesion following political disputes.*

Furthermore, customary institutions in Mamasa are characterised by a respected hierarchical structure, with the traditional leader (*to parenge*) serving as the principal mediator. The role of the traditional leader—whose authority provides moral legitimacy—has been shown to facilitate effective resolution whenever conflicts occur. This figure acts as an intermediary between competing political elites and grassroots communities. The effectiveness of custom-based reconciliation in reducing conflict potential has been consistently demonstrated, confirming that customary institutions play a crucial role in sustaining reconciliation processes within the community (Mahyuddin and Febry 2023).

Customary reconciliation mechanisms in Mamasa have demonstrated a strong correlation with religious institutions. In practice, traditional leaders and both Christian and Muslim religious authorities frequently participate in joint peace ceremonies. This pattern reflects the integration of customary norms and religious ethics in shaping social values that



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accommodate diverse identities (Prasojo and Pabbajah 2023). The synergy between custom and religion constitutes an essential form of social capital that helps prevent various types of conflict, including political polarisation.

Empirical evidence from Mamasa further shows that the intersection of custom, religion, and local politics remains a decisive factor in mitigating tensions during regional elections. Traditional processions that serve as deliberative arenas, consistent with Habermas's (1991) notion of communicative action, have enabled open dialogue that reduces intergroup polarisation (Muttaqien 2023). In this sense, customary practices function not only as mechanisms for preserving cultural memory but also as political instruments that facilitate peace.

Overall, the cultural and customary reconciliation mechanisms in Mamasa exemplify local wisdom practices that complement the formal state system. Studies have shown that the combined use of customary law, religious engagement, and political negotiation is more effective in preventing recurrent post-election conflict than relying on any single institution alone (Fathullah, Hasan, and Jalaluddin 2024), (Alsalloum and Brown 2019). Therefore, the integration of customary institutions into formal policy structures offer a viable model for achieving sustainable reconciliation in multicultural regions across Indonesia. The role of customary law in Mamasa's reconciliation process can be understood as a form of social capital that reinforces social cohesion. Sen (2016) point out that multiple identities within a society can coexist when supported by cultural spaces that allow interaction and recognition. In Mamasa, customary law operates as a nexus that bridges identities across religious boundaries, enabling communities to defuse political tensions through shared cultural symbols.

A comparison of these findings with previous research reveals similarities with studies on customary conflict resolution in Papua (Putri 2022), (Viartasiwi 2018). In Papua, customary rituals have been used to repair social relations following political contestations that escalate into ethnic tensions. Mamasa demonstrates a comparable pattern in which customary law functions as a buffer mechanism that stabilises society when formal state interventions are insufficient. This interpretation aligns with Lederach's (1997) framework of culture-based reconciliation, which highlights the importance of local actors and traditional values in establishing sustainable peace. In Mamasa, customary law provides stronger social legitimacy than formal state procedures, thereby underpinning long-term reconciliation efforts

These findings contribute to the literature on culture-based conflict resolution in Indonesia. Research conducted in the Moluccas, Aceh, and Kalimantan indicates that customary mechanisms frequently prove more effective than formal legal approaches in rebuilding social trust (Burhanuddin 2024), (De Juan, Pierskalla, and Vüllers 2015), (Bräuchler 2009). The Mamasa case thus reinforces the broader argument that customary-based strategies remain highly relevant to the practice of local democracy and conflict management in Indonesia.

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3.3. Political Tolerance to Rebuild Post-Conflict Brotherhood

In post-conflict settings—particularly in regions marked by historical tensions grounded in religious or ethnic identity—political tolerance serves as a critical instrument for rebuilding intergroup brotherhood. In the Mamasa regional elections, political tolerance is expressed through patterns of cross-community engagement in which both majority and minority groups actively accommodate shared political interests. Political tolerance, therefore, entails not only the willingness to accept differences but also the creation of dialogical spaces that enable the reconstruction of mutual trust (Nizah 2017).

A historical review of conflict in Mamasa indicates that tensions initially emerged from competing perspectives regarding regional division (Mahyuddin, Nizah et al. 2025). These disagreements escalated into broader social and political conflict. However, observations and interview data reveal that, in the post-conflict period, political, traditional, and religious leaders made consistent efforts to cultivate mutual respect and facilitate reconciliation. Interfaith leaders regularly convene deliberative forums through the Forum for Interfaith Harmony (FKUB) to mitigate polarisation (HF, Interview, 2025). A parallel study by (Alaverdov et al. 2023), highlights the importance of minority inclusion as a foundation for post-conflict stability, drawing on the concept of consociational democrac.

Political tolerance is also evident at the grassroots level in Mamasa. Daily interactions between Muslim and Christian communities—such as joint participation in mutual cooperation activities, shared celebrations of religious holidays, and collaboration in social and religious programs—have contributed significantly to strengthening post-conflict social bonds. These interactions, once strained by political tensions (Maryanah 2013), now serve as practical expressions of intergroup trust. The evidence suggests that political tolerance is not limited to elite-level negotiation but is embedded in the everyday practices of the wider community.

In this context, political tolerance functions as a mechanism of social cohesion that enables diverse groups to maintain interconnectedness within the existing social structure (Arsyam, Zakirah, and Ibrahim 2021). This perspective challenges the assumption that identity politics is inherently divisive. Instead, the Mamasa case demonstrates that political tolerance can operate as both a preventive mechanism against recurring conflict and as an essential form of social capital for building inclusive local governance. It represents a convergence point between religious norms, customary values, and formal state structures in the broader process of local democratisation. The success of this political tolerance model is shaped by the interplay of structural factors (power-sharing), cultural factors (customary institutions), and normative factors (religious ethics). As such, Mamasa contributes a significant conceptual insight to the study of post-conflict reconciliation in Indonesia and offers comparative value for global discussions on identity-based political settlements.



Figure 1. Celebration of the Prophet's birthday at a predominantly Christian school and distribution of sacrificial meat to Gereja Toraja priests in Mamasa

The commemoration of the Prophet Muhammad's birthday at a predominantly Christian educational institution in Mamasa exemplifies a form of political tolerance that transcends routine socio-religious interaction (AB, Interview, 2025). The institution's willingness to provide space for Islamic traditions indicates an acceptance of pluralistic identities within the community. This practice is particularly significant in Mamasa, a region with a historical trajectory marked by socio-religious tensions. The organisation of shared celebrations in public educational settings has contributed to the emergence of a younger generation accustomed to interfaith camaraderie, thereby gradually eroding boundaries of exclusivity.

Similarly, the distribution of sacrificial meat to priests of the Toraja Mamasa Church carries substantial symbolic value. This ritual reflects a commitment to social solidarity and cultural reconciliation, emphasising communal togetherness as a moral principle. By sharing sacrificial offerings with non-Muslim residents, the Muslim community in Mamasa affirms that religious devotion is not confined to intra-group obligations but extends to the cultivation of harmonious intergroup relations. This practice has been shown to reinforce interfaith networks and strengthen bonds of brotherhood that are essential for rebuilding trust in post-conflict settings.

Both practices may therefore be understood as tangible manifestations of post-conflict political tolerance. They signify not only respect for religious freedom but also the collective willingness to coexist, share communal spaces, and utilise shared resources to promote social stability. In Mamasa, these modest yet symbolically significant acts contribute to the consolidation of social capital that underpins peaceful political development (Allolayuk, Sukendro, and Widodo 2024). Consequently, the expression of tolerance through daily religious practices functions as an important conduit for post-conflict reconciliation and strengthens the foundations of local democratic governance.

4. Discussion

The findings of this study indicate that power-sharing between Muslim and Christian communities in Mamasa has operated as an essential mechanism for reducing identity-based tensions and strengthening the legitimacy of local governance. Consistent with the literature on consociationalism, proportional distribution of political authority reduces the risk of group domination and creates a secure political space for minority participation (Lijphart 2007). The Mamasa case demonstrates that alternating leadership across religious groups and cross-identity electoral coalitions have contributed to stable political competition (Mahyuddin and Feby 2023). This observation aligns with Wolff's (2013) argument that power-sharing arrangements at the local level can function as reconciliation strategies in plural societies (Wolff 2013). In this regard, Mamasa illustrates how local political institutions can generate innovations that reinforce post-conflict social cohesion.

In addition, the study highlights the significant contribution of customary institutions in complementing formal state structures. Traditional mechanisms—such as *Ada' Tuo*, *ma'renden tedong*, and *mebulle bai*—operate as normative and performative tools that help calm collective emotions and restore social relations (Mahyuddin, Nizah et al. 2025). These findings are consistent with research conducted in Maluku (van Klinken 2017) and Aceh (Sahlan et al. 2022), which shows that customary law often carries stronger social legitimacy than formal legal institutions during reconciliation processes. Deliberative principles embedded in practices such as *Ma'bisara* and the maxim “Mesa Kada di Patuo” represent a form of *local peace infrastructure* that functions effectively at the community level (Lederach 1997a). Thus, customary mechanisms in Mamasa not only preserve cultural continuity but also serve as communicative arenas that facilitate intergroup dialogue.

Furthermore, political tolerance emerges as a central element connecting formal structures and cultural norms in sustaining peace. This tolerance is expressed through everyday interfaith interactions, cooperative activities, and symbolic practices such as the celebration of the Prophet's birthday in Christian schools and the distribution of sacrificial meat to church leaders. These examples indicate that political tolerance is not solely produced through elite negotiation but is ingrained in the social practices of the community. This interpretation resonates with the arguments of Nizah, who emphasise that tolerance requires regular social interaction and open communicative spaces (Nizah 2017). The Mamasa case therefore illustrates how political tolerance can function both as a preventive mechanism against conflict recurrence and as a source of social capital for inclusive local governance.

Overall, the findings suggest that conflict reconciliation in Mamasa results from the interplay of three reinforcing elements: power-sharing arrangements, customary institutions, and practices of political tolerance. Together, these dimensions produce what Fukuyama refers to as *recognition-based legitimacy*—a form of legitimacy built through identity recognition and equitable power distribution (Fukuyama 2018). This holistic model echoes Sen's argument that managing plural identities requires institutional arrangements capable of accommodating diversity without generating insecurity (Sen 2016). Accordingly, the Mamasa experience not only contributes to the understanding of local reconciliation



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processes but also offers theoretical insights relevant to global discussions on identity-based political settlements in multicultural societies.

5. CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that the Mamasa Pilkada illustrates how political tolerance and reconciliation practices—grounded in local traditions, interfaith cooperation, and culturally embedded peacebuilding mechanisms—have prevented potential political tensions from escalating into violent conflict. By analysing how Muslim and Christian communities have shared political authority, adapted customary institutions, and engaged religious as well as political actors as mediators, the findings address the research questions concerning the maintenance of social integration in a plural society. The results also show that reconciliation in Mamasa has not been achieved solely through formal institutional arrangements but through culturally internalised practices that emphasised dialogue, kinship relations, and mutual recognition. In contrast to previous studies that frequently characterised Eastern Indonesia as a region vulnerable to sectarian violence, this research contributes a corrective perspective by presenting Mamasa as an example of how local wisdom and Lederach's reconciliation framework can be contextualised and operationalised effectively. Ultimately, the Mamasa case offers a broader analytical insight: sustainable peace in divided societies requires more than institutional design; it depends on the cultivation of everyday political tolerance and the embedding of reconciliation within the community's cultural fabric.

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