Article

The Symbolic-Compliance Gap and Public Perceptions of Sharia Law Enforcement in Aceh, Indonesia: Insights from Becak Drivers

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Abstract

This study explores the perceptions of *becak* (three-wheeled motorcycle taxis) drivers in Aceh regarding the implementation and enforcement of Sharia law, offering insights into the interplay between religious governance and its influence on social order, morality, and justice. Drawing on in-depth interviews with 30 drivers from diverse socioeconomic backgrounds, the research reveals a complex relationship between the symbolic authority of Sharia law and community compliance. While many participants view the law as a representation of public discipline and Aceh's religious heritage, they frequently critique it as being largely symbolic and ineffective in fostering genuine moral transformation. Thematic analysis identifies key concerns, including superficial compliance, inconsistent enforcement, and perceived injustices, which collectively undermine public confidence in the law. To address these challenges, the study introduces the theory of Symbolic- Compliance Dynamics, which highlights the disjunction between external adherence to regulations and internal moral commitment. The findings suggest that a community-centered approach emphasizing fairness, consistent application, and meaningful moral education is essential for achieving more substantive outcomes.

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While these results are specific to Aceh, they provide a foundation for further research on the societal impacts of Sharia law in other regions and contexts.

Introduction

Aceh, the northernmost province of Sumatra, is unique within Indonesia as the only region authorized to enforce Sharia Law—a legal system based on Islamic principles (Siregar 2008; Friwarti et al. 2021). This distinct status arises from the special autonomy granted to Aceh's provincial government, enabling the creation of local regulations known as *qanun*—an Arabic term meaning "laws" or "rules" (Idris et al. 2022). This autonomy differentiates Aceh from other provinces, blending religious governance with regional administration in a way unparalleled elsewhere in Indonesia.

The implementation of Sharia Law in Aceh has sparked significant academic debate, both nationally and internationally. Proponents argue that qanun represents democratic values within Indonesia's constitutional framework and reflects Aceh's historical ties to Islamic governance, which date back to the 17th century (Siregar 2008; Friwarti et al. 2021). They further assert that Sharia Law sustains Aceh's cultural and religious identity. Conversely, critics—primarily international human rights organizations—highlight concerns over potential human rights violations, particularly those affecting women and marginalized groups (Halim 2022).

One major challenge in the enforcement of Sharia Law is the limited public understanding of qanun and its implications. This knowledge gap has fostered divisions within the community, with some individuals opposing the law while others comply without fully understanding its provisions or rationale (Halim 2022). Local authorities have been criticized for their insufficient efforts in raising

awareness and educating the public, further complicating the law's acceptance and implementation.

Becak drivers, who operate three-wheeled motorcycle taxis, provide a unique perspective on the societal impact of Sharia Law. Their mobility and daily encounters with diverse segments of society position them as firsthand witnesses to both compliance and resistance to the law. Supported by social structures such as family and community, becak drivers observe how Islamic traditions are practiced and how Sharia Law shapes cultural and societal dynamics in Aceh (Idris et al. 2022).

This study seeks to explore public attitudes toward Sharia Law through the perspectives of becak drivers, who serve as representatives of the lower socioeconomic class. By traversing the streets of Aceh, they gain unparalleled insights into the lived realities of the community. This research aims to uncover how Sharia Law influences daily life, social order, and moral behaviour, offering a nuanced understanding of its broader societal implications.

Sharia Law in Aceh

For the people of Aceh, Islam is not merely a system of belief but also a cornerstone of local identity, shaping precepts, customs, and conventions. It functions as a political concept that has historically supported the region's autonomy (Feener 2013). Sharia law, often perceived as a revival of religious glory, serves as a socio-political policy aimed at shaping societal behavior and enhancing communal identity (Milallos 2007).

The development of Sharia law in Aceh, as in other parts of Indonesia, has been a complex and evolving process. Influenced by Acehnese cultural dynamics and nationalistic aspirations, this process gained momentum after the catastrophic tsunami of December 26, 2004. In the aftermath, Sharia principles were framed as a practical framework for social reconstruction, transcending their purely religious roots (Buehler 2016). The implementation of federalism

in 2001 granted Aceh a degree of self-governance, enabling the provincial government to enact qanun—local laws tailored to its unique context (Siregar 2008). This autonomy facilitated the establishment of Islamic courts to adjudicate specific offenses, including those under *jinayat* law, effectively bringing criminal law under the domain of Islamic principles.

The enforcement of jinayat law in Aceh includes severe sanctions, such as public whipping for offenses like gambling and fornication, which have sparked widespread debates over human rights (Muhammadin et al. 2019). These discussions often centre on the challenges of reconciling religious principles with fundamental human rights (Buehler 2016). The implementation of Sharia law is overseen by institutions such as the Lembaga Penegak Syariah (LPS) and *Wilayatul Hisbah*, which are tasked with ensuring societal adherence to Islamic rules (Feener 2013).

Public opinion on Sharia law enforcement in Aceh is deeply divided. Supporters argue that it is essential for preserving the region's social and religious fabric, which they believe has been compromised by modern changes and the 2004 tsunami (Buehler 2016). Critics, however, contend that the law's implementation risks violating personal freedoms and human rights (Habiburrahim et al. 2020). Additionally, the perceived politicization of Sharia law has influenced its interpretation and application, further complicating public perceptions (Ichwan 2007; Siregar 2008).

Socioeconomic factors play a significant role in shaping perceptions of Sharia law enforcement, particularly among informal workers such as becak drivers. Decentralization and post-conflict dynamics have exacerbated territorial disparities between urban and rural populations, leading to the marginalization of informal economy workers (Barron & Clark 2006). Despite their substantial contribution to local economic activity, these workers often lack access to adequate facilities and investment opportunities (Barron & Clark 2006). This economic marginalization influences how informal

workers experience and perceive the enforcement of Sharia law, highlighting the intersection of religion, economy, and governance in Aceh.

Studies on Sharia Law in Aceh

Using tools like Publish or Perish and VOSviewer for bibliometric analysis, it is evident that most existing research on Sharia law enforcement in Aceh centers on broad themes, including social cohesion, public perceptions, Islamic law, and legal pluralism. While these studies contribute to understanding the societal and governance-related dimensions of Sharia law, they often overlook more specific issues, such as the operational role of *Wilayatul Hisbah* (the Sharia law enforcement body), perceptions of fairness in enforcement, and the practical challenges of implementation.

A shown in Figure 1, a review of the literature reveals that concepts such as *symbolic compliance*—which examines outward adherence to Sharia law without genuine moral commitment— are discussed in a limited capacity. However, these discussions rarely connect with real-life perceptions and lived experiences of individuals. Moreover, critical themes such as *becak* drivers, human rights in the context of Sharia, the intersection of cultural identity and Islam, and the broader moral and spiritual transformations prompted by Sharia enforcement remain largely unexplored.

This gap is particularly significant for understanding the perspectives of marginalized or underrepresented groups, such as informal workers, who often face the dual pressures of economic instability and social regulation. The absence of research on these groups limits our ability to grasp how Sharia law interacts with their daily lives and cultural contexts.

Additionally, there is a lack of focus on the socio-political dynamics unique to Aceh, the only Indonesian region with the authority to enforce Sharia law. This uniqueness offers a distinct

context for examining how religious governance influences societal behaviour and individual compliance.

This study addresses these gaps by focusing on the perceptions and experiences of *becak* drivers as representatives of Aceh's lower socioeconomic class. It examines underexplored concepts such as the *symbolic-compliance gap*—the disparity between outward adherence and internal moral alignment—and investigates issues of fairness and enforcement practices. By integrating socio-cultural dynamics and localized perspectives, this research contributes a nuanced understanding of how Sharia law influences, and is influenced by, the community it governs. In doing so, the study not only enriches academic discourse but also offers practical insights for policymakers and stakeholders seeking to improve the implementation and social acceptance of Sharia law in Aceh.
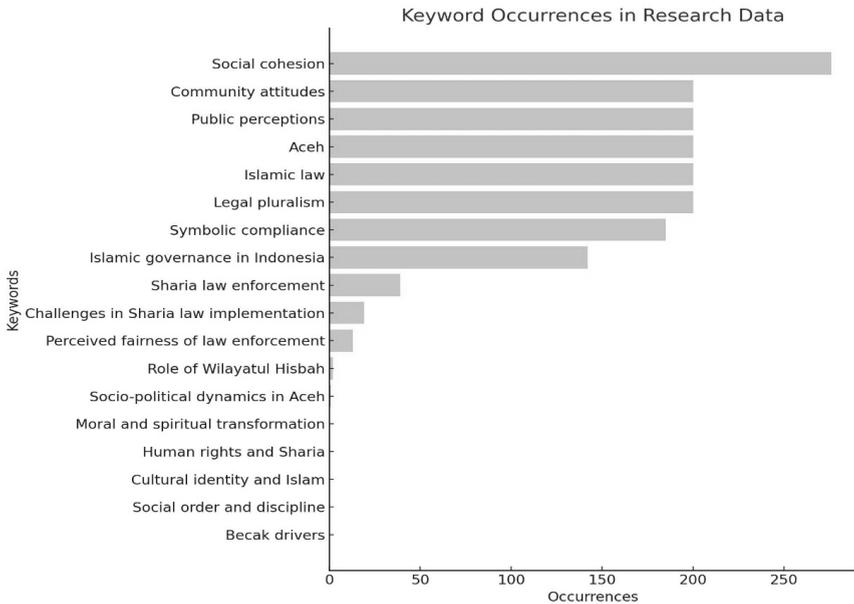

Figure 1

Trends in Research on Sharia Law Enforcement

Research Method

This study employed a qualitative research approach, conducting in-depth interviews with 30 becak drivers to explore their perceptions of Sharia law enforcement in Aceh. A random sampling technique was utilized to ensure diverse representation, capturing participants from various social classes and neighborhoods across Banda Aceh. Interviews were conducted in Bahasa Indonesia to preserve cultural and linguistic authenticity.

The recorded interviews were meticulously transcribed and translated into English. The translation process was closely monitored to maintain the integrity and accuracy of the original responses. Data were analyzed using thematic analysis, guided by Braun and Clarke's six-step framework, which emphasizes systematic coding and the extraction of themes. NVivo software was employed to manage the data and enhance the depth of thematic analysis (Elliott & Timulak 2021). This methodological rigor facilitated the identification of recurring patterns and themes, offering insights into how becak drivers perceive the enforcement of Sharia law in Aceh.

The study draws on two key theoretical frameworks to analyze public perceptions of Sharia law enforcement. First, Social Perception Theory. This theory explains how crime and law enforcement are perceived by society, emphasizing the influence of cultural norms and media representations (Warr 1980). It helps to contextualize how Aceh's residents, particularly becak drivers, interpret and respond to Sharia law enforcement practices. Second, Social Constructivism. Social Constructivism posits that public attitudes toward specific activities are shaped by the cultural contexts in which those activities occur (Wall 2008). This framework is particularly relevant for understanding how informal workers, such as becak drivers, engage with and internalize the discourse surrounding Sharia enforcement in Aceh. Together, these frameworks provide a robust lens for examining the interplay between cultural identity, societal norms, and individual perceptions, offering a nuanced understanding of the drivers' perspectives on Sharia law enforcement.

Becak Drivers' Sentiments Toward Sharia Law Implementation

Figure 2 illustrates the opinions of becak drivers regarding the implementation of Sharia law in Aceh. The data reveals a complex mix of positive and negative sentiments, reflecting a nuanced and often contradictory perspective. Notably, the themes of "Symbolic Enforcement (Superficial)" and "Safety and Security (Positive Perception)" emerge most frequently. This suggests that Sharia law holds both symbolic and practical significance within the community.

The prominence of "Symbolic Enforcement" indicates that many drivers perceive Sharia law as largely decorative—serving more as a superficial marker than a consistently or meaningfully applied framework. This view raises questions about the effectiveness of Sharia law in fulfilling its intended social and moral purposes. Conversely, the theme of "Safety and Security" underscores its perceived utility, with drivers emphasizing the role of Sharia law in maintaining order and protecting individuals and property.

Concerns such as "Burden and Harshness (Negative Perception)" and "Inconsistent Enforcement" were also raised but were somewhat overshadowed by biases in the responses. These concerns highlight doubts about the fairness of enforcement and the risk of overly harsh or selectively applied sanctions.

These findings present a multifaceted perspective among becak drivers. While Sharia law is acknowledged for its symbolic and practical contributions to community ethics and safety, it also faces skepticism regarding its consistency and fairness in application. This mixed sentiment reflects a broader tension between the ideals and realities of Sharia law in Aceh.
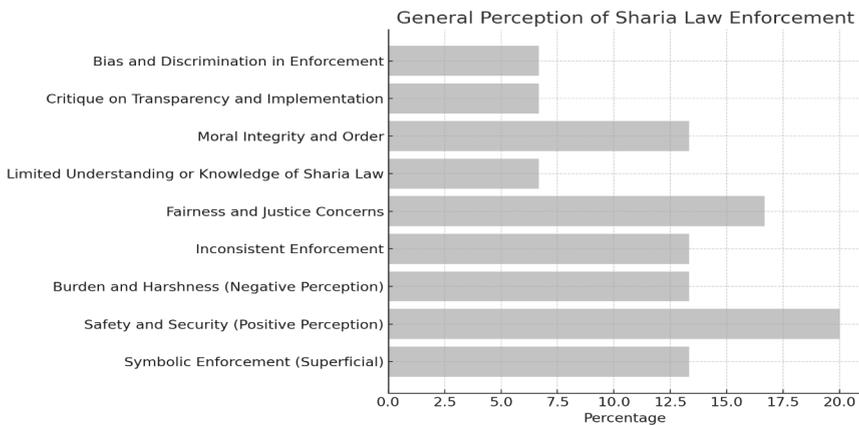
General Perception of Sharia Law Enforcement

Figure 2

Sentiment of Becak Drivers toward Sharia Law Implementation in Aceh

The Influence of Sharia Enforcement on Social Order

Figure 3 highlights the perceptions of becak drivers regarding the influence of Sharia law enforcement on social order in Aceh. The findings reveal a mix of supportive and critical views, underscoring the nuanced impact of Sharia law on community behaviour and interactions. Two prominent themes emerge: "Increased Social Order and Discipline" and "Discomfort, Burden, or Pressure from Enforcement" each cited by approximately 25% of participants, reflecting the contrasting sentiments within the community.

On the positive side, many drivers recognize that Sharia law contributes to social order and discipline, suggesting that enforcement helps regulate behaviour and discourages undesirable actions. This perception aligns with the primary goals of Sharia law—promoting societal harmony and upholding moral standards.

However, the theme of "Inconsistent Compliance or Exploitation of Loopholes," reported by 18% of respondents, highlights a concern that sporadic enforcement undermines the perceived legitimacy and

effectiveness of Sharia law in protecting community interests. Other notable themes include "Behavioural Changes and Compliance" (22%) and "Reduction of Criminal or Negative Behaviours" (20%). These findings suggest that Sharia law enforcement has influenced community practices to align more closely with Islamic legal and ethical standards.

Nonetheless, some respondents expressed reservations. The theme "Effectiveness but Room for Improvement" (15%) indicates that while Sharia law has shown some success in achieving its objectives, it falls short of overall satisfaction and leaves scope for refinement.

In short, the drivers' perceptions reflect a complex interplay of benefits and challenges associated with Sharia law enforcement. While it is credited with fostering discipline and reducing negative behaviours, concerns about inconsistent enforcement and areas for improvement remain significant.
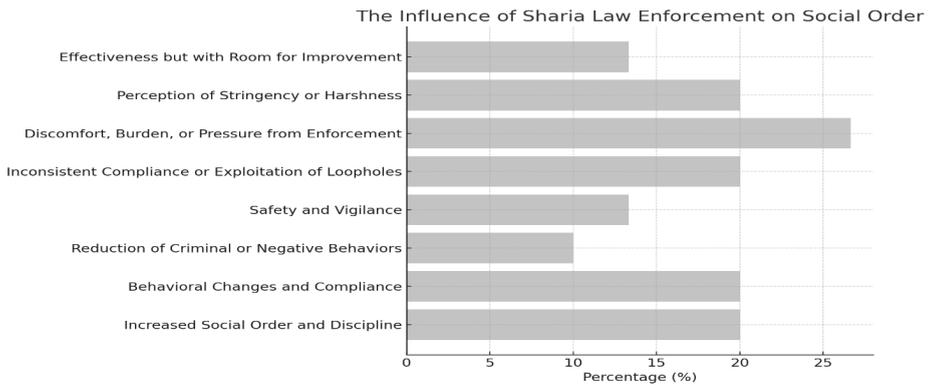

Figure 3

The Influence of Sharia Enforcement on Social Order

The Impact of Sharia Law Enforcement on Morality

Figure 4 highlights the perceptions of becak drivers regarding the influence of Sharia law enforcement on moral behaviour and standards in Aceh. The findings reveal critical insights, with many drivers expressing scepticism about Sharia law's ability to foster genuine moral growth.

The most frequently cited theme, "Minimal or No Impact on Moral Standards" (40%), indicates that a significant portion of respondents believe Sharia enforcement does little to improve moral behaviour. This suggests a disconnect between the intended purpose of Sharia law—to elevate moral standards—and its actual impact.

Other prominent themes, such as "Superficial Behaviour Change" (35%) and "Emphasis on Punishment Rather Than Moral Education" (30%), reinforce the perception that Sharia law focuses more on outward compliance than on fostering meaningful ethical development. Many drivers argue that current enforcement mechanisms encourage behaviors that appear moral but lack genuine ethical substance.

Themes like "Coercion and Fear-Based Compliance" (25%) and "Public Appearance vs. Genuine Morality" (20%) highlight concerns that compliance often stems from fear of punishment rather than a true belief in moral principles. This approach may not only fail to instil lasting moral values but could also breed resentment and defiance within the community.

Additional criticisms include "Inefficient in Addressing Deeper Moral Issues" (15%) and "Social Control Rather Than Moral Growth" (10%). These perspectives suggest that while Sharia law may effectively regulate external behaviours, it falls short in addressing deeper ethical and moral concerns, focusing instead on maintaining social control.

Overall, the feedback from becak drivers indicates that the current enforcement of Sharia law in Aceh does not effectively raise moral or ethical standards. Instead, it appears to prioritize control and public conformity over genuine moral transformation. These

findings underscore the need for reforms that emphasize moral education and ethical development to achieve the intended goal of creating a more responsible and ethically grounded community.
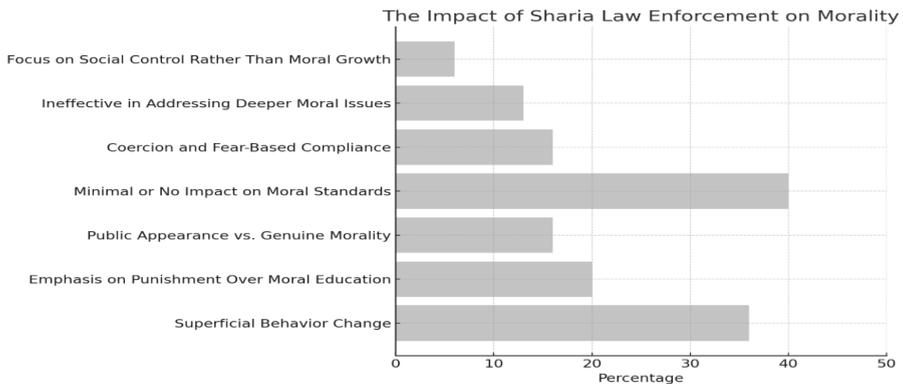

Figure 4

The impact of Sharia law enforcement on morality

Treatment of Offenders Under Sharia Law

Figure 5 illustrates becak drivers' perceptions of how offenders are treated under Sharia law in Aceh, shedding light on issues of fairness and justice. The findings reveal significant concerns about the focus, consistency, and equity of Sharia law enforcement.

The most prominent theme, "Focus on Public vs. Private Offenses" (noted by over 60% of respondents), suggests that many drivers feel Sharia law enforcement prioritizes visible, public misdeeds over private ones. This emphasis raises questions about the system's comprehensiveness and fairness, as it may neglect private or less conspicuous moral violations.

The theme of "Inconsistent Enforcement" (raised by nearly 50% of respondents) highlights a perceived lack of uniformity in the application of Sharia law. Many drivers believe that similar offenses are treated differently depending on the context or the individuals involved. This inconsistency fosters a sense of unfairness and can

erode trust in the system, giving the impression of arbitrariness in enforcement.

Approximately 30% of respondents expressed concerns about "Inequity in Law Enforcement." These drivers perceive that offenders may receive preferential treatment or face disadvantages based on their social or economic status. Such disparities compromise the legitimacy of the Sharia legal system, as equity is essential for maintaining public trust and support.

Another theme, "Limited Scope of Sharia Law Enforcement" (mentioned by about 30% of respondents), reflects concerns that Sharia law is applied too narrowly. Drivers argue that enforcement focuses only on certain aspects of public life while neglecting critical issues or areas that need attention. This limited scope could render the system ineffective in addressing broader community concerns and achieving a more comprehensive sense of justice.

These findings suggest that becak drivers have significant reservations about the application of Sharia law in Aceh, particularly regarding its focus, inconsistency, and inequity. Addressing these issues through reforms could help ensure that the treatment of offenders under Sharia law is perceived as fair, thereby fostering greater community trust and support.
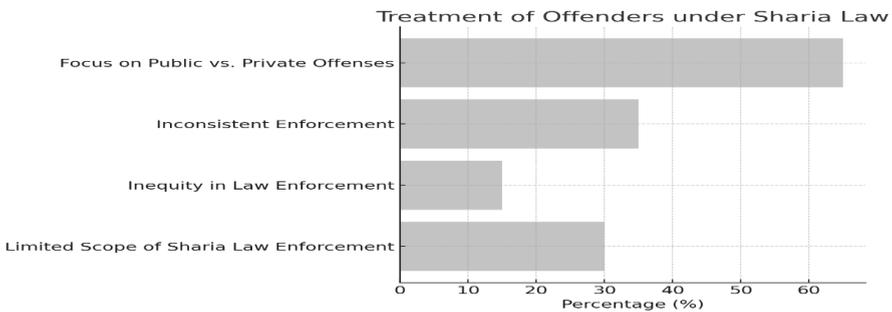

Figure 5

Treatment of Offenders Under Sharia Law

Sharia Enforcement in Promoting Societal Harmony and Spiritual Values

The perceptions of Acehnese becak drivers regarding the effectiveness of Sharia law enforcement are presented in Figure 6, highlighting key challenges in its implementation. The most significant concern, expressed by over 40% of respondents, is the belief that Sharia law enforcement has been less effective than expected. Many drivers feel that the intended moral and spiritual impact of the law has not been realized. In other words, the primary goal of fostering societal harmony and strengthening spiritual values has yet to be fully achieved.

Approximately 30% of respondents view Sharia law enforcement as largely ceremonial or symbolic. They argue that it focuses more on outward compliance—such as visibly adhering to regulations—rather than fostering genuine moral awareness and sincere commitment within the community.

Another notable concern, raised by 20% of respondents, is the uneven application of Sharia law. Drivers feel that enforcement is often inconsistent or biased, leading to perceptions of favouritism and unfair treatment. This perceived lack of equity can erode trust in the system and, in some cases, even create divisions within the community.

In addition, around 15% of respondents highlighted issues with inconsistent enforcement. This inconsistency leaves individuals confused about the rules and undermines their confidence in the legal system. Without clear and reliable enforcement, Sharia law struggles to serve as an effective guide for daily life.

Lastly, fewer than 10% of respondents pointed to a lack of socialization and collaboration as a problem. They believe that a more inclusive and cooperative approach—one that actively involves the community—could enhance understanding, acceptance, and adherence to Sharia law.

The perspectives of these becak drivers indicate that while Sharia law aims to promote noble values, its current implementation faces significant challenges. There is a public desire for a system that is more effective, equitable, and consistent to truly have a positive impact on everyday life.
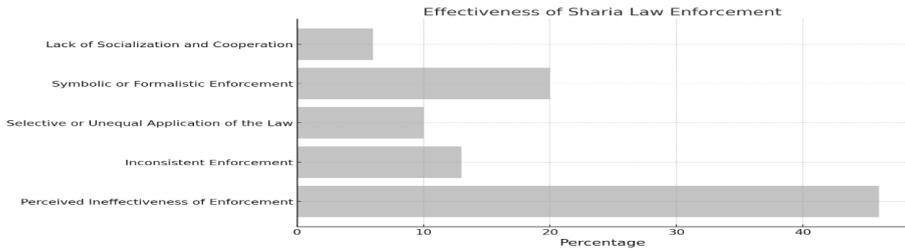

Figure 6

Sharia Enforcement in Promoting Societal Harmony and Spiritual Values

Becak Drivers' Perception of Sharia Law in Aceh: A Perspective of Symbolic Compliance Dynamics Theory

Symbolic Compliance Dynamics Theory provides a framework for analysing the societal impact of laws like Sharia law, which carry profound religious and cultural significance. The theory posits that such laws often function symbolically, creating the appearance of moral change without necessarily driving genuine behavioural or spiritual transformation. In Aceh, Sharia law holds substantial cultural and religious influence, but its enforcement primarily relies on external mechanisms. As a result, compliance often stems from fear of punishment or societal pressure rather than sincere belief.

A central concept in this theory is symbolic control. In the Acehnese context, Sharia law serves as a powerful symbol of Islamic identity and tradition, shaping public behaviour through its presence. However, this influence is often superficial, driven more by external pressures than by internalized moral values. Consequently,

individuals may prioritize outward conformity and adherence to societal norms over authentic spiritual and ethical growth.

This dynamic highlight what the theory terms the symbolic compliance gap—the disparity between outward adherence to laws and the deeper moral or spiritual development the laws aim to achieve. When laws are perceived as tools of authority rather than genuine moral guides, they risk being seen as mechanisms of control rather than instruments of meaningful transformation.

Attitudes Toward Sharia Law

The study explored the general attitudes of becak drivers toward Sharia law, revealing a range of perspectives. While some drivers view Sharia law as essential for maintaining public order and preserving religious identity, others criticize it as largely symbolic, lacking the transformative power needed to effect meaningful moral change. This critique aligns with Pierre Bourdieu's theory of symbolic power, which suggests that laws and institutions often function as symbols of authority rather than as instruments of substantive transformation (Ajvazi 2022). Consequently, Sharia law is frequently perceived as a representation of Islamic authority rather than an effective tool for fostering moral development.

Herbert Kelman's theory of social influence further explains why symbolic enforcement struggles to bring about genuine moral change. According to Kelman, compliance driven by fear—such as fear of social punishment—is unlikely to lead to the internalization of values essential for authentic moral growth (social influence). Similarly, Max Weber's concept of legitimate power underscores the importance of public trust and legitimacy for legal systems to succeed (Nikolakakis 2024; Yilmaz & Telsac 2021). When mandatory laws are perceived as symbolic or politically motivated, they erode trust and weaken the moral authority of justice.

These theoretical insights suggest that for Sharia law to achieve its intended goals, it must go beyond symbolic enforcement

and focus on cultivating trust, legitimacy, and internalized moral values within the community.

Sharia Law and Social Order

This study also explored the impact of Sharia law on social structures and community practices. Themes such as "enhanced social order and discipline" and "behaviour modification and compliance" indicate that visible rules play a role in reinforcing social norms. This aligns with Albert Bandura's social learning theory, which posits that people adopt behaviours by observing authority figures and established social norms (social influence).

However, socioeconomic disparities—particularly among informal workers such as becak drivers—complicate perceptions of Sharia law implementation. In Aceh, decentralization and post-conflict inequality have marginalized many informal workers, shaping their views on the fairness and effectiveness of the legal system (Barron & Clark 2006). Issues such as "inconsistent compliance" and "enforcement pressure" further diminish the perceived impact of Sharia law.

Thomas Schelling's focal point theory suggests that inconsistency in enforcement weakens social cohesion and fosters mistrust (Estrada, n.d.). Similarly, Jürgen Habermas's communicative action theory highlights that laws are more effective when they reflect and resonate with the realistic social conditions and opinions of the community (Habermas 1984). These findings underscore the importance of addressing social and economic inequalities and ensuring consistent, community-oriented enforcement for Sharia law to contribute meaningfully to social cohesion and equitable governance.

Sharia Law and Moral Behaviour

In addition, this study explored the impact of Sharia law on ethical practices. Themes such as "Surface Behaviour Change" and "Public

Appearance vs. Real Morality" highlight the disconnect between external compliance and internal moral beliefs. Leon Festinger's cognitive dissonance theory explains this dynamic: when individuals act in ways that contradict their personal beliefs, they experience discomfort, leading to superficial compliance rather than genuine moral alignment (Miller et al. 2015).

Robert Merton's strain theory provides additional insight, suggesting that social pressures can result in ritualistic behaviour—adherence to norms without deep moral commitment (Tutor 2020). Similarly, Erving Goffman's theory of impression management illustrates how individuals often adapt their behavior to meet societal expectations, prioritizing appearances over authenticity (Simply Psychology, n.d.).

These findings reflect a broader cultural phenomenon in Aceh, where religion plays a significant role in public life but does not always lead to profound individual spiritual transformation. This highlights the need for approaches that bridge the gap between external enforcement and internal moral growth, fostering deeper ethical integration within the community.

Fairness in Enforcement of Sharia Law

Finally, this research examined perceptions of fairness in Sharia law implementation. Concerns about "asymmetry" and "choice of work" align with John Adams' equity theory, which posits that justice is assessed by balancing contributions and outcomes (Davlembayeva 2023). When enforcement is perceived as biased, it erodes trust and fosters a sense of inequality. Howard Becker's theory of scripts further underscores the social consequences of selective law enforcement, revealing how target groups may experience stigmatization, weakening their sense of justice and community cohesion.

This objective also explored whether Sharia law fosters social cohesion and promotes spiritual values. While some becak drivers acknowledged its role in maintaining order, themes such as

"perceived ineffectiveness" and "symbolic intervention" indicate that Sharia law often falls short of achieving deeper spiritual and social integration. Durkheim's concept of social integration highlights that true cohesion requires the internalization of shared values rather than superficial enforcement.

Turner's theory of social solidarity further asserts that genuine solidarity is built on the consistent application of moral principles, not on surface-level compliance (Turner 2006). Similarly, Charles Taylor's theory of authenticity emphasizes that spiritual growth occurs when individuals' inner beliefs align with their outward behaviour, suggesting that coerced compliance fails to promote genuine moral development. Supporting this, Ryan & Deci's self-determination theory argues that motivation stems from intrinsic values rather than external pressures (Ryan & Deci 1985).

The perspectives of becak drivers highlight both the strengths and limitations of Sharia law implementation in Aceh. While it plays a role in maintaining social order, its inconsistent enforcement and symbolic nature hinder its potential for fostering genuine moral and spiritual growth. As Feener (2013) cautions, symbolic enforcement without meaningful community engagement risks alienating the very people it seeks to guide. To be effective, Sharia law must prioritize consistent application, actively involve communities in its policies, and provide education that promotes genuine compliance and intrinsic motivation.

These findings underscore the complexities of balancing symbolic authority with substantive moral engagement. The study proposes a "symbolic compliance dynamics theory" as a framework to better understand the tension between symbolic control and authentic moral transformation, offering a pathway for future research and policy development.

To bridge the gap found from these findings, the theory of Symbolic Compliance Dynamics provides us with insights about the need for consistent and fair application of the law, alongside community engagement and moral education. Laws must transcend

their role as mere symbols of authority and actively engage with society to foster genuine moral and spiritual development. This involves encouraging individuals to internalize the values underlying the laws, rather than simply complying with them out of obligation or fear.

When implemented effectively, laws like Sharia can evolve from symbolic expressions of cultural authority into instruments of true social harmony and spiritual growth. By addressing the symbolic compliance gap, these laws can better align with their intended purpose of fostering ethical and spiritual development within the community.

Conclusion

This study provides valuable insights into how becak drivers in Aceh perceive the implementation and enforcement of Sharia law, highlighting its complex role in shaping social order and morality. Through in-depth interviews with 30 drivers from diverse backgrounds, the findings reveal that while Sharia law contributes to maintaining public discipline and reinforcing Aceh's religious identity, it often falls short of fostering genuine moral and spiritual transformation. Aceh's unique status as the only province in Indonesia with the authority to enforce Sharia law is crucial for understanding these perceptions. Despite its cultural and historical significance, the drivers' views suggest that Sharia enforcement is often seen as more symbolic than transformative. While many view it as a tool for maintaining public order, they question whether it truly inspires deeper internalization of Islamic values.

A key insight from this research is the symbolic-compliance gap, the disconnect between outward compliance and inner conviction. While Sharia law shapes behaviour through its cultural authority, its influence often remains superficial. People tend to follow the rules to avoid punishment or societal judgment, rather than out of authentic moral conviction. The Symbolic-Compliance Dynamics Theory

developed in this study underscores this tension, suggesting that for laws to be effective, they must engage people's internal beliefs and values, beyond mere symbolism. Inconsistent enforcement of Sharia law further weakens its legitimacy and diminishes its potential impact. When people perceive the law as being applied unevenly, it fosters feelings of unfairness and undermines social cohesion. Addressing these concerns requires a more balanced approach, including consistent enforcement, active community involvement, and educational initiatives that promote genuine moral growth.

While this study offers valuable insights, its findings are specific to the context of Aceh, particularly the becak drivers and areas where the research was conducted. Perceptions of Sharia law may vary across different regions or among other groups within Aceh. Future research should explore these variations to deepen understanding of Sharia law's impact on diverse communities and settings.

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