

Charisma, Tradition, and Rationality: The Authority of Teungku in Maintaining Social Order

Mimi Rahmawati¹, Siti Ikramatoun²

*Correspondence:

Email:
siti.ikramatoun@usk.ac.id

Authors Affiliation:

¹Universitas Syiah Kuala,
Indonesia

²Universitas Syiah Kuala,
Indonesia

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Abstract

The study examines the role of Teungku—local religious leaders in maintaining social order in Gampong Krueng Tuynong, Aceh Jaya. Drawing on Max Weber's theory of authority, the study analyzes how the three types of authority—traditional, charismatic, and legal—rational—interact and function synergistically within informal religious leadership. Using a qualitative narrative method, data were collected through in-depth interviews, field observations, and documentation. The findings indicate that Teungku gains legitimacy through lineage, moral charisma, and involvement in village governance structures. Their leadership, rooted in cultural heritage and ethical example, positions them as mediators, educators, and guardians of social harmony. Empirically, this study demonstrates that the stability of post-conflict village social structures can remain stable through informal leadership that is not formally institutionalized, yet holds socially recognized authority. Theoretically, it offers a new synthesis of Weber's typology by showing that, in local contexts such as Aceh, the three forms of authority do not operate in isolation but instead converge functionally within the figure of the Teungku. Thus, this article contributes to a broader understanding of how informal religious authority can serve as a stabilizing force in communities shaped by layered values, traditions, and local norms.

Introduction

In the landscape of Acehnese society, the Teungku position in the gampong is not just a religious role, but a social actor with the authority to regulate the lives of the gampong community. Teungku is a mediator, guardian of cultural values, and a moral authority who maintains social cohesion and regulates life together. Teungku's leadership is built on a foundation of cultural and religious beliefs that have been passed from generation to generation. This suggests that in traditional Muslim communities, religious authority holds dual significance: spiritual and social.

Indonesian society cannot be separated from the dominance of symbolic authority derived from religion, customs, and the state, which compete with each other and collaborate in organizing the social space of society. (Abdullah 2010). In the context of Aceh, Teungku authority is a local form of symbolic power that manifests itself in the daily life of the community, especially in maintaining social order. Max Weber's typology of authority has long been a crucial foundation for understanding the structure of power in society. Weber divides authority into three main types: traditional authority, which stems from a belief in the legitimacy of customary and ancestral heritage; charismatic authority, which rests on trust in the exceptional qualities of an individual; and legal-rational authority, which is based on legal systems and formal structures. (Weber, Roth, and Wittich 1978). Although this typology was formulated during the early modern period, numerous contemporary studies corroborate that these forms of authority remain pertinent and are being reconfigured within increasingly complex social environments.

Recent studies indicate that legal-rational authority does not entirely supplant traditional or charismatic forms in contemporary society. Conversely, a hybridization of authority exists, enabling all three types to operate concurrently within a specific social figure. (Patra and Paltasingh 2024; Whimster 2024). This is highly evident in societies that

integrate customary structures, religious principles, and contemporary governance, such as those observed in Aceh. Multiple studies indicate that religious authorities within Indonesia occupy a strategic and influential position in society. The Islamic authorities in Aceh experienced a process of renegotiation following the tsunami and armed conflict, yet they continued to maintain their influence within the community. Local Islamic leadership in Indonesia is instrumental in preserving cultural heritage and ensuring social stability, particularly in regions characterized by prominent traditional practices. Furthermore, neo-Weberian research suggests that charismatic authority does not necessarily have to be revolutionary; instead, it can serve as a conservative force that sustains social cohesion and stability, particularly in post-conflict societies. (Fiol, Harris, and House 1999; Jermier 1993; Levay 2010). The moral, affective, and symbolic dimensions in informal leadership practice, particularly when such authority is not formally institutionalized but is nevertheless acknowledged by the broader community.

Within the scope of this research, the Weberian theoretical framework is employed to reinterpret the relationship between Teungku and the residents of Gampong Krueng Tunong as a multidimensional and context-dependent configuration of authority. Teungku is not solely a successor to the ulema tradition but also serves as a charismatic moral exemplar and participates in the local governance system as a normative reference for the community. Weber's three forms of authority do not function independently; instead, they complement each other within adaptable social practices. This study argues that an understanding of local religious leadership necessitates a synthetic approach that transcends Weber's typology, moving beyond rigid classification to view it as a dynamic spectrum of social power legitimized through culture, morality, and local institutional frameworks.

Research Methods

This research employs a qualitative methodology to examine the administration and legitimization of Teungku's authority in daily life. Data collection was conducted through interviews, observations, and documentation. The primary aim of this study is to explore both conceptually and empirically how leadership based on religious authority contributes to the creation of social order. This research not only addresses a gap in the study of informal leadership in Aceh but also enriches the discourse on religious and community relations within the local context. Additionally, this study provides a novel interpretation of the role of religion in establishing social order, emphasizing its function not merely as a private domain but also as a potent cultural institution facilitating communal cohesion.

Socio-Religious Landscape of Gampong Krueng Tunong

Krueng Tunong Village, situated in Aceh Jaya Regency, exemplifies the rural community of Aceh that continues to uphold a prominent socio-religious framework. Similar to numerous other gampongs within Aceh, communal life is orchestrated by an amalgamation of traditional values and Islamic law, with religious figures—referred to as Teungku Imum Chik—serving as pivotal figures of morality, religious authority, and social harmony custodians. In Gampong Krueng Tunong, *Teungku Imum Chik*, known locally as "aba," functions not only as a spiritual leader but also as a guardian of customary norms and an arbitrator of social disputes.

The social structure of the community in Gampong Krueng Tunong reflects the typology of the *gemeinschaft* (community society), where relationships between individuals are based on kinship, loyalty, and shared values that are inherited from generation to generation (Tunnnies 2012). In this kind of social order, authoritative figures like Teungku are essential for maintaining social stability.

The role of Teungku in this context is inherently linked to the longstanding historical heritage of the Acehnese people, for whom religion has traditionally served as the primary foundation of public life (Azyumardi Azra, Fathurahman 2004). The scholarly network in Aceh has historically functioned as a conduit linking religious authorities with local social institutions since the 17th century. It has established a unique tradition of Islamic intellectual leadership within the region. This tradition persists in the leadership of Teungku Gampong, who is esteemed not only for his knowledge but also for his instrumental role in preserving social harmony.

Most of the residents in Krueng Tunong still use *the meunasah* (village mushalla) as a center of religious and social interaction. Religious activities such as routine recitation, Friday night wirid and dhikr assemblies are led by Teungku and serve as significant means in building collective awareness and strengthening the moral values of the village community. This is where the importance of Teungku's position as a binding actor between religious values and daily social practices lies.

This social context demonstrates how the inhabitants of Krueng Tunong perceive religion not solely as a spiritual domain, but also as a societal framework that governs conduct, resolves conflicts, and sustains communal harmony. From the perspective of the sociology of religion, this illustrates that religion exists not only through texts and rituals but also through leadership and social institutions that are profoundly embedded in the community (Hefner 2011; Yinger, Geertz, and Oliver 1961). Teungku's presence in society exemplifies an organic form of informal authority, deriving its legitimacy not from the state but from social consensus and collective belief. This situation demonstrates that the social and religious dimensions within Krueng Tunong are interconnected, mutually reinforcing each other in establishing a social structure grounded in cultural and spiritual legitimacy.

Within the Weberian framework, this condition demonstrates how traditional and charismatic authority are not eradicated by modern legal – rational structures; rather, they coalesce into a distinctive hybrid pattern. Societies that continue to uphold communal and spiritual values, alongside formal rationality, are frequently "re – rationalized" through local values (Whimster 2024). In social structures such as Krueng, it is evident that modernization does not invariably supplant traditional authority but rather promotes its integration into daily social practices. In this context, Teungku exemplifies an adaptive and context – sensitive model of authority.

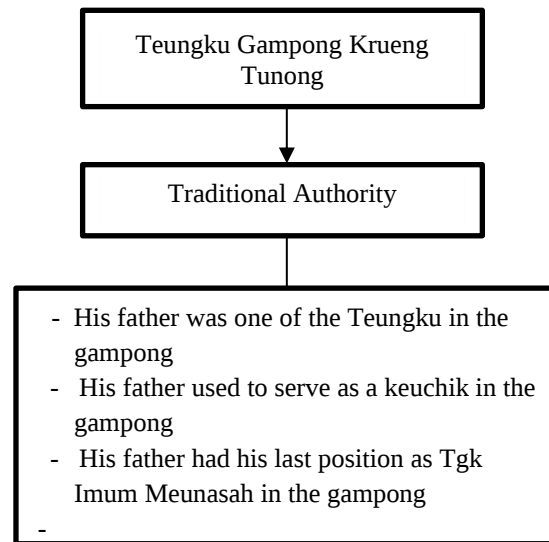
Thus, Krueng Tunduk's socio – religious landscape extends beyond mere local structures, constituting a component of a wider pattern observed in post – conflict societies where the prominence of weak state institutions and local religious figures serves as primary reference points. In this context, the role of Teungku must be understood not solely as that of a spiritual leader but also as a socio – political actor who integrates customary norms, Islamic law, and evolving social dynamics.

Traditional Authority: Legitimacy Rooted in Heritage

In Acehnese society, particularly within Gampong Krueng Tunong, the presence of a Teungku is regarded not solely as a religious leader but also as a figure who acquires social legitimacy due to his traditional heritage. According to Max Weber, traditional authority originates from a longstanding belief system transmitted across generations, whereby leaders are esteemed not for their technical or legal expertise but for their historical and cultural standing within the community (Cahnman, Roth, and Wittich 1969).

In Krueng Tunong Village, research indicates that Teungku Imum Chik, referred to as "aba," derives his authority not solely from his religious qualifications but also from his familial heritage. His father is acknowledged as an elder, having held the position of Keuchik, and is a Teungku esteemed by the community. This substantiates the notion that the leadership of Teungku is hereditary and legitimized by traditional values.

Figure 1. Traditional Authority of Teungku Gampong Krueng Tunong



Source: Researcher's Processed Results, 2024

Conceptually, the traditional authority possessed by Teungku becomes a kind of bridge between cultural continuity and contemporary social management. They are representations of past collective values that remain relevant to answer societal problems. This is what makes their position very strategic in maintaining social order in the midst of the dynamics of current social change. This form of authority is also shown through Teungku's active involvement in various traditional activities. From the author's observations, Teungku is actively involved in traditional rituals such as *khanduri blang*¹, *Peusijek*², Kenduri Maulid Nabi, and other traditional rituals (Umam n.d.). The presence of Teungku as a prayer leader in every traditional ritual strengthens Teungku's symbolic position as a representation of cultural values.

Some previous literature has also emphasized the importance of the traditional dimension in local religious authorities. Religious leaders in Acehese villages often gain social influence because of their genealogical affiliation and social heritage, not just because of their religious knowledge (Nur Ichwan 2005). Informal leaders such as ulama or Teungku are very effective in driving social change precisely because they stand on the collective trust of the community (Nasution 1979).

Informal leaders such as ulama or Teungku are very effective in driving social change precisely because they stand on the collective trust of the community (Sanyal 2007). This authority comes not only from lineage but also from the continuity of the role played in reconciling social conflicts, leading religious rituals, and maintaining local customary norms. This reinforces the findings in Krueng Tunong that Teungku's legitimacy is not

¹ Kegiatan doa dan makan bersama yang dilaksanakan oleh para petani ketika musim tanam tiba

² Prosesi adat yang dilakukan dalam berbagai kegiatan seperti perkawinan dan lainnya untuk memberikan doa yang biasanya dipimpin oleh Teungku.

the result of formal labelling, but rather social recognition sustained by collective memory and daily practices that are preserved across generations.

In the Weberian typology, traditional authority is understood as a form of power legitimised by a belief in long-standing customs or traditions (Weber et al. 1978). However, contemporary studies such as Adair–Toteff (Adair–Toteff 2005) and this authority is not statically understood (Whimster 2024). In Krueng Tunong, the Teungku authorities have shown how traditional values can be reproduced in an ever-changing social context, including when faced with the pressures of modernisation and the state's formal laws. This shows that traditional authority is not just a relic of the past, but a social asset that is reactivated according to the needs of the times.

Thus, the traditional authority in the figure of Teungku is not only rooted in the nasab but is also reshaped by the social context and demands of contemporary communities. In this case, Teungku plays a dual role: as an heir to traditional values and as a bearer of moral mandates that are constantly tested in social practice. When this hereditary authority is accompanied by a strong personality, alignment with the values of justice, and the ability to resolve conflicts, a more personal and magnetic dimension of authority emerges, namely charismatic.

Charismatic Authority: Moral Influence and Personal Piety

In addition to gaining legitimacy through traditional heritage and genealogical position, Teungku in Krueng Tunong Village also has charismatic authority. Within the framework of Max Weber's theory, charismatic authority is rooted in extraordinary qualities that a person believes to possess, such as piety, spiritual ability, or wisdom that most people do not possess. (Weber et al. 1978). This type of authority is not inherited, but rather is acquired through public recognition and respect for a person's personality and example.

In a religious society like Krueng Tunong, the charisma of a Teungku does not develop overnight. "Aba" as the respected Teungku Imum Chik has been studying religion for a long time, as he said,

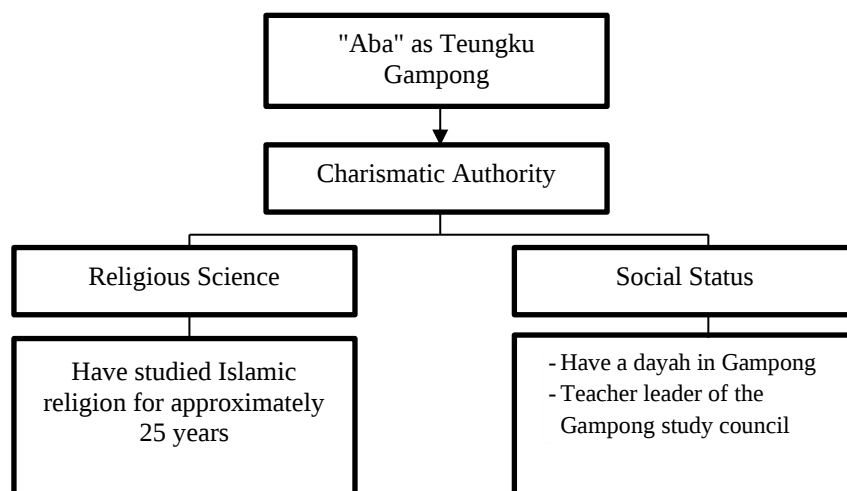
"If I recite the main thing, I recite it at the dayah of the Sabang Mosque, after that there is also recital at Abu Budi's place in the morning after the dawn prayer. After that, it remained in the recitation of the taklim council led by the late Abu Budi. There is also a recital at Abu leman in Gampong Blang, more or less settled in dayah for about 25 years. Including reciting Abati Nasruddin, after that until now he has participated in the daily taklim assembly every Wednesday" (Teungku Basri (Aba), interview, February 6, 2023).

"Aba's" experience of studying for an extended period made him a person who had much religious knowledge compared to others. For the community, he is a person who possesses the knowledge to solve various life problems. Teungku's charisma grew along with his life experience, dedication, and consistency in applying religious knowledge and values. As conveyed by Tgk. Basri,

"As a Teungku in the gampong, for now, I teach the book every day at the recitation of the taklim council in the gampong. After that, there was also teaching reciting in the dayah; apart from that, I was also the imam of the mosque." (Teungku Basri (Aba), interview, February 6, 2023).

Leading Tahlilan is not just a ritual routines, but a form of direct involvement in fostering the community. Through these activities, the community fosters an emotional and spiritual connection with Teungku, entrusting him not only with matters of worship but also with social and family concerns. This kind of charismatic influence, which grew out of a dedication to religious education, contributed to the formation of the social character of the society. The Teungku not only imparted knowledge but also shaped religious ethics, attitudes, and lifestyles. This is what makes them a respected source of authority, even more so than the formal village apparatus. The following is an overview of the source of the charismatic authority "Aba", Teungku Gampong Krueng Tunong;

Figure 2. The Charismatic Authority of Teungku Imum Chik Krueng Tunong



Source: Researcher's Processed Results, 2024

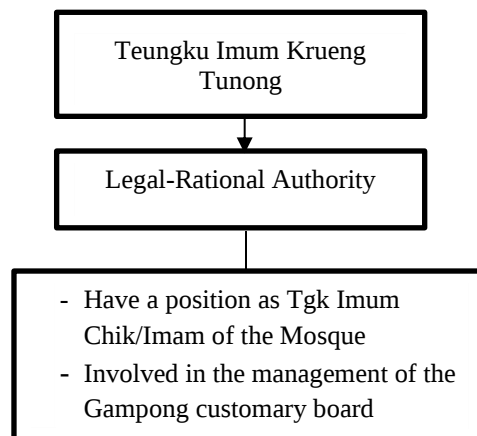
Several studies confirm the importance of charisma in religious leadership. In many local Islamic communities in Indonesia, the legitimacy of the ulama or kyai is often stronger because of the charisma of presence—that is, spiritual authority that comes from real actions, not just titles or positions (Burhani 2018). In a community like this, people's loyalty to leaders is more influenced by morals and social contributions, rather than formal structures (Bruinessen 1995; Burhani 2018).

In the neo-Weberian perspective, charisma is seen as a form of power that is lasting and has a socially adaptive task. Charisma is not just a personal trait, but a reciprocal relationship that is given recognition by followers (Adair-Toteff 2005). Charisma can also be a conservative tool for maintaining and affirming a common identity, not just a revolutionary force (Levay 2010). This is relevant in the practice of Teungku, where moral legitimacy arises as people actively acknowledge their role as mediators and spiritual figures. Thus, Teungku's charismatic authority not only serves as an inspirational force but also as a moral foundation that stabilises social dynamics. This expands the understanding of classical Weberian theory by describing how charisma can serve as a bridge between traditional values and theIn addition to inheriting traditional authority and building spiritual charisma, the Teungku in Krueng Tunong Gampong also play an important role within the framework of legal-rational authority. This authority refers to a power based on a system of formal and legal regulations, where one's legitimacy derives from the ability to perform one's duties based on collectively and rationally recognized norms needs of modern society in the gampong.

Legal – Rational Authority: Negotiating Modernity and Institutional Roles

In addition to inheriting traditional authority and building spiritual charisma, the Teungku in Krueng Tunong Gampong also play an important role within the framework of legal – rational authority. This authority refers to a power based on a system of formal and legal regulations, where one's legitimacy derives from the ability to perform one's duties based on collectively and rationally recognised norms (Weber et al. 1978). The form of legal – rational authority possessed by Teungku is manifested through his active involvement in the formal social structure at the gampong level, namely the village government structure in Aceh, which is officially recognised in regional regulations (Qanun Aceh). In this structure, Teungku is part of the gampong customary institution, particularly in the positions of Tuha Peut (the highest customary institution comprising elements of religious leaders, traditional leaders, and community leaders) and Tuha Lapan (a companion customary institution to Tuha Peut). The position of Teungku Imum Chik (Imam of the Mosque), which is both a formal religious position and the spiritual leader of the gampong community, is currently held by Teungku Basri (Aba), who was elected through consensus deliberation. The validity of the position is documented through an official decree from the village head (keuchik), which confirms that Teungku Basri (Aba) is a legally recognised official within the formal structure of the gampong. The following is an overview of the legal – rational authority of Teungku Basri, called "Aba";

Figure 3. Rational Authority of the Criminal Defense Forces



Source: Researcher's Processed Results, 2024

As the Imam of the Mosque (Teungku Imum Chik), Teungku's legal – rational role emerged in supervising the governance of mosques and religious institutions in the gampong. However, "Aba" not only handles the main tasks of the Mosque, such as arranging the Khatib and supervising the Mosque committee, but is also involved in resolving problems or disputes. Teungku Basri (Aba) explained that he was often involved in solving gampong problems, as he stated that,

"For the problem solving part in the gampong, the first one involved was the elder of the gampong, Tuha Peut. After that, I myself was also involved as a teungku imum chik or imam of the mosque in the gampong" (Teungku Basri, interview, February 6, 2023).

This was also emphasized by one of the young Teungku in Gampong who said that, *"If there is a dispute or problem in the gampong, usually if it can still be resolved in a family way, it is the affair of the gampong elders, but if it cannot be resolved, then later it will go up to meunasah and will involve Aba"* (Baihaqi, interview, February 13, 2023).

From the statement, Teungku is practically involved in decision-making that concerns the public interest. This involvement shows that the community not only respects Teungku for the depth of his knowledge, but also for his ability to manage social problems rationally and reasonably. As stated by one of the informants, Teungku Baihaqi,

"If there is a dispute or problem in the gampong, the first thing to be reminded is not immediately sanctioned. Reminded once. Because each of these problems cannot immediately assume that the person is indeed bad" (Baihaqi, interview, February 13, 2023).

The statement became interesting, that in practice, Teungku's involvement through rational-legal authorities, as Teungku Imum Chik, in solving problems was carried out with a humanistic approach. Teungku also directs conflict resolution deliberations, helps shape collective decisions that are acceptable to all parties, and ensures their implementation by prevailing customary values and religious norms.

In this context, legal-rational authority does not only mean the execution of the formal legal system of the state, but also includes local norms that have been socially institutionalised. The Teungku carry out administrative functions—supervising activities, regulating roles, and managing institutional conflicts—based on a system agreed upon by the community. Local Islamic leadership in Indonesia often serves as a mediator between state law and societal norms. Religious leaders are not necessarily subject to a formal legal structure, but rather are shaped through the interpretation of local Islamic and socio-cultural values. In the context of Aceh, especially after the formal enactment of Islamic law, Teungku's position as a moral guardian and implementer of local regulations has become increasingly important (Barton 2002).

The Interplay of Three Authorities in Sustaining Social Order

Teungku's leadership in Krueng Tunong Village cannot be understood through only one type of authority. The social power possessed by Teungku was born from the combination of three forms of authority, as stated by Max Weber—namely, traditional, charismatic, and legal-rational authority. The three work simultaneously, strengthen each other, and form a solid social foundation in strengthening Teungku's role in maintaining social order.

Teungku gained early recognition for its traditional roots, being respected for its ancestry, dayah education, and proximity to indigenous values. However, this homage is not static; he is strengthened by personal charisma through a religious personality, wise leadership, and a willingness to engage in community issues. In every decision, Teungku's approach to acting is not solely based on status. However, it is combined with a rational approach—deliberating, listening to the parties in dispute, and directing the community toward a fair and peaceful solution.

For example, Teungku's involvement in resolving conflicts that occurred between residents in Gampong Krueng Tunong. "Aba" is often involved when the disputing parties are unable to reach an agreement during the negotiation process carried out by the family or Keuchik. The involvement of "Aba" is often a mediator who can resolve

disputes because it uses an approach based on religious and family values. As he stated, *"The parties to the dispute will be summoned and asked to explain the issue. We listen one by one. Only then will we find a fair solution, not just punishment?"* (Teungku Basri, interview, February 6, 2023).

In a situation like this, the power of Teungku's authority is getting stronger because it is not coercive, but normative and symbolic. In societies where religious values and customs remain strong, religious leaders like Teungku can play the role of "moral negotiators"—those who bridge local norms, Sharia values, and social challenges. Teungku's involvement in the world of practical politics is not a symbol of pragmatism; for some people, Teungku's involvement in politics serves as a guide for making choices. "Aba" explains that,

"So far, among those who have been involved in politics, people have indeed been influenced to participate. Yes, he invites us to participate in politics because our attitudes and behaviours can affect others" (Teungku Basri, interview, February 6, 2023).

Thus, the authority possessed by Teungku is not only culturally relevant but also adaptive to the challenges of the times. As modernity and social transformation began to penetrate rural areas, Teungku remained the centre of authority because it was able to transform its role without losing public trust. These findings reinforce the view that the leadership of scholars in Indonesia, especially at the local level, is dynamic and continues to undergo a process of re-establishment through social relations, moral charisma, and adaptation to changing power structures. (Bruinessen 1995; Hasan 2009). In Aceh, this position is strengthened by the existence of a value system that makes religion and customs the two main poles of shaping the social order (Nur Ichwan 2005).

With this complex and mutually reinforcing foundation of authority, the Teungku in Krueng Tunong Village play a very vital role in maintaining social order. They are not just spiritual leaders, but also serve as the integration node of the three types of authority, as evident in Teungku's involvement in various socio-religious events, such as the blang feast, the Prophet's birthday, the election of gampong leaders, and his participation in political campaigns.

Rethinking Informal Religious Leadership in Contemporary Villages

The findings from the research in Gampong Krueng Tunong are important for revisiting the informal religious leadership model in contemporary village communities. In situations where the state is not fully present in every aspect of citizens' lives, local figures like Teungku play a vital role as pillars of the social order. Teungku's leadership is not always formally institutionalised, but gains strong legitimacy from the community through a combination of traditional, charismatic, and legal-rational authority. These three authorities do not operate independently, but rather complement each other, strengthening Teungku's position as a trusted actor. Traditional authority provides a historical and cultural foundation, personal charisma fosters emotional loyalty within the community, and participation in the village's normative structure strengthens the social status of the Teungku. In practice, Teungku is not only a religious teacher but also a peacemaker, conflict mediator, and moral guardian of the community.

This discussion reinforces the argument that the customary and religious-based conflict resolution system in Aceh is more effective because it operates within the framework of values that the community has internalised (M. Kasim and Nurdin 2020). Teungku is here not to impose rules, but to bring together parties who disagree in a dialogue space that has fair and beneficial values. Dayah clerics in Aceh build the

legitimacy of power through a combination of symbolic and social forces that are inseparable from the local power structure (Muntasir et al. 2025).

They act as cultural and moral agents who can reach spaces inaccessible to state actors. In the context of Krueng Tunong, a similar function is carried out by Teungku in an adaptive way, integrating local and religious values to answer everyday social challenges. In the global context, this discourse on faith-based informal leadership is gaining attention as an alternative model for building social stability. Some of the results indicate that traditional informal institutions and religious leadership play a crucial role in local communities in preventing conflict, mediating conflicts, and providing security. (Bhattacharya et al. 2022; Mboh 2021; Sheranova 2020). In line with the study's results, this study not only provides an overview of local practices in Krueng Tunong but also offers a new theoretical lens for understanding the informal power of religion-based practices in rural communities. Teungku's leadership demonstrates that authority does not have to be institutionalised to be legitimate; more important are acceptance, moral involvement, and closeness to the social life of the community.

Conclusion

This research demonstrates that the informal religious leadership exercised by Teungku in Gampong Krueng Tunong effectively maintains the social order within the village community. By integrating three forms of authority, as outlined in Max Weber's typology—traditional, charismatic, and legal—rational—Teungku successfully established a layered and adaptive legitimacy. Teungku Imum Chik in Gampong Krueng Tunong is not only respected for its lineage or religious knowledge, but also for its moral integrity, the ability to resolve conflicts peacefully, and its active involvement in the socio-formal structure of the gampong. This proves that religion-based informal authority is not static or separate from modern social dynamics. Instead, he was able to bridge traditional values and formal regulation in the form of flexible but firm leadership. These findings confirm that, theoretically, Weberian categories of authority remain relevant in the context of contemporary society, particularly when used to understand power dynamics in local communities where strong customary and religious values prevail.

In practical terms, this study provides important implications for policymakers and village development practitioners. A top-down approach that ignores the existence of informal actors such as Teungku has the potential to create cultural resistance and ineffective policies. Conversely, by recognising and involving local religious leaders in the decision-making process, social stability and sustainable development can be more guaranteed. This is also reflected in cross-border findings, where religious and traditional authorities in rural communities play a central role in conflict resolution, norm enforcement, and fostering social cohesion.

Going forward, similar studies will need to be conducted in a variety of other local contexts to broaden our understanding of how faith-based informal leadership plays a role in addressing modern social challenges, such as technological disruption, political polarisation, and value transformation. Thus, the understanding of the relationship between religion, power, and society will become increasingly rich and contextual.

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