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ORIGINAL RESEARCH ARTICLE

Negotiating Multiculturalism in Rural Indonesia: The Structural-Functional Role of Muslim Community Leaders in Social Cohesion

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the structural-functional role of Muslim community leaders in fostering social cohesion within a multicultural rural context in Tanjung Medan Village, Bilah Barat District, Labuhanbatu Regency. While cultural, linguistic, and ethnic diversity often presents structural friction in rural Indonesian communities, social harmony remains intact through active local leadership. Utilizing a qualitative descriptive approach, data were gathered through observations, in-depth interviews, and document analysis involving Muslim community leaders, traditional figures, and village administrators. The findings demonstrate that Muslim community leaders perform essential integrative functions to maintain social equilibrium through proactive strategies, including joint social initiatives, rural infrastructure development, inclusive religious and mutual-aid association (Serikat Tolong Menolong/STM) activities, and deliberative consensus-building (musyawarah). Furthermore, these leaders fulfill structural roles as mediators, advisors, and social catalysts in embedding tolerance and collective solidarity. Despite potential constraints stemming from divergent customs, language, and ethnicity, peaceful coexistence is sustained via effective communication, mutual respect, and cross-group cooperation. In conclusion, Muslim community leaders serve as pivotal structural-functional anchors in negotiating multiculturalism and sustaining a harmoniously integrated, peaceable rural society. Keywords: community leaders; social harmony; Islamic social capital; STM; wirit.

ABSTRAK

Kohesi sosial masyarakat Muslim pedesaan menghadapi tantangan akibat keberagaman etnis, dinamika politik lokal, persaingan kepentingan, serta interaksi antara aturan formal dan norma sosial-keagamaan. Desa Tanjung Medan, Kecamatan Bilah Barat, Kabupaten Labuhanbatu, merupakan masyarakat multi-etnis yang terdiri atas kelompok Mandailing, Jawa, Nias, dan kelompok lainnya. Perbedaan budaya, persoalan keamanan, serta perbedaan pilihan politik berpotensi memunculkan ketegangan sosial. Penelitian ini tidak sekadar mengkaji pentingnya tokoh masyarakat, tetapi menganalisis bagaimana agency tokoh masyarakat bekerja melalui institusi lokal dalam membangun kerukunan dan mencegah konflik. Penelitian menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif dengan desain studi kasus. Data dikumpulkan melalui wawancara mendalam, observasi, dan dokumentasi, kemudian dianalisis menggunakan model Miles, Huberman, dan Saldaña melalui pengodean tematik yang dipetakan dengan teori struktural-fungsional Talcott Parsons dan interaksi simbolik George Herbert Mead. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa tokoh masyarakat berperan sebagai mediator, fasilitator musyawarah, penggerak kegiatan sosial-keagamaan, dan penghubung masyarakat dengan pemerintah desa. Temuan utama menunjukkan bahwa Serikat Tolong Menolong (STM) dan wirit berfungsi sebagai modal sosial Islam yang membangun kepercayaan, solidaritas, timbal balik, dan jaringan lintas etnis. STM memperkuat fungsi integration, sedangkan wirit memperkuat latency melalui transmisi nilai moral. Penelitian ini menunjukkan bahwa kerukunan merupakan hasil negosiasi berkelanjutan antara perbedaan identitas, kepentingan, norma lokal, dan tata kelola formal.

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Kata kunci: tokoh masyarakat; kerukunan sosial; modal sosial Islam; STM; wirit.

1. INTRODUCTION

1. INTRODUCTION

Social cohesion in rural Muslim communities has become an increasingly important issue amid social change, democratization, and decentralization. Rural villages can no longer be understood merely as relatively homogeneous communal spaces; they have increasingly become arenas where diverse ethnic identities, religious affiliations, economic interests, and political orientations intersect. In plural societies, diversity can serve as a source of social strength, but it may also generate tensions when differences are not managed through communication mechanisms and social institutions capable of fostering trust. Hefner (2019) demonstrates that democratic life and pluralism in Indonesia are closely associated with the presence of social institutions and civic ethics that enable diverse groups to coexist. Similarly, Menchik (2016) shows that Indonesia's socio-religious life is shaped by complex relationships among religion, social institutions, and formal rules. Therefore, the study of social harmony in rural communities should examine not only the existence of differences but also how such differences are negotiated through everyday social interactions.

Social cohesion becomes more complex when formal village governance interacts with customary norms, religious values, kinship relations, and informal community mechanisms. Formal law plays an important role in regulating village life; however, many social issues are also addressed through informal mechanisms, including deliberation (*musyawarah*), advice from community leaders, religious networks, and systems of social solidarity. This condition demonstrates an ongoing interaction between the formal rule of law and informal customary law. At the same time, local political changes and competition over economic resources may intensify differences in interests. Village head elections, for example, are not merely matters of political preference but may reshape relationships among supporters, social networks, and perceptions of power distribution. Accordingly, social harmony should be understood as an ongoing social process rather than as a fixed or completed condition.

This context is particularly evident in Tanjung Medan Village, Bilah Barat District, Labuhanbatu Regency. Based on preliminary findings, the community of Tanjung Medan is ethnically diverse, comprising Mandailing, Javanese, Nias, and other groups. This diversity represents an important social resource but also creates several conditions that may potentially challenge social cohesion. Preliminary observations identified experiences of cultural marginalization among some Javanese residents associated with the stronger influence of the dominant group's customs and cultural practices. In addition, security concerns, including theft and the theft of oil-palm plantation products, have generated anxiety among residents. Differences in political preferences during village head elections and general elections may also contribute to tensions among community members. These conditions indicate that social harmony in Tanjung Medan is not simply a naturally occurring condition but the outcome of social processes involving particular actors, institutions, and mechanisms.

Within this context, community leaders occupy a strategic position between formal governmental structures and informal community structures. They do not merely function as respected figures but also serve as intermediaries capable of connecting residents, village government, religious leaders, and customary leaders. Their agency can be observed through the initiation of deliberative forums, mediation, mobilization of mutual assistance, activation of socio-religious activities, and articulation of community aspirations to the village government. Thus, the contribution of community leaders should be understood as a process through which social, symbolic, religious, and relational resources are mobilized to maintain social integration.

Previous studies have demonstrated the importance of community leaders in rural social life. Hidayat (2019), for example, explains that community leaders can function as mediators through persuasive approaches and communication. However, the study primarily emphasizes the success of mediation without examining in depth the social institutions that sustain such mediation over time. Putri and Sari (2021) demonstrate that community leaders can strengthen solidarity through mutual assistance, deliberation, and religious activities. Nevertheless, their study does not sufficiently explain how such activities develop into networks of trust capable of crossing ethnic boundaries. Kurnia and Muhamad (2023) show that *gotong royong* strengthens community solidarity, but their analysis does not fully explore the relationship between solidarity, religious institutions, and local governance within a multi-ethnic community.

Accordingly, the research gap does not lie in the assumption that studies on community leaders are scarce. Rather, this topic has already received considerable scholarly attention. The more specific gap concerns the limited explanation of how community leaders exercise agency through local institutions, particularly how STM (*Serikat Tolong Menolong*), *wirit*, deliberation, and social networks are mobilized to develop cross-ethnic social capital while simultaneously bridging formal village governance and informal community norms. Furthermore, previous studies have paid relatively limited attention to power relations within the construction of social harmony, particularly the bargaining position of ethnic minority groups when social decisions are negotiated through community deliberation.

This study offers novelty in three main respects. First, it conceptualizes community leaders as agents of local governance rather than merely symbolic or respected figures. Second, it examines STM and *wirit* as institutions that generate Islamic social capital. STM is not understood merely as a social organization providing assistance during bereavement or other misfortunes, but as a mechanism for generating trust, reciprocal norms, and solidarity networks that can cross ethnic boundaries. Similarly, *wirit* is examined not merely as a religious activity but as a social space for transmitting moral values, constructing collective identity, and reproducing norms of peaceful coexistence. Third, the study incorporates a power-relations dimension by examining whether deliberative processes provide equitable opportunities for residents from different ethnic backgrounds to express their interests and participate in decision-making.

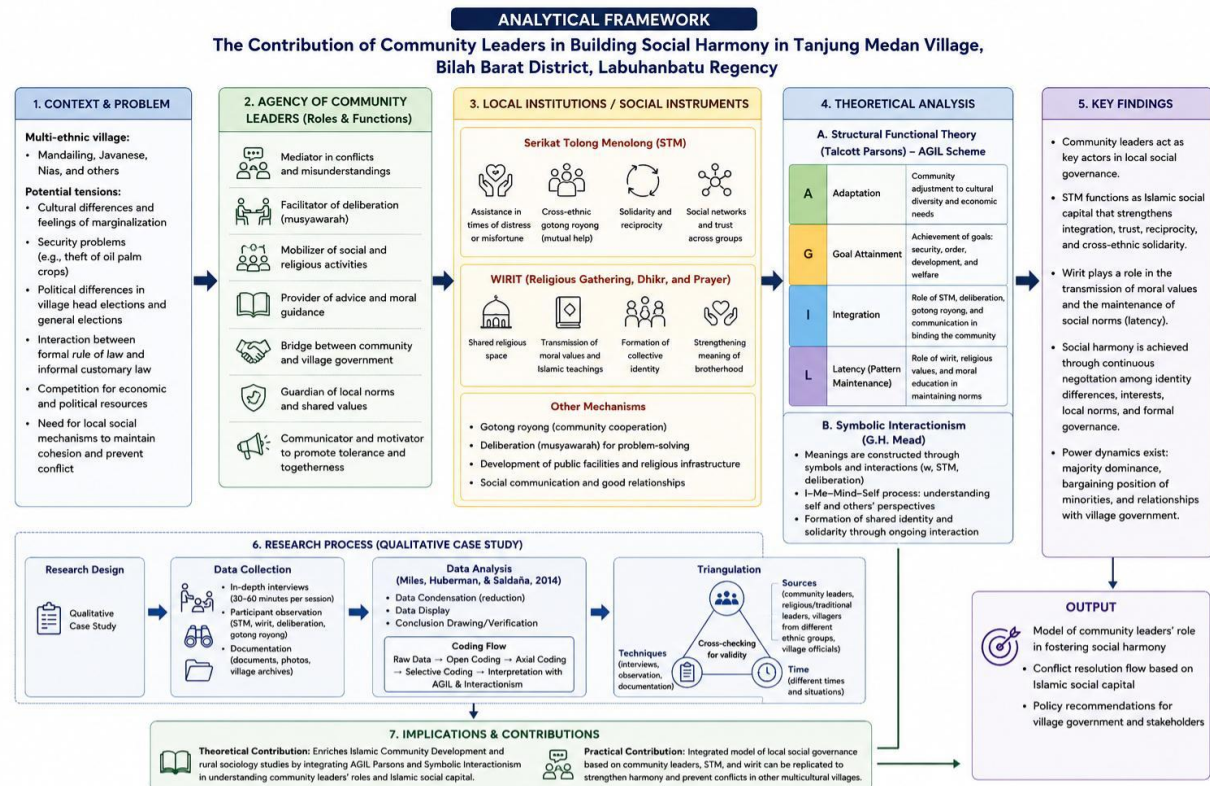
The theoretical framework of this study draws on Talcott Parsons' structural functionalism and George Herbert Mead's symbolic interactionism. Parsons' theory is employed to conceptualize society as a social system that requires the fulfillment of four fundamental functions: Adaptation, Goal Attainment, Integration, and Latency (AGIL). Adaptation is used to analyze the community's capacity to adjust to ethnic diversity and socio-economic needs. Goal Attainment examines how community leaders assist residents in pursuing collective objectives related to security, social order, and village development. Integration is used to analyze deliberation, STM, *gotong royong*, and interpersonal relationships as mechanisms for maintaining social cohesion. Latency is employed to examine the role of *wirit* and other religious activities in maintaining and transmitting moral values and social norms.

Meanwhile, Mead's symbolic interactionism is used to understand how social meanings are constructed through interaction. The concepts of self, mind, and society help explain how residents understand themselves as members of a broader community, take the perspectives of other social groups, and attach meaning to social symbols such as deliberation, *gotong royong*, STM, and *wirit* as expressions of collective solidarity. By integrating these two theoretical perspectives, the study goes beyond identifying what community leaders do and examines how their actions acquire social legitimacy and contribute to the production of social integration.

Based on this framework, the study aims to analyze the contribution and agency of community leaders in building social harmony among residents of Tanjung Medan Village, identify the socio-religious mechanisms through which social differences are managed, and examine the roles of STM, *wirit*, deliberation, and relationships with village government as mechanisms of social integration. The study is expected to contribute to the development of Islamic Community Development scholarship by providing a deeper understanding of the relationship between

Islamic social capital, local governance, and social harmony within a multi-ethnic rural community.

The systematic analytical framework of community leaders' contributions to strengthening social



harmony in Tanjung Medan Village is illustrated in Figure 1.

Figure 1. Analytical Framework

Adaptation: Community adjustment to differences in ethnicity, culture, language, and economic needs. Goal Attainment: Achievement of shared goals related to security, order, development, and village stability. Integration: STM, deliberation, mutual cooperation, and inter-community communication as mechanisms of integration. Latency: Wirit, religious gatherings, religious advice, and exemplary conduct as mechanisms for maintaining social values.

2. RESEARCH METHODS

2.1 Research Design

This study employed a qualitative approach with a case-study design. This approach was selected because the research seeks to understand in depth the social processes, meanings of actions, and mechanisms of community leaders' agency in building harmony. The study is not intended to statistically measure relationships among variables but to generate a conceptual understanding of how harmony is constructed within a multi-ethnic community. Tanjung Medan Village was selected as the research site based on a unique-case rationale. The site was not selected merely because of its ethnic diversity but because of the combination of Mandailing, Javanese, and Nias



populations; potential tensions associated with local politics and security; and the existence of local institutions such as STM, wirit, mutual cooperation, and deliberation that contribute to maintaining social relations. These characteristics make Tanjung Medan a relevant setting for examining how informal community mechanisms interact with formal village governance. See design research in Figure 1.

Figure 2. Research Design

Informants were selected purposively based on their direct involvement in community social life. The inclusion criteria were: (1) community leaders, customary leaders, religious leaders, or village officials with experience performing social roles in the village; (2) individuals who had participated in deliberations, STM activities, wirit, mutual cooperation, village development, or the resolution of community problems; (3) individuals familiar with inter-community relations across different ethnic groups; and (4) individuals willing to provide information based on their experiences. To strengthen the perspectives represented in the study, informants were not limited to local elites but also included residents from different ethnic backgrounds so that the narratives of community leaders could be compared with residents' experiences.

2.2 Data Collection

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, observation, and documentation. In-depth interviews lasted approximately 30–60 minutes per session or were adjusted according to field conditions. The interview guide was developed based on the research focus and Parsons' AGIL framework. Questions concerning Adaptation focused on how residents dealt with cultural differences and economic needs; Goal Attainment addressed security, order, and village development; Integration focused on deliberation, STM, mutual cooperation, and conflict resolution; while Latency addressed wirit, religious gatherings, religious values, and the transmission of social norms.

Observation was conducted during activities directly related to the research focus, particularly STM, wirit/religious gatherings, mutual cooperation, deliberation, development activities, and community interactions. Observation focused on who participated, how communication occurred, who had opportunities to speak, how decisions were made, and how different ethnic groups were positioned during interactions. Documentation complemented the data through village archives, activity records, STM documentation, religious activities, deliberation records, development activities, and other relevant documents.

2.3 Data Analysis

Data analysis in this study employed the qualitative data analysis model proposed by Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2014), consisting of data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification. The analysis was conducted systematically to identify patterns related to the contribution and agency of community leaders in building social harmony among residents of Tanjung Medan Village. The data analysis began with data condensation by selecting, organizing, and coding relevant information obtained from in-depth interviews, observations, and documentation. The initial coding focused on empirical phenomena such as community leaders' mediation, deliberation, communication, mutual cooperation, Serikat Tolong Menolong (STM), wirit, social solidarity, ethnic differences, political differences, security issues, and relations between community leaders and village government. The second stage involved axial coding, in which related codes were grouped into broader analytical categories, including social interaction, Islamic social capital, social integration, religious values, local governance, conflict management, and power relations. The third stage was selective coding, which was used to identify the central theme of the study, namely community leaders' agency and Islamic social capital as mechanisms for strengthening social integration and mitigating potential social conflict.

The findings were subsequently interpreted using Talcott Parsons' AGIL framework and George Herbert Mead's symbolic interactionism. The AGIL framework was used to classify findings into Adaptation, Goal Attainment, Integration, and Latency. Adaptation refers to the community's ability to adjust to ethnic, cultural, and socioeconomic differences; Goal Attainment concerns efforts to achieve security, order, and common village objectives; Integration refers to the role of STM, deliberation, mutual cooperation, and communication in maintaining social cohesion; and

Latency refers to the role of wirit and religious activities in maintaining and transmitting social and moral values.

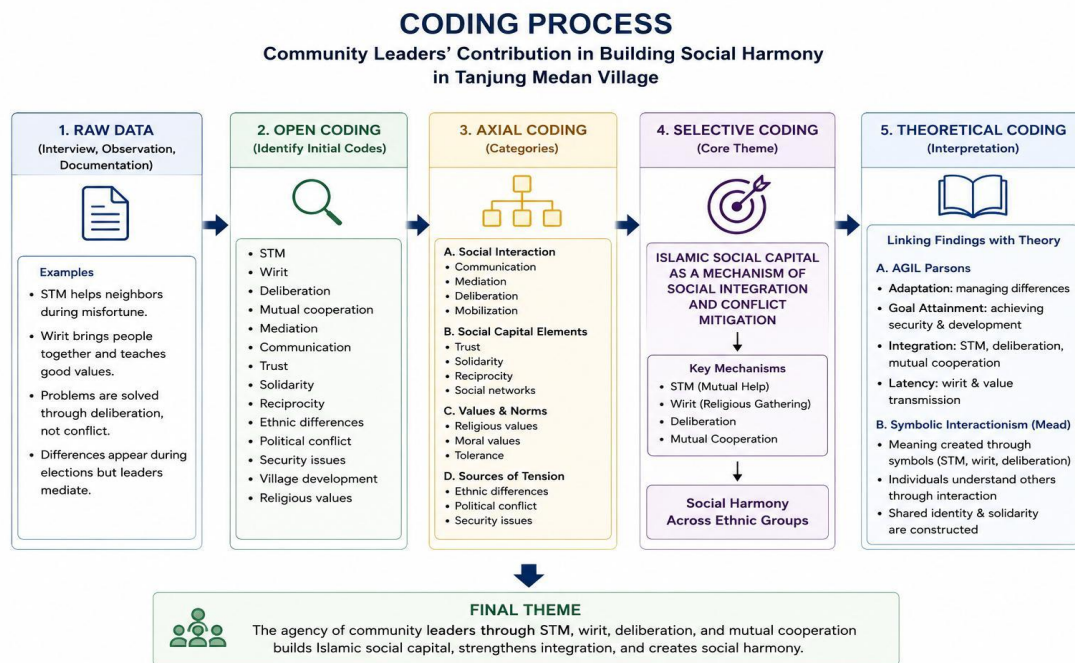


Figure 3. Coding Process of the Research Data

The final conclusions were verified through comparison across data sources and data collection techniques. This analytical procedure enabled the study to move beyond descriptive accounts of community activities toward an explanation of the mechanisms through which community leaders, STM, wirit, deliberation, and other local institutions contribute to social harmony.

2.4 Research Instruments

As a qualitative case study, this research did not use standardized quantitative instruments to measure variables. The primary research instrument was the researcher, supported by semi-structured interview guidelines, observation guidelines, and documentation guidelines. These instruments were developed based on the research objectives, the empirical context of Tanjung Medan Village, and the theoretical framework of Talcott Parsons and George Herbert Mead. The interview guidelines were designed to explore the experiences and perspectives of community leaders, religious leaders, traditional leaders, village officials, and residents from different ethnic backgrounds. The questions focused on community leaders' roles in mediation, deliberation, communication, social mobilization, conflict prevention, and relationships with the village government. Questions also addressed the role of STM, wirit, mutual cooperation, and religious activities in strengthening trust and solidarity among residents.

The observation guidelines were used to examine social interactions and participation in activities such as STM, wirit, religious gatherings, mutual cooperation, village meetings, and deliberation forums. Observation focused on patterns of communication, participation, decision-

making processes, relationships among ethnic groups, and the role of community leaders in facilitating interaction. Documentation guidelines were used to collect relevant village documents and records, including village meeting records, documentation of STM activities, religious activities, community activities, development activities, and other documents relevant to social harmony and local governance. The research instruments were also mapped to the AGIL framework to ensure that the theoretical perspective was directly connected to data collection.

Table 1. Research Instrument Matrix

No.	Informant/Source	Data Collection Technique	Main Focus	Analytical Indicators
1	Community leaders	In-depth interview	Leadership role and agency	Mediation, communication, deliberation, mobilization, conflict management
2	Religious leaders	In-depth interview	Religious and social values	Wirit, religious advice, moral values, tolerance, solidarity
3	Traditional leaders	In-depth interview	Customary norms and local relations	Customary values, social norms, conflict resolution, cultural interaction
4	Village officials	In-depth interview	Formal village governance	Village regulations, public services, development, cooperation with community leaders
5	Residents from different ethnic groups	In-depth interview	Community perceptions	Harmony, participation, trust, marginalization, social interaction, power relations
6	Community activities	Observation	Social interaction	STM, wirit, mutual cooperation, deliberation, participation
7	Village/community documents	Documentation	Supporting evidence	Meeting records, activity records, village documents, social and religious activities

The interview process was conducted semi-structurally, with an approximate duration of 30–60 minutes per session, depending on the availability and circumstances of each informant. The interview questions were flexible so that the researcher could explore emerging information while maintaining consistency with the research focus.

2.5 Validity and Reliability

Because this research employed a qualitative approach, data quality was not assessed through statistical validity and reliability tests such as Product Moment correlation or Cronbach's Alpha. Instead, the trustworthiness of the data was established through triangulation, member checking, and continuous comparison between empirical data and theoretical interpretation. Source triangulation was conducted by comparing information obtained from community leaders with the perspectives of village officials, religious and traditional leaders, and residents from different ethnic backgrounds, particularly Mandailing, Javanese, and Nias communities. This procedure was important to avoid relying exclusively on the narratives of local elites.

Technique triangulation was conducted by comparing interview findings with observations and documentation. For example, statements concerning the role of STM were compared with observations of STM activities and available records of community assistance. Similarly, information regarding wirit and religious activities was compared with field observations and documentation. Member checking was conducted by clarifying important information with

selected informants to ensure that the researcher's interpretation was consistent with the meaning intended by the informants. The researcher also maintained field notes throughout the research process to record observations, contextual information, and reflections that could support the interpretation of interview data.

The analytical interpretation was further strengthened through theoretical triangulation by examining the findings through both Parsons' AGIL framework and Mead's symbolic interactionism. The use of these two perspectives allowed the researcher to examine both the structural functions of social institutions and the meanings produced through everyday interaction..

2.6 Research Subject and Location

The research was conducted in Tanjung Medan Village, Bilah Barat District, Labuhanbatu Regency. The research subjects consisted of community leaders, religious leaders, traditional leaders, village officials, and residents who were directly involved in or had knowledge of social interaction and harmony in the village.

Tanjung Medan Village was selected through purposive case selection. The selection was not based solely on ethnic heterogeneity but on the combination of several characteristics that make the village analytically relevant. The community consists of residents from different ethnic backgrounds, including Mandailing, Javanese, Nias, and other groups. At the same time, the village has experienced social dynamics associated with cultural differences, security concerns, local political competition, and differences in community interests. These conditions coexist with local institutions such as STM, wirit, mutual cooperation, and deliberation that function as mechanisms for maintaining social relationships.

Therefore, Tanjung Medan Village represents a relevant case for examining how informal social institutions and community leaders interact with formal village governance in managing diversity and maintaining social harmony.

Informants were selected purposively according to specific inclusion criteria. The criteria included: (1) having a recognized role as a community, religious, traditional, or village leader, or being a resident with direct experience of the social dynamics under study; (2) having lived or served in Tanjung Medan Village for a sufficient period to understand local social relations; (3) having participated in deliberation, STM, wirit, mutual cooperation, village development, or conflict management activities; (4) being familiar with relationships among residents from different ethnic backgrounds; and (5) being willing to participate voluntarily in the research.

To prevent the study from being dominated by elite perspectives, residents from different ethnic backgrounds were also included as informants. Their perspectives were used to compare and verify the narratives presented by community leaders.

Table 2. Informant Matrix

Code	Age	Position/Role	Ethnicity	Religion
I1	35	Community Leader	Mandailing	Islam
I2	40	Religious Leader	Mandailing	Islam

I3	55	Traditional Leader	Melayu	[insert]
I4	45	Village Official	Javanse	[insert]
I5	45	Resident	Javanese	[insert]
I6	30	Resident	Nias	[insert]

The relationship between the research questions, data sources, and analytical procedures is presented in Table 3.

Table 3. Research Questions and Analytical Procedures

No.	Research Question	Data Source	Analytical Procedure
1	How do community leaders contribute to building social harmony in Tanjung Medan Village?	Interviews, observations, documentation	Thematic coding and descriptive interpretation
2	What mechanisms are used by community leaders to manage social, cultural, and political differences?	Interviews and observations	Open coding, axial coding, and thematic analysis
3	How do STM and wirit function as mechanisms of Islamic social capital?	Interviews, observations, documentation	Thematic analysis and interpretation using AGIL
4	How are social interactions and meanings of harmony constructed among residents?	Interviews and observations	Symbolic interactionism analysis
5	How do formal village governance and informal social institutions interact in maintaining harmony?	Interviews, observations, documentation	AGIL analysis and power-relations analysis

The analytical framework ensured that each research question was connected to a specific data source and analytical procedure. This approach enabled the study to move from empirical descriptions of community activities toward a theoretically informed explanation of community leaders' agency and the role of Islamic social capital in maintaining harmony. Overall, the methodological design was intended to capture the dynamic relationship between community leaders, local social institutions, formal village governance, and residents from different ethnic backgrounds. The study therefore treats social harmony not as a static condition but as an ongoing social process produced through mediation, interaction, negotiation, solidarity, and the reproduction of shared values.

3. RESULTS AND FINDINGS

The findings presented in this section are derived from the empirical material reported in the research manuscript, namely semi-structured interviews, field observations, and documentation collected in Tanjung Medan Village. The presentation is intentionally separated from theoretical interpretation so that the results describe what was encountered in the field before those findings are discussed through Parsons' structural-functional framework and Mead's symbolic interactionism. Data condensation and coding identified recurring empirical phenomena concerning ethnic diversity, cultural difference, security concerns, political tension, mediation by community leaders, deliberation, mutual cooperation, Serikat Tolong Menolong (STM), wirit or religious gatherings, village development, and relations between community leaders and the village government. Cross-source comparison was used to avoid treating the account of a single local actor as the complete representation of village life. The findings indicate that harmony in Tanjung Medan was not characterized by the absence of differences. Instead, the field material

showed the coexistence of potential friction and recurring community mechanisms used to manage everyday relations. The following subsections therefore present the demographic-social setting, concrete contributions of community leaders, and the operation of local social institutions as empirically observed mechanisms of social cohesion.

3.1 Demographic Profile and Socio-Ethnic Fragmentation of the Research Setting

Field data portray Tanjung Medan Village as a multi-ethnic rural community in which Mandailing, Javanese, Nias, and other residents interact within the same village social space. The significance of this diversity was visible not only in the presence of different ethnic identities but also in differences in language, customary practices, social habits, political preferences, and ways of participating in community life. The empirical material identifies several situations in which these differences could become socially sensitive. Some Javanese residents were reported to experience cultural marginalization when the customs and cultural practices of a more dominant group had stronger influence in everyday community life. Security also appeared as a shared concern, particularly in relation to theft and the loss of oil-palm plantation products. In addition, differences in political preference during village-head elections and general elections were identified as moments that could intensify tension among residents. These findings do not demonstrate permanent ethnic conflict. Rather, they show the specific social conditions within which community leaders, village institutions, and residents were required to negotiate difference and maintain workable relationships across ethnic and political boundaries.

The composition of the research participants was designed to capture this social complexity. Informants were selected purposively from community leaders, religious leaders, traditional leaders, village officials, and residents with direct knowledge of inter-community relations and participation in deliberation, STM, wirit, mutual cooperation, village development, or conflict-management activities. Residents from different ethnic backgrounds were included so that narratives provided by local leaders could be compared with experiences at the community level. This is methodologically important because the study concerns not only the formal or symbolic role of respected figures but also how their actions are experienced by people situated differently within the village social structure. The available manuscript, however, does not provide a complete individual-level list containing each participant's initials, ethnicity, religion, social role, and length of leadership. Accordingly, Table 1 reports only participant characteristics explicitly supported by the research record and does not invent missing biographical information. Before publication, the authors should replace the "not individually reported" entries with verified field-record data where available, while retaining anonymized participant codes to protect confidentiality.

Table 4. Empirically Reported Informant Profile and Data Coverage

Informant group	Ethnic coverage	Religion	Social role / experience	Leadership duration
Community leaders	Cross-ethnic relations considered	Not individually reported	Mediation, communication, deliberation, mobilization, conflict management	Not individually reported
Religious leaders	Not individually reported	Muslim socio-religious context	Wirit, religious advice, moral values, tolerance, solidarity	Not individually reported

Traditional leaders	Not individually reported	Not individually reported	Customary values, social norms, cultural interaction, conflict resolution	Not individually reported
Village officials	Not individually reported	Not individually reported	Formal governance, development, public services, cooperation with community leaders	Not individually reported
Residents	Mandailing, Javanese, Nias and other groups represented in the research setting	Not individually reported	Community perceptions of harmony, participation, trust, marginalization and social interaction	Not applicable / not individually reported

3.2 Concrete Contributions of Community Leaders in Residents' Social Dynamics

The empirical data identify community leaders as active actors in the handling of everyday community problems rather than merely ceremonial figures. Their contribution appeared most clearly in mediation, communication, deliberation, social mobilization, village development, and coordination with formal village authorities. When disagreements or social problems emerged, community leaders were reported to approach the parties concerned, facilitate communication, and direct unresolved issues toward deliberation. This pattern placed community leaders between household- or group-level interaction and the formal structure of village government. Their role was also visible outside situations of dispute. Leaders participated in or encouraged mutual cooperation, environmental cleaning, construction and improvement of public facilities, mosque-related activities, and other collective village work. These activities created repeated occasions for residents from different backgrounds to work in the same social setting. The data therefore show two interconnected forms of contribution: a responsive function, in which leaders intervened when problems or tensions appeared, and a mobilizing function, in which they organized or supported routine collective activities before tension developed into open conflict. Both forms were repeatedly associated with maintaining communication among residents.



Figure 4. Field Interview with a Community Informant in Tanjung Medan Village*Source: Research documentation, 2026*

A second empirical pattern concerned the position of community leaders as intermediaries between residents and the village government. Interview and observational material reported that community concerns could be conveyed through respected local figures, while information and collective decisions from village structures could also be communicated back to residents. This bridging role was particularly relevant when issues involved security, village development, competing interests, or matters requiring broader agreement. Community leaders also participated in religious and deliberative forums, where advice about mutual respect, togetherness, peaceful coexistence, and the avoidance of conflict was communicated to residents. Importantly, the research material does not support reducing this contribution to a single type of leader or a single ethnic group. The study design deliberately incorporated community, religious, traditional, governmental, and resident perspectives because leadership operated through overlapping social roles. What emerged from the field was therefore a networked pattern of local leadership: mediation was connected to deliberation, deliberation to village coordination, and social mobilization to recurring community encounters. This network of actions constitutes the principal empirical finding concerning the agency of community leaders in Tanjung Medan.

Table 2. Empirical Forms of Community-Leader Contribution

Empirical domain	Observed/reported action	Community arena	Immediate empirical function
Mediation	Approaching parties, facilitating communication, directing unresolved matters to deliberation	Interpersonal/group disputes	Opening communication and preventing escalation
Social mobilization	Encouraging gotong royong, environmental cleaning and collective work	Community activities	Bringing residents into repeated cooperative interaction
Village development	Participation in construction/improvement of public facilities and related activities	Village development	Coordinating collective interests and participation
Religious leadership	Supporting wirit/pengajian and communicating moral-social advice	Religious gatherings	Maintaining recurring interaction and shared social messages
Government liaison	Conveying community concerns and coordinating with village authorities	Formal-informal governance interface	Connecting resident concerns with village decision processes

3.3 Local Social Institutions as Instruments of Harmony: STM, Wirit, and Deliberation

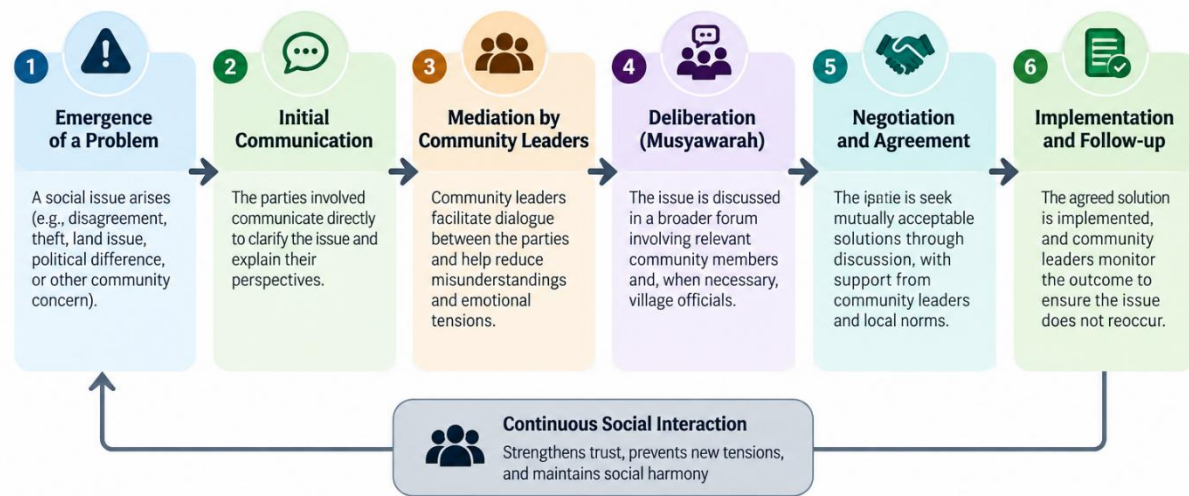
Serikat Tolong Menolong (STM) emerged from the field material as one of the most visible local mechanisms of mutual assistance. Its activities were associated with situations in which residents experienced bereavement, illness, accidents, or other forms of difficulty requiring collective support. The research record describes STM as a setting in which assistance could take material,

practical, and participatory forms and in which residents were encouraged to help beyond immediate family boundaries. Of particular relevance to the multi-ethnic setting, STM activities provided opportunities for residents from different backgrounds to encounter one another through concrete acts of assistance rather than through abstract declarations of tolerance. Observation and documentation were used to compare interview claims concerning STM with actual community activities and available records. The empirical importance of STM in this study therefore lies in its repeated pattern of action: a resident or family experiences difficulty, information circulates through community networks, assistance is mobilized, and community members participate in support. These recurring encounters produced observable practices of helping, reciprocity, and social contact across everyday community relationships, which were subsequently interpreted theoretically in the Discussion section rather than assumed in advance.

Wirit and other religious gatherings formed a second recurring arena identified in interviews, observations, and documentation. These activities were not recorded solely as ritual events; they also brought residents together at regular intervals and created opportunities for communication before, during, and after religious activities. Religious and community leaders used these gatherings to communicate advice concerning brotherhood, mutual assistance, respect for differences, social responsibility, and avoidance of conflict. The empirical result is therefore not simply that religious gatherings existed, but that they functioned as repeated social encounters in which moral messages and interpersonal contact occurred together. The study's observation guidelines specifically examined patterns of participation, communication, and interaction during wirit and related gatherings, while documentation was used to support the existence of these activities. The manuscript does not provide a verified numerical attendance series or exact frequency for every gathering; consequently, no unsupported figures are introduced in this revision. What can be established from the available research record is that wirit/religious gatherings were recurring activities recognized by informants and observed as part of the village's social-religious life, making them an important empirical component of the local mechanisms through which residents maintained continuing contact.

Deliberation (*musyawarah*) constituted the third major mechanism found in the data and was particularly relevant when a problem could not be resolved through direct interpersonal communication. The field material describes a recurring process in which a social problem or sign of tension was first recognized, followed by communication with the parties involved and the involvement of community leaders. Where broader consideration was required, the issue was brought into a deliberative setting involving relevant residents, community or religious figures, and, when necessary, village officials. The purpose of this process was to allow positions to be expressed, negotiate differences, and arrive at an agreement or practical follow-up. Political differences surrounding village-head elections and general elections were identified as situations with potential to intensify tension, making the availability of informal communication and deliberative channels especially relevant. Observation focused not only on whether a meeting occurred but also on who participated, who had opportunities to speak, and how decisions were made. This is significant because the empirical assessment of harmony must include participation and bargaining processes, not merely the final appearance of consensus. Figure 3 summarizes the

conflict-resolution sequence consistently reflected in the research design and reported field mechanisms.



Fig

Figure 5. Empirical Flow of Community-Based Conflict Resolution

Taken together, STM, wirit, and musyawarah show that the maintenance of social relations in Tanjung Medan was embedded in recurring local practices rather than dependent on a single formal intervention. Each institution operated in a different empirical arena. STM organized assistance when residents faced misfortune or practical need; wirit and religious gatherings created repeated socio-religious encounters and channels for moral advice; and musyawarah provided a procedure for communicating, negotiating, and following up issues that involved competing interests or potential conflict. Mutual cooperation and village-development activities complemented these three mechanisms by placing residents in situations requiring shared work. The data also show that community leaders were involved across these arenas, which explains why their contribution appeared simultaneously interpersonal, institutional, religious, and governmental. At the level of results, the important finding is the recurrence and interconnection of these practices.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The significance of community leadership in Tanjung Medan is best understood not as the personal capacity of respected individuals to “keep the peace,” but as a form of relational agency situated between heterogeneous social groups, informal institutions, religious authority, and formal village governance. This distinction is theoretically consequential. Parsons’ structural functionalism would predict that a differentiated social system requires mechanisms capable of coordinating its constituent parts, yet the Tanjung Medan case suggests that such coordination cannot be attributed to institutional functions in the abstract. Adaptation occurs because social actors repeatedly negotiate cultural and linguistic differences; Goal Attainment becomes possible when dispersed interests are translated into collectively recognizable concerns; Integration

depends on actors capable of moving between social networks; and Latency requires spaces through which normative expectations can be reproduced. Community leaders occupy these intersections, but their authority appears to derive less from a fixed formal position than from their ability to mobilize relationships across them. This interpretation extends Sumarmi, Untari, and Meiji's (2022) analysis of Desa Pancasila, which identifies local government, community leaders, and youth as significant actors in translating national values into village practice, because the present study specifies the institutional channels through which such local agency becomes socially effective. It also develops Humaedi et al.'s (2021) argument that local leadership and *gotong royong* constitute important resources for collective resilience: Tanjung Medan indicates that leadership becomes effective when it is embedded in repeated social practices rather than activated only during exceptional disruption. Najma and Bakri's (2022) study of Kalimanggis similarly positions Islamic leaders and adaptive religious practice as social glue in a multicultural village, but their emphasis on tolerance through multicultural Islamic education leaves relatively unexplored how religious leadership intersects with informal welfare institutions, conflict mediation, and formal governance. More recent evidence from Yoga and Utama's study of Kampung Saren Jawa likewise foregrounds communication, mutual respect, local traditions, and religious and customary leaders in sustaining multicultural harmony. The Tanjung Medan case pushes this literature further by treating leadership as an institutional brokerage process. This reframing matters for Islamic Community Development because it shifts analytical attention away from the charismatic or moral qualities of the leader toward the social architecture that allows leadership to function. It also cautions against policy interventions that merely appoint, train, or formally recognize community leaders without sustaining the local networks through which their legitimacy is continuously produced.

The multi-ethnic character of Tanjung Medan also complicates any functionalist assumption that social equilibrium signifies successful integration. Cultural difference, political competition, security concerns, and unequal symbolic positions do not disappear simply because open conflict remains limited; they are continually processed through everyday relationships. In Parsons' terms, Adaptation should therefore not be reduced to minorities adjusting themselves to a culturally dominant environment. Such an interpretation would mistake accommodation for integration and could obscure asymmetrical costs borne by different groups. The reported experience of cultural distance among some Javanese residents is analytically important precisely because it exposes this limitation: a village can remain outwardly cohesive while particular identities experience pressure to conform. The finding invites a more critical reading of structural functionalism in which equilibrium is treated as an empirical question rather than an automatically desirable endpoint. Mahmudin et al. (2021), studying social capital among Sunda Wiwitan minority communities, demonstrate the importance of distinguishing bonding, bridging, and linking forms of social capital when assessing cohesion under conditions of minority status. Wiasti, Yadnya, and Dhanawaty's (2022) analysis of language convergence in a Muslim diaspora community in Bali similarly indicates that communicative adjustment within a dominant linguistic environment is intertwined with social identity, making adaptation socially consequential rather than culturally neutral. Supriatna et al. (2023) likewise associate cultural diversity, social networks, and social capital with community resilience, although their quantitative urban setting does not illuminate

the micro-processes through which unequal cultural positions are negotiated. The Tanjung Medan evidence thus extends the resilience literature by demonstrating why social cohesion should be conceptualized as negotiated rather than merely possessed: the capacity to remain connected despite difference depends on recurrent opportunities to communicate, cooperate, contest, and renegotiate relationships. This interpretation also resonates with Demartoto and Ramdhon's (2023) account of Chinese–Javanese relations in Surakarta, where pluralism was socially constructed through collective meanings, cultural symbols, and inter-ethnic collaboration rather than simply guaranteed by demographic coexistence. The theoretical consequence is substantial. Adaptation and Integration should be read dynamically: adaptation concerns reciprocal adjustment rather than minority assimilation, while integration concerns maintaining channels through which difference can remain socially expressible. For village governance, this means that the absence of visible conflict is an insufficient indicator of successful multicultural governance. Policy evaluation must also examine whose cultural practices remain visible, whose language and preferences shape deliberation, and whether minority residents can participate without relinquishing meaningful dimensions of identity.

STM provides the clearest basis for moving from a generic vocabulary of “solidarity” toward a mechanism-based conception of Islamic social capital. Its analytical importance does not arise simply because residents assist one another; mutual aid is widespread across Indonesian communities and has already been extensively associated with *gotong royong*. What is theoretically distinctive is the conversion of a religiously meaningful obligation to assist others into a recurring institutional arrangement through which expectations of reciprocity, trust, social obligation, and network membership can be reproduced. In Parsons' framework, this makes STM an Integration mechanism because it connects differentiated actors through patterned expectations. Yet social-capital theory reveals a process that functionalism alone leaves underdeveloped: assistance becomes socially consequential because repeated exchanges create expectations concerning what members may reasonably expect from one another. Sumarmi et al. (2022) identify *gotong royong* as an important form of social capital for implementing shared national values, while Humaedi et al. (2021) show how mutual cooperation and local leadership contribute to community resilience under crisis. Studies of community resilience provide a comparable mechanism. The research on Surabaya's urban kampungs emphasizes community networks and self-organization as resources for managing both major and everyday shocks, while Qadriina, Herdiansyah, and Aryo (2024) conceptualize social capital as a community asset that mobilizes collective action and support during post-earthquake recovery. Nurdin's (2024) investigation of Islamic faith-based organizations goes closer to the religious dimension, demonstrating that Islamic organizations can build or strengthen social capital during disaster recovery. Tanjung Medan nevertheless differs from these crisis-centered settings: STM embeds reciprocal assistance within ordinary social life before an extraordinary disaster occurs. This temporal difference is theoretically important because it suggests that Islamic social capital is not merely a reserve activated during crisis; it may be continuously produced through mundane practices of giving, receiving, remembering obligations, and recognizing others as members of a morally connected community. The interpretation also advances beyond the manuscript's earlier literature, which largely characterized mutual assistance and community activity as routes to

solidarity without sufficiently explaining how solidarity becomes institutionally reproducible. The critical qualification is that social capital is not inherently bridging. Dense reciprocity can reinforce bonding within an already cohesive group while excluding outsiders. STM can be claimed as cross-ethnic Islamic social capital only insofar as participation and assistance actually traverse ethnic and status boundaries. This distinction gives the finding both theoretical precision and practical relevance: strengthening STM should mean widening the social radius of reciprocity, not simply increasing the intensity of assistance among already well-connected members.

Wirit requires a similarly differentiated interpretation. Treating religious gatherings as automatically harmony-producing would reproduce a normative assumption rather than explain a social mechanism. Their relevance in Tanjung Medan lies in the combination of temporal repetition, moral communication, face-to-face encounter, and the symbolic interpretation of participation. Parsons' Latency function helps explain why recurrent religious settings matter: a social system cannot depend exclusively on episodic conflict resolution because norms concerning brotherhood, assistance, restraint, and peaceful coexistence must be maintained between moments of tension. Mead provides the missing micro-foundation. Norms do not become socially effective merely because leaders pronounce them; actors interpret symbols, observe others' responses, take the perspectives of relevant social groups, and revise expectations through interaction. Wirit can consequently be understood as a site in which religious discourse and everyday recognition operate simultaneously. Najma and Bakri (2022) found that multicultural Islamic education in Kalimanggis adapts to local culture and that Islamic leadership can operate as a social adhesive within diversity. Saputra, Yunanda, and Kiram's (2022) phenomenological work on Majelis Taklim Fardhu Ain in North Sumatra similarly associates religious understanding and practice with patterns of social integration. Recent research on routine religious activities in Jodipan further argues that Burdah, Maulid Diba', and public religious studies function not only spiritually but also as spaces of interaction, togetherness, and solidarity. These studies help establish that religious gatherings can generate social effects, but the present analysis adds a symbolic-interactionist explanation for how those effects may become durable. Repetition matters because meanings are stabilized through recurrent interaction: helping ceases to be only an abstract religious injunction when participants encounter one another within a social environment where mutual responsibility is repeatedly articulated and enacted. Yet this mechanism has limits. A religious gathering may strengthen bonding capital while leaving ethnic, generational, gender, or status inequalities intact; participation itself cannot be assumed to be equally accessible. Recent research on majelis taklim participation, for example, identifies demographic imbalance as a substantive problem rather than assuming that the existence of a religious forum guarantees broad inclusion. The theoretical contribution of the Tanjung Medan case should therefore be formulated carefully: wirit can function as a Latency mechanism and a site of meaning-making when repeated religious interaction reproduces norms that are socially transferable beyond the ritual group. For practice, the implication is not to instrumentalize worship as a government conflict-management program, but to recognize the existing social infrastructure of religious gatherings while safeguarding their voluntary,

community-based character and widening opportunities for the values articulated within them to inform cross-group relations.

Musyawarah reveals the strongest tension between social integration and power, and this tension prevents the analysis from becoming an uncritical celebration of local wisdom. Parsons can explain deliberation as an integrative institution that coordinates competing interests, while Mead clarifies how communicative interaction allows participants to interpret one another's positions and construct a shared definition of a problem. Neither framework, however, is sufficient if consensus is treated as evidence that every participant possessed comparable influence. The crucial analytical question is not whether agreement was reached but how the conditions of agreement were produced. Indonesian village-governance scholarship provides strong reasons for this caution. Research on rural planning published in 2022 argues that village deliberation can contain substantial power contestation, with informal power relations influencing formal planning meetings and potentially obscuring public preferences. Briansyah and Riyadh's (2024) work similarly identifies continuing challenges surrounding meaningful community participation in village-governance planning. Turmudi and Iksan (2024), from a legal-governance perspective, position village deliberation as a strategic pillar of village democracy and development, demonstrating the normative importance of musyawarah within Indonesian governance. Yet Ramda's more recent analysis warns of "pseudo-participation": legal guarantees of participation do not necessarily ensure substantive influence within policy formation. These perspectives illuminate why the Tanjung Medan finding concerning ethnic position, social status, and access to community authority is not peripheral but central to the interpretation of harmony. The experience of cultural marginalization reported in the research setting creates a plausible possibility that actors may enter deliberation with unequal symbolic resources. A respected leader may successfully prevent escalation while simultaneously reproducing a hierarchy if some voices are regarded as more legitimate than others. This does not invalidate musyawarah; it distinguishes procedural presence from substantive inclusion. The study therefore extends conventional functionalist reasoning by introducing a power-sensitive criterion for Integration: a mechanism cannot be evaluated solely by whether it produces stability, because stability achieved through silence, deference, or cultural assimilation differs sociologically from stability achieved through meaningful negotiation. This distinction also sharpens the interpretation of the newly developed empirical conflict-resolution flow. Communication, mediation, deliberation, negotiation, and agreement should not be treated as a mechanically linear technology of peace. Each transition contains decisions about who defines the problem, who is recognized as a legitimate mediator, whose account enters the deliberative arena, and whose concessions become embedded in the final agreement. Sustainable village harmony thus depends not only on consensus but on the social conditions under which consensus becomes legitimate.

The interaction between informal community institutions and formal village government further differentiates the Tanjung Medan case from accounts that locate cohesion either in state intervention or in autonomous community solidarity. Community leaders appear analytically significant precisely because they operate at the boundary between these domains. This boundary position can be understood as a form of linking social capital: actors connect horizontal networks of residents with vertically differentiated structures of authority and resources. The manuscript's

original framing already recognizes that leaders communicate community aspirations to village government while simultaneously helping residents interpret formal decisions; the deeper implication is that local governance is partially produced outside government offices. This interpretation complements Sumarmi et al. (2022), who show that village-level implementation of collective values depends on multiple local actors rather than government alone. It also resonates with the Surabaya research showing that community networks strengthen capacities for self-organization and everyday resilience. Nurdin's (2024) work on Islamic faith-based organizations further demonstrates that religious organizations can mobilize social capital in ways that matter for collective recovery, indicating that governance capacity can be distributed across formal and non-formal institutions. Susanto's (2022) study of the Peaceful Village of Gemblegan likewise emphasizes social capital in the development of tolerance across religious communities. The distinction in Tanjung Medan is the institutional combination: STM, wirit, musyawarah, community leadership, and village governance do not operate as isolated variables but as an interconnected local governance ecology. This helps explain why the agency of leaders cannot be reduced to personal charisma. A leader without access to functioning social networks may possess symbolic status but little capacity to coordinate action; conversely, institutions without actors capable of connecting them may remain socially fragmented. The implication for Islamic Community Development is a shift from leader-centered intervention toward relational capacity-building. Programs intended to strengthen cohesion should map the actual routes through which information, assistance, religious norms, grievances, and public decisions circulate. Yet institutional brokerage also creates risk: actors who control connections between residents and formal authorities may become gatekeepers. Strengthening community leadership must consequently be accompanied by transparent access, multiple channels of representation, and opportunities for minority residents to approach village governance without dependence on a single intermediary. The same mechanism that produces coordination can otherwise consolidate unequal control over information and representation.

Taken together, the dialogue between Parsons and Mead produces a more defensible explanation of social cohesion than either framework can offer independently, but the Tanjung Medan case also exposes the limitations of both. Parsons provides a macro-level grammar for distinguishing Adaptation, Goal Attainment, Integration, and Latency, thereby showing why security, collective objectives, mutual assistance, deliberation, and religious value maintenance perform different yet interconnected systemic tasks. Mead explains why these functions cannot operate mechanically: institutions become socially consequential only when actors assign meaning to them through interaction. STM acquires integrative force when giving and receiving assistance becomes interpreted as mutual responsibility; wirit acquires normative force when recurrent participation gives religious messages recognizable social meaning; musyawarah acquires legitimacy when residents learn to interpret dialogue as an acceptable means of handling disagreement. Demartoto and Ramdhon's (2023) finding that pluralism in Surakarta is constructed as a collective social reality through symbols and inter-ethnic cooperation reinforces the importance of this meaning-making dimension. Yoga and Utama similarly demonstrate the importance of social communication, openness, tolerance, and local traditions in multicultural harmony. Mahmudin et al. (2021), however, remind us that social capital has differentiated bonding, bridging, and

linking dimensions, while the village-deliberation literature demonstrates that interaction always occurs within structures of unequal influence. The present study therefore does more than place two classical theories side by side. Its more useful theoretical proposition is that social cohesion emerges from an iterative relationship between institutional functionality, socially constructed meaning, and unequal relational positioning. Function without meaning would reduce actors to passive components of a system; meaning without institutional structure would inadequately explain why some interpretations become durable; both without power analysis could mistake conformity for cohesion. This three-level interpretation is especially important for the reported position of Javanese and Nias residents. Their inclusion cannot be inferred merely from participation in shared institutions. Meaningful integration requires that cross-ethnic interaction generate both belonging and capacity to influence collective decisions. In this sense, the study modifies rather than simply confirms structural functionalism: equilibrium is treated as provisional, negotiated, and potentially unequal. It simultaneously extends symbolic interactionism by showing that locally constructed meanings are stabilized through institutional infrastructures that repeatedly organize encounters among actors.

The broader contribution to Islamic Community Development lies in conceptualizing Islamic social capital as an infrastructure of negotiated coexistence rather than as a normative synonym for Muslim solidarity. Contemporary Indonesian evidence increasingly shows that cohesion depends on combinations of social networks, local leadership, cultural resources, religious organizations, and collective action. Nurdin (2024) demonstrates how Islamic faith-based organizations create or strengthen social capital; Qadriina et al. (2024) show that social capital can mobilize collective action in community recovery; research on Surabaya emphasizes the resilience-producing capacity of community networks; Sumarmi et al. (2022) demonstrate how local actors and *gotong royong* translate collective values into village practice; Najma and Bakri (2022) reveal the adaptive relationship between Islamic leadership and multicultural culture; Mahmudin et al. (2021) expose the importance of bonding, bridging, and linking capital for minority cohesion; and recent work on youth peacebuilding in Central Java explicitly combines intergroup contact and social capital to understand preventive conflict strategies. Against this literature, the distinctive contribution of Tanjung Medan is not another claim that religion, local wisdom, or community leaders are “important.” Its analytical contribution is to specify how several mechanisms intersect: religiously inflected reciprocity is institutionalized through STM; normative continuity and meaning-making are reproduced through *wirit*; difference is processed through *musyawarah*; community leaders broker horizontal and vertical relationships; and formal village governance provides an institutional endpoint for concerns that cannot be managed solely through informal networks. The long-term practical implication is consequently more demanding than recommending that village governments “strengthen harmony.” Effective policy would need to preserve the autonomy of organic community institutions while making their bridging and linking capacities more inclusive, monitor whether deliberative access is substantively distributed across ethnic groups, develop multiple communication channels so that community leaders do not become exclusive gatekeepers, and treat early social signals—cultural marginalization, security anxiety, or electoral polarization—as governance information rather than waiting for open conflict. Such an approach transforms conflict prevention from episodic

intervention into social-infrastructure maintenance. Theoretically, it also reframes harmony as an achievement that must continually be reproduced, contested, and renegotiated. That proposition is more consistent with the empirical complexity of Tanjung Medan than a static image of a harmonious village and provides a transferable analytical model for studying other multi-ethnic Muslim rural communities without assuming that the particular institutional forms identified here will operate identically elsewhere.

The study's critical implication is therefore that the sustainability of harmony should be judged by the quality of relationships that reproduce it, not merely by the absence of confrontation. This distinction becomes especially important in rural political contexts where village-head elections, resource interests, cultural hierarchy, and interpersonal networks may overlap. Recent research on post-election reconciliation in Jatilengger Village examines precisely how political polarization after a village-head election affects social cohesion and how local values and community actors contribute to reconciliation. Research on deliberative rural planning likewise demonstrates that informal power relations may penetrate formal decision-making, while recent governance scholarship identifies the possibility of pseudo-participation even where legal structures formally guarantee public involvement. These comparisons make it difficult to interpret Tanjung Medan's negotiated harmony as evidence of a completed equilibrium. A more defensible interpretation is that community cohesion is continuously produced through a combination of preventive communication, reciprocal assistance, moral socialization, mediation, and negotiated access to authority. The empirical conflict-resolution flow developed from this research should consequently be read as a recursive rather than terminal model: agreement does not end the social process because implementation changes relationships, creates memories of fairness or unfairness, and shapes how actors approach the next disagreement. This insight links Mead's emphasis on the social production of meaning with a critical revision of Parsons. Successful Integration feeds back into future Adaptation and Goal Attainment only when participants interpret previous processes as sufficiently legitimate to warrant continued participation. An agreement perceived as imposed may generate surface stability while weakening future trust. Conversely, a process in which minority voices are substantively recognized can expand bridging capital and reduce the social distance that makes later tensions harder to manage. The policy consequence is concrete: village governments and community institutions should evaluate conflict resolution not only by whether a dispute ends but also by whether communication networks remain open afterward, whether groups continue participating in shared institutions, and whether previously less influential residents acquire meaningful access to deliberative arenas. Such indicators move the evaluation of rural harmony from ceremonial consensus toward relational resilience. They also articulate the central contribution of this study: social cohesion in a multicultural Muslim village is neither an automatic consequence of shared religion nor the product of a single leader; it is a negotiated institutional accomplishment produced through the interaction of agency, Islamic social capital, meaning-making, governance, and power.

5. CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

5.1. Conclusions

This study concludes that social harmony in Tanjung Medan Village is not a static condition defined by the absence of conflict, but a continuously negotiated social process shaped by community leadership, local institutions, religious values, and village governance. Community leaders function not merely as respected figures but as relational actors who connect residents across ethnic and social boundaries, mediate emerging tensions, facilitate deliberation, mobilize collective participation, and bridge informal community networks with formal village government. Through Parsons' AGIL framework, these processes can be understood as interconnected mechanisms of adaptation to socio-cultural differences, attainment of shared community goals, integration through collective institutions, and maintenance of social values. Mead's symbolic interactionism further explains how meanings of solidarity, mutual responsibility, and peaceful coexistence are constructed and reinforced through repeated social interaction. The study therefore demonstrates that the sustainability of harmony depends not simply on the authority of individual leaders, but on their capacity to activate and connect the social relationships and institutions through which differences are continuously negotiated. This interpretation also requires attention to unequal social positions, because consensus does not automatically indicate substantive inclusion. The participation and bargaining position of Javanese, Nias, and other groups remain important for assessing whether community harmony is genuinely inclusive. This corresponds with the manuscript's finding that ethnic position, social status, and access to community authority may shape participation and bargaining power within deliberative processes.

5.2. Suggestions

Based on these findings, several suggestions can be proposed. First, community leaders should strengthen inclusive and participatory deliberation by ensuring that residents from different ethnic and social backgrounds have equal opportunities to express their concerns and participate in decision-making processes.

The principal theoretical contribution of this study lies in conceptualizing STM and wirit as interconnected forms of Islamic social capital and social infrastructure. STM transforms mutual assistance from an episodic act into a recurring mechanism that can generate trust, reciprocity, shared norms, solidarity, and cross-ethnic relationships. Wirit performs a complementary function by providing a recurrent socio-religious space through which values of brotherhood, mutual assistance, tolerance, and peaceful coexistence are communicated and reproduced. Within Parsons' framework, STM primarily supports Integration, whereas wirit contributes to Latency; through Mead, both institutions acquire social significance because their meanings are continuously constructed through interaction. The novelty of the study therefore extends beyond the familiar conclusion that community leaders are important for harmony. It explains how their agency operates through STM, wirit, musyawarah, mutual cooperation, and relationships with

village government, thereby connecting Islamic values, informal social norms, and formal local governance. This mechanism-based explanation is also identified in the manuscript as its central contribution.

Practically, the findings imply that strengthening social cohesion should focus on sustaining inclusive community institutions rather than relying primarily on intervention after conflict occurs. Village government and community leaders need to preserve communication networks capable of recognizing social tension at an early stage, while STM, wirit, and musyawarah should remain accessible spaces for interaction across ethnic and social boundaries. Particular attention should be given to the quality of participation in deliberation. The existence of consensus alone is insufficient if residents with weaker social positions have limited opportunities to articulate their interests. Strengthening harmony therefore requires meaningful representation, transparent communication, and multiple channels through which residents can engage community leaders and village authorities. Such an approach positions conflict prevention as an everyday process of maintaining relationships rather than an emergency response undertaken only after social tension becomes visible.

These conclusions should nevertheless be interpreted within the context-specific character of a qualitative case study in Tanjung Medan Village. The mechanisms identified here cannot automatically be generalized to other multicultural rural communities with different ethnic compositions, religious networks, political structures, or forms of local leadership. Future research should therefore compare several multi-ethnic villages to examine whether STM, wirit, musyawarah, and community-leader brokerage operate through similar mechanisms in different socio-cultural settings. Longitudinal research is also needed to examine how these mechanisms respond to leadership succession, electoral competition, migration, and socio-economic transformation. Overall, the study proposes that social harmony in a multicultural Muslim rural community is a negotiated institutional accomplishment produced through the interaction of community-leader agency, Islamic social capital, shared meaning, inclusive deliberation, and local governance. This formulation provides a more dynamic basis for understanding rural social cohesion while offering a framework that can be critically tested in future Islamic Community Development research.

6. REFERENCES

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