

Asymmetric Decentralization in a Unitary State: Lessons from Pattani, Thailand



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ARTICLE INFO

Article history

Received: February 2, 2025

Revised: November 12, 2025

Accepted: November 25, 2025

Keywords

Decentralization;

Federalization;

Governance;

Unitary State;

ABSTRACT

A unitary state centralizes supreme authority within the national government; however, accommodating regional diversity without undermining national unity remains a persistent constitutional challenge. Indonesia's Daerah Istimewa Yogyakarta and Thailand's Pattani region illustrate contrasting approaches to the management of asymmetric decentralization within unitary state frameworks. This study compares the constitutional design of asymmetric decentralization in Yogyakarta and Pattani and examines how each state applies the unitary principle in responding to autonomy claims grounded in local identity. The research employs a comparative qualitative method through normative analysis of constitutional provisions and statutory regulations, supported by interviews with relevant stakeholders. The findings demonstrate, first, that the Thai constitutional and statutory framework does not expressly recognize asymmetric decentralization for Pattani and that the central government grants it no special governmental authority distinct from other provinces. Differentiation is confined to religious, linguistic, and educational regulation. Second, the Indonesian constitutional system explicitly grants Daerah Istimewa Yogyakarta a special legal status that confers extensive autonomous authority based on historical legitimacy and cultural identity. Third, Thailand applies the unitary state principle through a rigid and centralized governance model, whereas Indonesia operationalizes it through an approach in managing diversity.



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1. Introduction

Unitary states across the world confront a fundamental constitutional challenge in managing ethnic, cultural, and historical diversity within a single nation-state framework. Governments commonly employ decentralization as a policy instrument to address this challenge; however, symmetric decentralization based on a uniform governance model often fails to accommodate the specific demands of regions with strong historical and identity-based characteristics. In response,

many states adopt asymmetric decentralization by granting particular regions special autonomous powers that differ from those of other regions.¹

In theory, this model functions as a constitutional bridge between the principle of state sovereignty and the recognition of regional diversity. Nevertheless, critical questions arise regarding the normative boundaries between symmetric and asymmetric decentralization within a unitary state, the extent to which asymmetry may be tolerated without undermining state integrity, and the capacity of asymmetric decentralization to balance national unity with the protection of local identity.² Accordingly, this study aims, first, to analyze the constitutional design of asymmetric decentralization in the unitary states of Yogyakarta, Indonesia, and Pattani, Thailand, and, second, to examine how Indonesia and Thailand apply the unitary state principle in responding to demands for autonomy based on local identity.

The significance of implementing asymmetric decentralization lies in its capacity to accommodate local diversity within a unitary state. Through this policy model, the state grants special autonomy to particular regions based on their distinctive historical, cultural, social, or socio-political characteristics.³ The concept of asymmetric decentralization derives from comparative constitutional practices in various countries, including India (Jammu and Kashmir), Pakistan (Gilgit-Baltistan), Spain (the Basque Country), China (Hong Kong and Macao), the Philippines (Mindanao and Cordillera), Mexico (Chiapas), Canada (Quebec and Nunavut), France (Corsica and Brittany), Italy (Sardinia, Trentino-Alto Adige, Friuli Venezia Giulia, and Valle d'Aosta), South Korea (Jeju Island), and Thailand (Pattani). Pattani constitutes the only predominantly Muslim province in Thailand, a state with a Buddhist-majority population, in which Muslims account for approximately ten percent of the total population. Indonesia similarly applies asymmetric decentralization in several regions, including Aceh, Papua, the Special Capital Region of Jakarta, and Daerah Istimewa Yogyakarta (DIY). Among these regions, DIY represents a successful model of asymmetric decentralization supported by strong national recognition of its historical legitimacy and cultural identity.⁴

¹ Zuriana Zahrin and Ahmad Martadha Mohamed, 'REVISING THE UNITARY VS. FEDERAL CLASSIFICATION', *Journal of International Studies*, 18 (2022) <https://doi.org/10.32890/jis2022.18.5>

² Hèla Yousfi, 'Reshaping State/Local Communities Relations in Tunisia: The Socio-Cultural and Institutional Challenges of the Decentralization Project', *European Management Journal*, 37.5 (2019), 625–36 <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1016/j.emj.2019.05.002>

³ Irina Busygina, Mikhail Filippov and Elmira Taukebaeva, 'To Decentralize or to Continue on the Centralization Track: The Cases of Authoritarian Regimes in Russia and Kazakhstan', *Journal of Eurasian Studies*, 9.1 (2018), 61–71 <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1016/j.euras.2017.12.008>

⁴ Floriana Cerniglia, Riccarda Longaretti and Alberto Zanardi, 'How to Design Decentralisation to Curb Secessionist Pressures? Top-down vs. Bottom-up Reforms', *Structural Change and Economic Dynamics*, 58 (2021), 377–90 <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1016/j.strueco.2021.06.010>

Decentralization refers to the delegation of governmental authority from the central government to local governments to regulate and manage certain public affairs as part of their own autonomous responsibilities. As a governance mechanism, decentralization strengthens local autonomy, brings public services closer to citizens, and enables governments to respond more effectively to local diversity.⁵ States apply decentralization in both unitary and federal systems through various models that reflect their respective political, social, and economic realities. Each country adapts decentralization practices to its specific constitutional and institutional context, thereby demonstrating flexibility in governance without privileging a single state structure. In practice, decentralization has also encouraged the expansion of federalization processes within unitary states, resulting in an increasingly blurred distinction between unitary and federal systems.⁶

In principle, however, unitary states retain indivisible sovereignty, operate under a single constitutional order, and maintain a unified legal framework. Accordingly, decentralization in unitary states functions to distribute limited authority to local governments without diminishing the supremacy of the central government. By contrast, in federal states, decentralization constitutes a fundamental element of the constitutional structure, whereby constituent states or provinces hold extensive powers that the central government cannot unilaterally revoke.^{7v}

Previous studies on Pattani have predominantly focused on ethnic-religious conflict and security issues, while paying limited attention to the role of decentralization in shaping regional governance. Thailand's decentralization has historically remained under strong central control, constraining local authority and effectiveness. Scholars have examined political dynamics and identity struggles in Pattani, particularly the influence of religion and culture on demands for autonomy. In contrast, studies on Daerah Istimewa Yogyakarta (DIY) largely emphasize its historical special status and the preservation of monarchy within a democratic unitary state, with limited comparative relevance. Khairul Muluk analyzes symmetric and asymmetric decentralization in Indonesia and Thailand, demonstrating that Indonesia's asymmetric model accommodates minority regions through special arrangements, while Thailand's symmetric model prioritizes

⁵ Daniele Proverbio, 'Chemotaxis in Heterogeneous Environments: A Multi-Agent Model of Decentralized Gathering Past Obstacles', *Journal of Theoretical Biology*, 586 (2024), 111820 <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jtbi.2024.111820>

⁶ Robert Feinberg and Nathan Larson, 'Multi-Market Contact, Tacit Collusion, and Decentralized Managerial Decision-Making', *International Journal of Industrial Organization*, 97 (2024), 103100 <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijindorg.2024.103100>

⁷ Lina Ortiz Arroyave, Rita Lopes and Rui Santos, 'Leveraging Local Environmental Management in the Scope of an Administrative Decentralization Process: The Case of Portuguese Coastal Municipalities', *Journal of Environmental Management*, 394 (2025), 127052 <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jenvman.2025.127052>

territorial uniformity.⁸ However, this study does not connect its findings to theories of state form. Comparative works by Anurat Anantanatorn et al. and Patrick Ziegenhain explore subnational autonomy and political Islam in Aceh, Bangsamoro, and Pattani, while Harding discusses regional governance in Southeast Asia through localism and subsidiarity. Nevertheless, these studies lack a qualitative comparative analysis grounded in unitary state theory. Broader scholarship on asymmetric decentralization remains dominated by fiscal and administrative perspectives, with limited attention to constitutional, cultural, and identity-based dimensions. Consequently, a significant gap persists in comparative constitutional analysis of asymmetric decentralization in Yogyakarta and Pattani.⁹

This study contributes originality in three principal respects. First, it applies a comparative cross-country approach to the analysis of asymmetric decentralization in Southeast Asia by examining the application of the unitary state concept in Indonesia and Thailand. Second, it integrates legal, political, and cultural analyses to formulate a regulatory model that responds to local dynamics while remaining consistent with the constitutional framework of a unitary state. Third, it advances recognition-based decentralization theory by emphasizing the attribution of autonomous authority as a form of constitutional respect for local identity rather than as a mere instrument of administrative efficiency.¹⁰

The significance of this research lies in its capacity, first, to explain how constitutional recognition of local identity may reduce both horizontal and vertical conflict; second, to demonstrate how a unitary state can preserve its integrity while legally and politically accommodating local diversity; and third, to offer practical guidance for policymakers in designing constitutionally grounded decentralization and territorial justice policies. The urgency of this research emerges from the increasing tensions between central governments and local communities in various regions of the world caused by failures to recognize local identity. Accordingly, this study responds to the contemporary need to construct asymmetrical constitutional designs that remain consistent with the principles of state integrity and justice while addressing persistent central–local tensions rooted in identity-based claims.

⁸ M R Khairul Muluk and Anurat Anantanatorn, 'Comparing Symmetric-Asymmetric Decentralization for Reducing Regional Tension: Indonesia and Thailand Experience', *Policy & Governance Review*, 7.2 (2023), 154 <https://doi.org/10.30589/pgr.v7i2.731>

⁹ Anurat Anantanatorn, Ali Maskur and Noppawan Phuengpha, 'Decentralization and Local Governance in Southeast Asia: A Comparative Analysis of Thailand and Indonesia', in *Proceedings of the 3rd International Conference on Public Administration and Governance, ICOPAG 2024, 30 October 2024, Malang, Indonesia* (EAI, 2025) <https://doi.org/10.4108/eai.30-10-2024.2354740>

¹⁰ Daniela Duran-Romero and Karina Barquet, 'Business Models for Decentralized Water Services in Urban and Peri-Urban Areas', *Cleaner Water*, 4 (2025), 100138 <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1016/j.clwat.2025.100138>

2. Research Method

The research method employed in this article is a normative legal research combined with a comparative approach. This method is primarily aimed at examining and analyzing legal principles, doctrines, and statutory frameworks related to the constitutional design of asymmetric decentralization within a unitary state structure.¹¹ The study relies mainly on the analysis of primary, secondary, and tertiary legal materials obtained through extensive literature review, legal document examination, and a comparative analysis of the regulatory frameworks applied in Pattani and the Special Region of Yogyakarta. As supplementary support, limited primary data were utilized through informal interviews and academic discussions with experts in Constitutional Law, Islamic Law, and researchers from the Faculty of Liberal Arts and Social Sciences at Fatoni University, Thailand, as well as the Head of the ASEAN Center for Indonesia. These data serve to enrich and contextualize the normative analysis. The collected materials were analyzed qualitatively and descriptively, emphasizing both the statute approach and the comparative approach.¹²

3. Results and Discussion

The Implementation of Asymmetric Decentralization in DIY, Indonesia

A unitary state constitutes a form of state organization in which the highest governmental authority resides in the central government. The theory of modern *unitarism* conceptualizes the unitary system not only as an institutional foundation for achieving national objectives but also as a strategic instrument for exercising state sovereignty. As a multidimensional constitutional phenomenon, *unitarism* encompasses doctrinal ideas, theoretical frameworks, global constitutional practices, and the concrete constitutional form through which territorial governance operates. Empirical and theoretical studies on the unitary state demonstrate that its implementation generally follows two principal models.¹³

The first is the rigid model, which operates through a strict hierarchical structure, emphasizes institutional uniformity, and enforces a clear delimitation of authority between levels of government. This rigid model exhibits several defining characteristics: first, the centralization of power, whereby the central government monopolizes policymaking authority; second, a rigid constitutional framework that prescribes complex and stringent procedures for constitutional amendment; and

¹¹ Camille Barras, 'Does Decentralization Boost Electoral Participation? Revisiting the Question in a Non-Western Context', *Electoral Studies*, 92 (2024), 102873 <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1016/j.electstud.2024.102873>

¹² Supranoto and others, 'From Parallel to Partnership Governance: Strengthening Institutional Synergy for Stunting Reduction in Decentralized Indonesia', *Social Sciences & Humanities Open*, 12 (2025), 102051 <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ssaho.2025.102051>

¹³ Kiran Prakash Vattamparambil and Suhita Chopra Chatterjee, 'Decentralized Governance and Pandemic Management in Thrissur District of Kerala, India', *International Journal of Health Governance*, 30.2 (2024), 136–56 <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1108/IJHG-11-2024-0144>

third, hierarchical administrative control, through which the central government exercises extensive regulatory authority over regional policies.¹⁴ A rigid unitary state thus reflects a highly centralized distribution of authority in which the central government dominates governance functions, while regional governments primarily serve as implementers of centrally determined policies, as illustrated in Table 1.

Table 1. Characteristics of a Rigid Unitary State

Characteristics of a Rigid Unitary State	Explanation
Centralization of power	Nearly all policies are determined by the central government.
Limited regional authority	Regional governments function merely as implementers of central policies without broad autonomy.
Uniform legal system	National laws apply comprehensively with minimal local variations.
Centralized administration	The appointment of regional officials is often determined by the central government.
Minimal decentralization	There is only delegation of authority, not an actual division of power.

Source: Processed by the author based on research data.

In contrast to the rigid model, the theory of a flexible or dynamic unitary state emphasizes the need to maintain a balance between national unity and regional diversity. This theoretical approach draws upon classical governance theory, which underscores interdependence, pluralism, and dynamic interaction among relatively autonomous levels of government. By adopting an adaptive constitutional framework, a flexible unitary system enables the state to respond to social, political, and economic transformations without compromising the fundamental principle of state unity. This model prioritizes functional adjustment over rigid uniformity and permits differentiated governance arrangements in accordance with regional characteristics. The principal features of the flexible unitary state include, first, adaptive decentralization, which allows the central government to adjust policies based on the specific conditions and capacities of each region; second, substantive regional autonomy, whereby local governments receive broad authority to regulate and administer their own regional affairs; and third, constitutional flexibility, reflected in amendment procedures that are less rigid and more responsive to evolving societal needs. Through these characteristics, the flexible unitary state institutionalizes diversity within a unified constitutional order.¹⁵

¹⁴ Jin An and others, 'The Impact of Fiscal Decentralization on Corporate Carbon Emissions in the Yellow River Basin', *International Review of Financial Analysis*, 108 (2025), 104683 <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1016/j.irfa.2025.104683>

¹⁵ Mohamed Yusuf Ahmed and others, 'Empowering Communities: Assessing the Impact of Decentralisation on Citizen Participation in Formal Organisations within Somalia's Evolving

The concept of asymmetric decentralization can generally be distinguished between de jure asymmetry and de facto asymmetry. De jure asymmetry refers to constitutional recognition or explicit regulation of asymmetry, while de facto asymmetry arises from practical differences or relationships between regions due to cultural, social, or economic variations. Asymmetric decentralization offers an alternative solution for governments to accommodate regions with unique cultural backgrounds, historical contexts, or distinct security challenges.¹⁶ It serves as a response to regional diversity and varied security dynamics, especially in states with a history of conflict or minority groups that possess strong regional identities. This model is seen as effective in granting additional autonomy to certain regions requiring special arrangements to address their distinct identities and needs, enabling administrative sub-units to exercise greater authority in specific sectors to preserve local stability and enhance political participation among citizens who hold strong identity ties to their own regions. Both Thailand and Indonesia implement asymmetric decentralization in certain areas. Pattani in Thailand and the Daerah Istimewa Yogyakarta in Indonesia are two regions that have been granted special autonomy, each with distinct social characteristics, historical contexts, and local demands.¹⁷

The fundamental argument for implementing asymmetric decentralization within a unitary state lies in understanding the concept of a unitary state from two perspectives: sovereignty and state structure. First, from the perspective of sovereignty, the essence of a unitary state is that sovereignty is indivisible. The central government's authority is not limited, as the constitution of a unitary state does not recognize any legislative body other than the national legislature.¹⁸ The existence of regional legislative bodies with authority to enact local regulations (*Perda*) does not equate to regional sovereignty, as ultimate oversight remains with the central government. This principle of indivisible sovereignty aligns with the core notion of sovereignty itself, which cannot be divided. Second, in terms of state structure, the position of regional governments within a unitary state is integrated with the national government. In a unitary state, sovereignty lies solely with the central or national government, and no sovereignty exists at the regional level.

Governance Landscape', *Social Sciences & Humanities Open*, 12 (2025), 102147
<https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ssaho.2025.102147>

¹⁶ Jaime Castillo León and Alfred Lehar, 'What Data Have Told Us about Decentralized Finance', *Journal of Corporate Finance*, 96 (2026), 102916
<https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jcorpfin.2025.102916>

¹⁷ Anna V Matevosyan, Andreas Neef and Dau-Jye Lu, 'Resistance to Decentralised Natural Resource Governance: Taiwan's Chiku Wildlife Refuge', *Environmental Development*, 51 (2024), 101018 <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1016/j.envdev.2024.101018>

¹⁸ Fauzi D Setiawan, 'Spiritual Politics: The Role of Sultan in Yogyakarta's Autonomy System', *J. Southeast Asian Stud.*, 24.2 (2021), 141–56.
<https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003318170>

Hence, regardless of the breadth of autonomy granted to the regions, the ultimate responsibility for regional governance rests with the central government.¹⁹

The unitary state is seen as an ideal model to foster unity in a geographically fragmented country like Indonesia. The implementation of regional governance is determined with the aim of preserving national unity and sovereignty. Several key principles must be upheld, including democracy, equity, justice, special status, uniqueness, and the potential and diversity of regions within the framework of the Unitary State of the Republic of Indonesia.²⁰ The 1945 Constitution of the Republic of Indonesia (UUD NRI 1945) explicitly establishes Indonesia as a unitary state, as affirmed in Article 1 paragraph (1), which declares that Indonesia is a unitary state in the form of a republic, thereby constitutionally entrenching the principle of indivisible sovereignty and clearly distinguishing Indonesia from a federal system in which constituent units may possess independent sovereign authority.²¹ Within this unitary framework, the Constitution simultaneously institutionalizes the principle of decentralization as an integral element of regional governance, as reflected in Article 18 paragraph (1), which mandates the division of the Unitary State of the Republic of Indonesia into provinces, regencies, and municipalities, each vested with local governments regulated by law, indicating that regional autonomy operates within a hierarchical structure of authority delegated by the central government.²²

The Constitution formally recognizes the possibility of asymmetric decentralization through Article 18B paragraph (1), which obliges the state to acknowledge and respect regional government units possessing special or privileged status based on particular historical, sociocultural, or political considerations. This constitutional provision serves as the juridical basis for granting special autonomy to regions such as Aceh and Papua and privileged status to the Special Region of Yogyakarta, while simultaneously preserving the fundamental unitary character of the Indonesian state.²³ The implementation of asymmetric decentralization in Indonesia produces clear juridical implications, namely the preservation of the unitary structure of the state through the continued

¹⁹ Yangyang Zhao and Jiajun Qiu, 'Decentralized Governance in Action: A Governance Framework of Digital Responsibility in Startups', *Journal of Responsible Technology*, 21 (2025), 100107 <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jrt.2025.100107>

²⁰ Siddharth Sareen, Per Ove Eikeland and Tor Håkon Jackson Inderberg, 'Ten Questions Concerning Decentralised Energy Systems Governance', *Building and Environment*, 286 (2025), 113717 <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1016/j.buildenv.2025.113717>

²¹ Alan Zarychta and others, 'Decentralization and Equitable Service Delivery: Access and Satisfaction under Health Sector Governance Reform', *Social Science & Medicine*, 388 (2026), 118750 <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1016/j.socscimed.2025.118750>

²² Soeren J Henn and others, 'Urbanization and Decentralization in the Congo: Examining Governance in Rural Towns', *World Development*, 199 (2026), 107219 <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1016/j.worlddev.2025.107219>

²³ Bambang Sugeng Irianto, 'REGIONAL GOVERNMENT PROBLEMATIC', *EQUALEGUM International Law Journal*, 2023, 148–54 <https://doi.org/10.61543/equ.v1i3.28>

centralization of sovereignty, the subordination of regional governments to national law, and the granting of autonomy on a delegated and discretionary basis through organic legislation, such as Law Number 13 of 2012 concerning the Special Status of Yogyakarta. This model of decentralization operates in a functional, rather than structural, dimension, as it does not establish federated political entities within the state system.²⁴

Consequently, irrespective of the extent of autonomy conferred upon particular regions, the central government retains ultimate authority and responsibility for regional governance. The state determines the delegation of governmental functions to regional governments based on strategic considerations aimed at safeguarding national unity and state sovereignty within the framework of the Unitary State of the Republic of Indonesia. Within this context, asymmetric decentralization emerges as a pragmatic instrument for managing Indonesia's extensive socio-cultural diversity and for mitigating potential regional conflicts. Nevertheless, its effectiveness fundamentally depends on participatory and context-sensitive policy design that accommodates the distinctive social and political characteristics of each region, thereby ensuring both governmental responsiveness and constitutional consistency.²⁵

Asymmetric Decentralization Arrangements in Pattani, Thailand

The 1997 Constitution of Thailand formally initiated the decentralization agenda by establishing the legal basis for local administrative organizations and promoting the devolution of governmental authority to the subnational level. To operationalize this constitutional mandate, the government enacted the Decentralization Act of 1999, which sought to transfer administrative responsibilities to local governments; however, in practice, governance remained predominantly centralized.²⁶ Article 285 of the 1997 Constitution institutionalized a system of local government through the creation of directly elected local councils and administrative committees, with the explicit objective of curbing central dominance and strengthening local accountability. Thailand's local governance structure subsequently developed into two principal forms, namely the general system consisting of Provincial Administrative Organizations (PAOs), municipalities, and Subdistrict Administrative Organizations (SAOs), and the

²⁴ Deni Angela and Harsanto Nursadi, 'Implementation of Asymmetrical Decentralization In Papua: Relevance to Demands and Problems', *Fiat Justisia: Jurnal Ilmu Hukum*, 18.4 (2025), 373–406 <https://doi.org/10.25041/fiatjustisia.v18no4.3474>

²⁵ Panji Hendrarso and others, 'Decentralization in a Unitary State: A Comparative Analysis and Adaptive Governance Design Based on Performance-Panji Hendrarso et.al Decentralization in a Unitary State: A Comparative Analysis and Adaptive Governance Design Based on Performance', *Jurnal Multidisiplin Sahombu*, 5 (2025) <https://doi.org/10.58471/jms.v5i05>

²⁶ Patrick Ziegenhain, 'Subnational Autonomy and Political Islam: A Comparative Analysis of Aceh, Bangsamoro, and Patani', *JURNAL INDO-ISLAMIKA*, 15.1 (2025), 65–76 <https://doi.org/10.15408/jii.v15i1.47973>

special system comprising the Bangkok Metropolitan Administration (BMA) and Pattaya City. These institutional arrangements reflect Thailand's normative commitment to advancing regional welfare while maintaining the unitary character of the state.²⁷

Following the 2014 military coup, the 2017 Constitution reaffirmed a predominantly centralized governance model, albeit with limited space for decentralization. Although the Constitution does not explicitly regulate asymmetric decentralization, it delineates the framework for local governance through Articles 250–258, which confer restricted authority upon Local Administrative Organizations (LAOs). Thailand's territorial administration continues to consist of provinces (*changwat*) governed by centrally appointed governors, as well as districts (*amphoe*), subdistricts (*tambon*), and villages (*muban*), all administered by appointed officials, alongside LAOs such as municipalities (*thesaban*) and SAOs that operate under constrained autonomy.²⁸ While local governments possess formal authority to manage certain local affairs, the central government exercises strict supervisory control and retains the power to override or annul regional policies deemed inconsistent with national interests, as stipulated in Articles 250–251. Furthermore, Articles 252–253 define the structure of local government by establishing PAOs at the provincial level and municipalities and SAOs at the urban and district levels. Despite the existence of elected local councils and executives, their fiscal and policy-making authority remains limited, and provincial governors continue to be appointed by the central government, with the exception of special administrative areas such as Bangkok and Pattaya.²⁹

Articles 254–256 of the Thai Constitution assign specific competencies to local governments by authorizing them to administer economic, social, and infrastructure development; however, the state obliges all local policies to conform strictly to nationally determined priorities. The central government continues to dominate fiscal authority by controlling budget allocations through national policy decisions. Moreover, it actively exercises supervisory powers over local governance, including policy evaluation, the appointment and dismissal of local officials, and the realignment of regional budgets to national frameworks. Through these mechanisms, the central government preserves decisive control over local

²⁷ Imtiyaz Yusuf, 'Muslims as Thailand's Largest Religious Minority', in *Routledge Handbook of Islam in Southeast Asia* (London: Routledge, 2022), pp. 234–49 <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429275449-16>

²⁸ Moez Hayat and Ryan Ashley, 'Making the "Network Monarchy" Work in Thailand's Deep South A Deeper View of Thailand's Southern Insurgency Reveals More about the Nature of a Nation Facing New Challenges from a Vocal, Youthful Generation', *The Diplomat*, 2021. <https://thediplomat.com/2021/08/making-the-network-monarchy-work-in-thailands-deep-south/>

²⁹ Suciyani Suciyani and Faisol Mamaeng, 'Exploring Maqāṣid Al-Sharī'ah in the OIC's Role in Addressing Muslim Minority Conflicts: A Case Study of Pattani, Thailand', *Al-Ahkam: Jurnal Ilmu Syari'ah Dan Hukum*, 9.1 (2024), 14–28 <https://doi.org/10.22515/alakhkam.v9i1.8141>

governance, notwithstanding the formal devolution of limited administrative authority.³⁰

Although the Constitution designates Thai as the sole official language, the state adopts selective accommodative measures toward local identity in Pattani. In the religious domain, the government formally recognizes Islam in Southern Thailand and entrusts religious administration to institutions such as the Central Islamic Council of Thailand. It also authorizes the application of the 1946 Islamic Law on Family and Succession through Sharia Courts for Muslim family and inheritance matters, while maintaining their subordination to the national legal system. In the linguistic sphere, the Pattani Malay dialect remains widely used in daily life but does not obtain official governmental status. Since 2005, the government has permitted limited use of the *Jawi script* in education and administrative communication. Nevertheless, Thai continues to function as the exclusive official language of governance and formal education, in line with Article 70 of the Constitution, which mandates state support for local cultures without granting official status to any language other than Thai.³¹

In the education sector, the state integrates Islamic instruction into schools in Southern Thailand through curricula that include religious studies and Arabic, while subjecting madrasah and *pondok pesantren* to central government supervision. Articles 54–55 of the Constitution require the implementation of a uniform national basic education system, thereby obliging all schools in Pattani to comply with the national curriculum. Since 2006, the Ministry of Education has actively standardized Islamic education by aligning traditional levels such as *ibtidaiyah*, *mutawassitah*, and *thanawiyah* with the national education structure. Many private Islamic schools consequently integrate Islamic studies with nationally regulated general subjects under central government permits and approved curricula. In informal religious education institutions, such as Tadika, educators employ the Malay language as the primary medium for teaching religion and local culture; however, these institutions remain subject to regulatory oversight by the Ministry of Education.³²

Thailand constitutes a unitary state that for more than seven centuries operated under an absolute monarchy until the military-led revolution of 24 June 1932 transformed the political system into a constitutional monarchy. Following this

³⁰ Ismail Suardi Wekke, Siddin Siddin and Sukree Langputeh, 'Islamic Education in Thailand Pattani Muslim Minority: What Are the Institutional Continuity and Change?', *Tadris: Jurnal Keguruan Dan Ilmu Tarbiyah*, 4.1 (2019), 127–34 <https://doi.org/10.24042/tadris.v4i1.3753>

³¹ Y Watanabe and J Honna, 'The Politics of Autonomy and Identity in Southern Thailand: Pattani and Beyond', *Asian J. Comp. Polit*, 15.2 (2019), 123–39. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0021911813000065>

³² Frank W Munger, 'Thailand's Monarchy and Constitutional History - Constitutional Bricolage: Thailand's Sacred Monarchy vs. the Rule of Law. By Eugenie Mérieau. London: Hart Publishing, 2021, 328 Pp. Hardcover \$90.00', *Asian Journal of Law and Society*, 9.3 (2022), 460–62 <https://doi.org/10.1017/als.2022.27>

transition, Thailand entered a new constitutional era; however, its political development has remained unstable, as reflected in recurrent military coups, fragile civilian governments, and frequent parliamentary turnover. Notwithstanding these political disruptions, the monarchy has persisted as a stable and highly revered institution within Thai society. Classical political theory provides a useful analytical lens for understanding monarchical systems. Aristotle classified monarchy into several typologies, including non-absolute monarchy, absolute monarchy, absolute tyranny as a form of dictatorial rule, controlled monarchy in which royal authority operates under public oversight and reciprocal loyalty, and segmented monarchy in which rulers govern discrete territories independently. Similarly, Plato, through the Socratic dialogues, identified four principal forms of government timocracy, oligarchy, democracy, and tyranny each reflecting distinctive characteristics of political leadership. These theoretical frameworks illuminate the evolving nature of monarchical authority within constitutional systems.³³

In monarchical governance, hereditary succession traditionally outweighs considerations of leadership competence, as political legitimacy derives primarily from lineage rather than merit. Within Thailand's contemporary constitutional framework, the monarchy operates within a democratic system, with the King serving as Head of State. The coronation of the King follows a Buddhist religious ceremony, thereby requiring the monarch to profess and uphold Buddhist teachings. The legal system accords the King an exceptionally revered status and strictly prohibits any form of accusation or criticism against the monarch. Constitutionally, the King exercises several formal prerogatives, including the authority to confer royal titles and state honors, the position of Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces, and the power to appoint members of the Privy Council. Royal succession follows the 1924 Palace Law of Succession, which prioritizes male-preference primogeniture; however, the Constitution permits the appointment of a female heir in the absence of a designated male successor. In such circumstances, the Privy Council may nominate a Princess for consideration by the Council of Ministers, which subsequently submits the proposal to the National Assembly for approval.³⁴

Although the Constitution formally restricts the King's direct political authority, the monarch continues to exert significant moral influence in preserving national stability and unity. The King may provide counsel to the government and political

³³ Saifiyatil Bashiroh, Ahmad Khumaidi and Ummi Lailia Maghfiroh, 'MODERASI PENDIDIKAN ISLAM STUDI KASUS BUMRUNG SUKSA ISLAMIC SCHOOL DI THAILAND SELATAN', *Jurnal Visi Ilmu Pendidikan*, 16.2 (2024), 244 <https://doi.org/10.26418/jvip.v16i2.78142>

³⁴ Jingbo Zhong and others, 'Decentralized Event-Triggered Reinforcement Learning Control for Partially Unknown Nonlinear Systems with Time-Varying States and Asymmetric Input Constraints', *Communications in Nonlinear Science and Numerical Simulation*, 149 (2025), 108937 <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cnsns.2025.108937>

advisers on matters of national importance, thereby functioning as a symbolic arbiter above partisan conflict. Executive power, by contrast, resides in the Prime Minister, who emerges from a parliamentary majority and is formally appointed by the King following election by members of Parliament. Consistent with the nature of a parliamentary system, the Prime Minister's tenure remains contingent upon continued legislative confidence and may terminate prematurely through a parliamentary vote of no confidence.³⁵

Comparative Analysis of Asymmetric Decentralization in Yogyakarta and Pattani Regions

This comparative analysis demonstrates that Indonesia and Thailand have each developed distinct strategies for accommodating special regions within a unitary state framework, seeking to balance the imperative of national integration with the need to recognize and preserve local distinctiveness. Although unitary states are normatively grounded in the principle of centralized authority, many have, in practice, adopted decentralized governance arrangements to manage ethnic, cultural, historical, and political diversity.³⁶ One prominent institutional mechanism for this purpose is asymmetric decentralization, which involves the selective allocation of differentiated powers to particular regions based on specific historical, sociocultural, or political considerations. This model is clearly reflected in the governance arrangements of the Daerah Istimewa Yogyakarta (DIY) in Indonesia and Pattani in Thailand, both of which possess strong historical and cultural identities that have prompted special recognition by their respective central governments.³⁷

The special status of DIY originates from the historical contribution of the Yogyakarta Sultanate to the Indonesian independence movement, which the state subsequently institutionalized through Law Number 13 of 2012. By contrast, Pattani embodies a distinct Malay-Muslim identity within Thailand's predominantly Buddhist socio-political order and has experienced a prolonged history of tension surrounding its integration into the Thai state. Although both regions exist within unitary state structures, their legal and institutional arrangements of asymmetric decentralization differ substantially in scope, intensity, and constitutional justification. These variations illustrate that

³⁵ Arismunandar Arismunandar, Afriantoni Afriantoni and Asmuni Asmuni, 'MELAYU PATTANI THAILAND: MUSLIM MINORITY RELIGION EXPRESSION IN THE MIDDLE OF NON MUSLIM MAJORITY', *Journal of Malay Islamic Studies*, 3.1 (2019), 63–74 <https://doi.org/10.19109/jmis.v3i1.4576>

³⁶ Lin Yu, Junlin Xiong and Min Xie, 'Off-Policy Reinforcement Learning-Based Decentralized Stabilization for Interconnected Nonlinear Systems', *Information Sciences*, 728 (2026), 122817 <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ins.2025.122817>

³⁷ Chibuisi Chinasakwu Okorieimoh and Ehiaze Augustin Ehimen, 'Policy and Regulatory Challenges in Decentralised Renewable Energy Deployment: Case Studies from Nigeria, Liberia, and Malawi', *Utilities Policy*, 98 (2026), 102075 <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jup.2025.102075>

asymmetric decentralization does not operate as a uniform model but adapts to the specific historical and political trajectories of individual states.³⁸

The conceptualize asymmetric decentralization as a strategy adopted by states seeking to preserve national unity while simultaneously accommodating strong sub-national identities. This strategy compels central governments to allocate differentiated forms of autonomy, fiscal resources, and symbolic recognition to particular regions.³⁹ This phenomenon through their theory of multi-level governance, arguing that asymmetry often functions as a formal acknowledgment of sub-national entities possessing distinctive socio-political characteristics. These theoretical perspectives underline that asymmetric decentralization constitutes not merely an administrative technique but also a political instrument for managing diversity within the nation-state. From a comparative perspective, three principal models of asymmetric decentralization can be identified. First, the model of full asymmetry grants highly differentiated and specialized powers to local governments, resulting in significant divergence among regions. This model reflects a strong recognition of regional uniqueness and may generate as many institutional variations as there are regions within the state. However, as evidenced in the Indian experience, full asymmetry may undermine principles of fiscal equalization and technocratic governance, thereby raising concerns regarding equity and administrative coherence in public service delivery.⁴⁰

Second, the model of categorically based asymmetry differentiates regions according to socio-economic and cultural characteristics, either through binary distinctions or graduated classifications. In practice, this model frequently distinguishes between urban and rural regions, as observed in China and Spain. Through such categorization, governments can tailor decentralization policies to the specific developmental needs and cultural contexts of different territories. This approach aims to enhance policy responsiveness and administrative efficiency while maintaining a uniform constitutional framework.⁴¹

³⁸ Saldi Isra and others, *Asymmetry in a Decentralized, Unitary State: Lessons from the Special Regions of Indonesia*, *Journal on Ethnopolitics and Minority Issues in Europe*, 2019, XVIII <http://www.ecmi.de/fileadmin/downloads/publications/JEMIE/2019>

³⁹ Rizky Dwi Kusuma and others, 'Problems and Challenges of Asymmetrical Democracy in Indonesia', *Kybernology: Journal of Government Studies*, 3.1 (2023), 17–33 <https://doi.org/10.26618/kjgs.v3i1.12059>

⁴⁰ Anom Wahyu Asmorojati, Suyadi Suyadi and King Faisal Sulaiman, 'Asymmetric Decentralization in A Unitary State: The Legitimization of The Sultan's Daughter as The Governor of the Special Region of Yogyakarta', *Jurnal Hukum Novelty*, 13.2 (2022), 171 <https://doi.org/10.26555/novelty.v13i2.a24079>

⁴¹ Atrayee Choudhury and Sohini Sahu, 'The Asymmetric Impact of Fiscal Decentralization on Ecological Footprint-Accounting for Methodological Refinements and Globalization Facets', *The Journal of Economic Asymmetries*, 31 (2025), e00400 <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jeca.2024.e00400>

Third, the special autonomy model conceptualizes asymmetric decentralization as a deliberate institutional deviation from a uniform national decentralization system. States adopt this model primarily to accommodate regions with deeply entrenched historical, ethno-cultural, or linguistic identities. Examples include the Sámi region in Norway, the Åland Islands in Finland, and Quebec in Canada. In these cases, asymmetry functions not merely as an administrative adjustment but as a form of constitutional recognition of distinct communities within the nation-state. Indonesia adopts a comparable approach through the legal recognition of special status for regions such as Aceh, Papua, the Special Region of Yogyakarta, and Jakarta, all of which operate within, yet distinctively shape, the broader national legal framework.⁴²

From a regulatory perspective, Article 18B paragraph (1) of the 1945 Constitution of the Republic of Indonesia explicitly recognizes and respects the Daerah Istimewa Yogyakarta as a regional governmental unit with a special or privileged status. Throughout Indonesia's constitutional development under the 1945 Constitution, the 1949 Federal Constitution, the 1950 Provisional Constitution, and the amended 1945 Constitution, the state has consistently maintained the principle of asymmetric decentralization.⁴³ Although the structure of the state, the system of government, and the configuration of the legislature have undergone substantial changes, these transformations have not reduced the constitutional space for special regional arrangements. Instead, the constitutional framework has continuously guaranteed the existence of regional privileges and special statuses. The state typically justifies the implementation of asymmetric decentralization on the basis of historical legacies, cultural identity, border sensitivities, and the need to manage conflict or separatist movements.⁴⁴

The legal foundation of the special status of the Daerah Istimewa Yogyakarta is firmly established through Law Number 13 of 2012 concerning the Special Status of the Special Region of Yogyakarta, together with its implementing regulations in the form of Special Regional Regulations. This legal regime grants special authorities at the provincial level that exceed those provided under the general law on regional government. The legislature requires these special powers to rest upon principles of local wisdom and public interest. These authorities encompass governance over the procedures for appointing the Governor and Vice Governor, the institutional structure of regional government, cultural affairs, land administration, and spatial planning. Through this regulatory design, the state constructs a distinct governance

⁴² Ahmad Afandi and Udiyo Basuki, 'Menemukan Konsep Ideal Hubungan Pusat Dan Daerah Dalam Bingkai Negara Kesatuan Republik Indonesia', *Jurnal Hukum Caraka Justitia*, 3.1 (2023), 1 <https://doi.org/10.30588/jhcj.v3i1.1489>

⁴³ Fabio Fiorillo, Michele G Giuranno and Agnese Sacchi, 'Asymmetric Decentralization: Distortions and Opportunities', *Economia Politica*, 38.2 (2021), 625–56 <https://doi.org/10.1007/s40888-020-00211-7>

⁴⁴ Batanov O. V., 'The Doctrine of Modern Unitarism: Problems of Formation and Realization', *Al'manah Prava*, 11.11 (2020), 33–42 <https://doi.org/10.33663/2524-017X-2020-11-6>

framework that differentiates Yogyakarta from other provinces within the unitary system.⁴⁵

A central feature of asymmetric governance in the Daerah Istimewa Yogyakarta concerns the mechanism for selecting regional leadership. The law designates that the reigning Sultan Hamengku Buwono shall serve as Governor and the reigning Adipati Paku Alam shall serve as Vice Governor. The Sultan must ascend the throne in accordance with the customs and traditional rites of the Yogyakarta Sultanate, while the Adipati must be enthroned according to the traditions of the Pakualaman Duchy. Both officials hold office for a five year term from the date of inauguration. In contrast to the general regional leadership system in Indonesia, the Governor and Vice Governor of Yogyakarta are not subject to the two term limitation under the national regional government law. This arrangement affirms the hereditary and traditional foundations of political authority in the region.⁴⁶

Historically, the Daerah Istimewa Yogyakarta constitutes one of Indonesia's autonomous provincial regions that is deeply rooted in pre independence governance traditions. Before independence, Yogyakarta comprised the Sultanate of Ngayogyakarta Hadiningrat and the Duchy of Pakualaman. During the colonial era, the Dutch government recognized both entities as self governing territories and later classified them as special autonomous regions in the early years of the Republic. Prince Mangkubumi founded the Yogyakarta Sultanate in 1755 and ascended the throne as Sultan Hamengku Buwono the First, while Prince Notokusumo established the Duchy of Pakualaman in 1813 and became Adipati Paku Alam the First. The colonial administration formally acknowledged both as kingdoms with internal autonomy.⁴⁷

After the proclamation of Indonesian independence, the Sultanate of Yogyakarta voluntarily integrated into the Republic of Indonesia. President Soekarno subsequently affirmed Yogyakarta's special status through the issuance of the *Piagam Kedudukan* by appointing Sultan Hamengku Buwono the Ninth and Paku Alam the Eighth as Governor and Vice Governor and by entrusting them with safeguarding the region as an integral part of the Republic. The state later reinforced this recognition through Law Number 22 of 1948 and further formalized it through Law Number 3 of 1950. These legal instruments confirm the decisive role

⁴⁵ Hanfree Bunga' Allo and others, 'Asymmetric Decentralisation Arrangements in the Implementation of Regional Autonomy in Indonesia', *Edelweiss Applied Science and Technology*, 9.4 (2025), 1975–84 <https://doi.org/10.55214/25768484.v9i4.6442>

⁴⁶ Asianto Nugroho, I Gusti Ayu Ketut Rachmi Handayani and Lego Karjoko, 'Recognition of the Specialties of the Kingdom of Yogyakarta and the Practice of Asymmetric Decentralization in Indonesia', *Journal of Law and Sustainable Development*, 12.1 (2024) <https://doi.org/10.55908/sdgs.v12i1.3122>

⁴⁷ Triwahyuningsih Triwahyuningsih, 'The Reviewing Concept of Asymmetric Decentralization in The Special Region of Yogyakarta', *Jurnal Daulat Hukum*, 4.3 (2021), 189 <https://doi.org/10.30659/jdh.v4i3.17525>

of the Yogyakarta royal institutions in the struggle for independence and institutionalize cultural and spiritual recognition within the national decentralization framework.⁴⁸

The position of the Sultan in Yogyakarta as both a spiritual and political leader illustrates a comprehensive model of regional autonomy grounded in cultural legitimacy. In contemporary constitutional practice, Law Number 13 of 2012 provides the strongest statutory basis for the asymmetric decentralization model in the Daerah Istimewa Yogyakarta by clearly defining the region's special powers in the areas of leadership succession, governance structure, cultural preservation, land affairs, and spatial planning. The hereditary selection of the Governor and Vice Governor through traditional rites, together with their exemption from the general two term limitation, demonstrates that the asymmetric governance of Yogyakarta operates as a constitutionally sanctioned deviation within Indonesia's otherwise uniform system of regional government.⁴⁹

In contrast, Pattani in Thailand does not enjoy formal recognition of special status in the 2017 Thai Constitution. There is no constitutional acknowledgment of Pattani's distinct identity or specific needs. Pattani, along with Yala and Narathiwat, comprises a Muslim-majority region in southern Thailand with a long history of resistance to centralization. Unlike DIY, the Governor of Pattani is appointed by the central government, under strict control from Bangkok. The Southern Border Provinces Administrative Centre (SBPAC) functions as a coordinating body for policy and development in southern Thailand, including Pattani, but lacks any legal framework granting autonomy.⁵⁰

SBPAC is an administrative, non-ministerial body under the direct authority of the Prime Minister. Its responsibilities include administrative coordination and development across the southern border provinces, improving local welfare as part of counter-radicalization efforts, law enforcement and restorative justice; (4) promoting intercultural understanding and state-community relations, de-radicalization and reintegration programs; and facilitating community dialogue and mediating local disputes.⁵¹ SBPAC has had limited success in implementing development projects and fostering community dialogue. However, from the perspective of asymmetric decentralization, SBPAC does not constitute a legal mechanism of substantive autonomy. It does not grant political, legal, or cultural

⁴⁸ Indah Nur Santy Saleh Triwahyuningsih, 'Rekognisi Sistem Pemerintahan Daerah Di Indonesia Perspektif Konstitusional', 6.1 (2023) <https://doi.org/10.31933/unesrev.v6i1>

⁴⁹ Khairul Muluk and Anantanatorn.

⁵⁰ Sarah Shair-Rosenfield, 'Decentralization and Subnational Politics in Asia', in *Handbook on Decentralization, Devolution and the State* (Edward Elgar Publishing, 2021) <https://doi.org/10.4337/9781839103285.00015>

⁵¹ Mike Medeiros and Jean-Philippe Gauvin, 'Two Regionalisms, One Mechanism: How Identity Shapes Support for Decentralisation', *Comparative European Politics*, 19.2 (2021), 208–24 <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41295-020-00233-2>

recognition to Pattani's unique identity, nor does it structurally alter the central-local relationship in Thailand. SBPAC serves more as an instrument of stabilization and integration, rather than as a political or cultural recognition mechanism akin to Indonesia's treatment of DIY. As such, Pattani represents a case of "*pseudo-asymmetry*", where special handling exists in practice but without accompanying legal or constitutional recognition.⁵²

The goals of genuine asymmetric decentralization are fourfold recognition of local socio-cultural historical identity, enhancement of governability, economic development, and conflict resolution. To the extent these aims are met, the chosen model of asymmetric decentralization can be considered academically valid. However, if significant challenges persist-such as unresolved economic needs or continuing conflict-the current model, as in the case of Pattani, requires reconfiguration. A more adaptive and participatory legal approach is needed to design asymmetric decentralization models for regions with distinct identities.⁵³ The absence of formal regulation for Pattani's autonomy means that central policies are inherently provisional and political, not structural or sustainable. This results in not only ineffective governance but also undermines state legitimacy, regional stability, and public trust. Without constitutional or statutory recognition, cultural preservation efforts depend solely on the political will of the central government. The lack of legal protection for cultural rights ultimately hampers the authentic development of regional identities such as that of the Malay-Patani community.⁵⁴

Table 2. Comparison of Asymmetric Decentralization in the Daerah Istimewa Yogyakarta (DIY) and Pattani

Aspect	Daerah Istimewa Yogyakarta (DIY)	Pattani (Thailand)
Legal Basis	Regulated under Article 18B(1) of the 1945 Constitution and Law No. 13 of 2012	No constitutional recognition or specific regulation for Pattani
Legal Recognition of Special Status	Explicit legal recognition through national legislation and regional regulations	No formal legal recognition or designated special status at the national level
Special Status	Granted special regional status with distinctive governing powers	No officially recognized special status, despite Pattani's distinct Malay-Muslim majority
Regional Authority	Holds special authority, including hereditary succession in the appointment of Governor and Vice Governor	Authority remains centralized under SBPAC oversight
Model of Asymmetry	Full asymmetry model with constitutional recognition of local privileges	Pseudo-asymmetry model based on flexible administrative policies subject to central approval
Implementation	Structurally embedded in national law and regional regulations	Implemented via administrative policy dependent on central government discretion
Local Identity	Local identity formally acknowledged through	No formal legal recognition of Malay-Patani

⁵² Maryna Rabinovych and Hanna Shelest, 'Introduction: Regional Diversity, Decentralization, and Conflict in and around Ukraine', in *Decentralization, Regional Diversity, and Conflict* (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2020), pp. 1–14 https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-41765-9_1

⁵³ Ming-Hsi Sung and Hary Abdul Hakim, 'Unitary, Federalized, or Decentralized?: The Case Study of Daerah Istimewa Yogyakarta as the Special Autonomous Regions in Indonesia', *Indonesian Comparative Law Review*, 1.2 (2019) <https://doi.org/10.18196/iclr.1210>

⁵⁴ D E Tiopan & Kurniawan, 'The Suitable Concept of the Relationship of Authority between the Center and the Regions for the Unitary State of the Republic of Indonesia According to the 1945 Constitution of the Republic of Indonesia', *International Journal of Social Science and Human Research*, 05.07 (2022) <https://doi.org/10.47191/ijsshr/v5-i7-22>

Integration	governance practices rooted in historical customs	cultural or ethnic identity
Institutional Framework	Governorship filled through traditional royal succession (<i>Kasultanan and Kadipaten</i>)	Administered by SBPAC, a non-ministerial body under the Prime Minister's Office
Central Government Approach	Strong legal and participatory approach that supports identity recognition	Temporary and politically driven approach that offers no substantive autonomy
Socio-Political Context	Recognized for its historical contribution to Indonesian independence	Longstanding conflict over integration with Thailand, lacking legal resolution or recognition
Model Effectiveness	Serves as a successful model of legally grounded cultural and historical accommodation	SBPAC has achieved limited administrative outcomes without formal legal empowerment of local identity

Source: Processed by the author based on research data

Table 2 reveals a clear structural and juridical divergence between the asymmetric decentralization models applied in the Daerah Istimewa Yogyakarta and Pattani, particularly with respect to legal foundation, institutional authority, and recognition of local identity. The Indonesian government constitutionally anchors the special status of the Daerah Istimewa Yogyakarta through Article 18B paragraph (1) of the 1945 Constitution and further codifies it through Law Number 13 of 2012. This strong constitutional and statutory basis enables the region to exercise special governing powers, including hereditary succession in regional leadership, within a stable and legally protected framework. In contrast, the Thai legal system does not provide constitutional or statutory recognition of Pattani as a special region. The central government administers Pattani primarily through the Southern Border Provinces Administrative Centre under direct executive control, which prevents the emergence of genuine autonomous authority.

The table also demonstrates a fundamental distinction in the treatment of local identity. The Indonesian state formally integrates the cultural and historical identity of the Daerah Istimewa Yogyakarta into its governance structure by recognizing the role of the Sultanate and the Duchy as legitimate institutional components of regional administration. Conversely, the Thai state does not legally acknowledge the distinct Malay Muslim identity of Pattani within the national governance framework. This difference reflects contrasting approaches to diversity management. Indonesia institutionalizes cultural recognition through legal and participatory mechanisms, whereas Thailand relies on administrative control driven by political and security considerations.

From the perspective of policy implementation, the asymmetric decentralization of the Daerah Istimewa Yogyakarta operates within a structurally embedded legal system that ensures legal certainty, accountability, and continuity of authority. Pattani, on the other hand, experiences a form of administrative decentralization that depends on shifting central government policies and lacks

binding legal guarantees.⁵⁵ This disparity directly affects policy effectiveness. The Daerah Istimewa Yogyakarta demonstrates that constitutionally protected asymmetry can successfully accommodate historical and cultural uniqueness while maintaining national unity. In contrast, Pattani illustrates the limitations of decentralization that rests solely on executive discretion without formal legal empowerment of local identity. The comparison confirms that the effectiveness and legitimacy of asymmetric decentralization depend primarily on strong constitutional and statutory guarantees.⁵⁶

4. Conclusion

Daerah Istimewa Yogyakarta (DIY) and Pattani (Thailand) have very different governance models. Daerah Istimewa Yogyakarta (DIY) is a clear example of *de jure* (legal) asymmetric decentralization. Its status is institutionalized through the Constitution (Article 18B) and Law No. 13/2012, which grants it special authority (special autonomy) in various areas such as leadership succession, land affairs, and culture. Pattani, on the other hand, does not meet the *de jure* criteria for asymmetrical decentralization. Although there are cultural and religious accommodations (e.g., language and education), Pattani does not have any delegation of political authority or special legal autonomy. The region remains within Thailand's highly centralized government structure. The real (*de facto*) cultural and religious differences in Pattani are not managed through autonomy, but rather through centrally managed exceptions. Therefore, recognition of Pattani's uniqueness is more symbolic than structural. Pattani reflects a rigid, uniform, centralistic unitary state with minimal local recognition, while DIY reflects a flexible unitary state that accepts historical/cultural differentiation of authority as an integration strategy. The difference is not in the form of the state (both are unitary), but in the way the state manages diversity: Thailand suppresses differentiation, while Indonesia accommodates it asymmetrically.

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⁵⁵ Mexsasai Indra and Fadhilah Fauzan, 'The Importance Of Structuring Relationships Between Local Governments And Business Entities In The Perspective Of State Administrative Law In Batam City, Riau Islands', *Jurnal IUS Kajian Hukum Dan Keadilan*, 11.1 (2023), 126–39 <https://doi.org/10.29303/ius.v11i1.1146>

⁵⁶ Fifi Febriandiela, Aldri Frinaldi and Lince Magriasti, 'Critical Analysis of Decentralization Theory in the Context of Local Government: A Literature Review', *Adabi: Journal of Public Administration and Business*, 11.1 (2024), 1–13 <https://doi.org/10.62066/jpab.v11i1.13>

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