

## **Practice Acceptance and Label Rejection: Social Ambivalence toward Islam Nusantara in Minangkabau, Indonesia**

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### **Abstract**

This study examines the ambivalent reception of Islam Nusantara in Minangkabau, West Sumatra, where local Islamic practices associated with cultural accommodation remain socially accepted, while the label Islam Nusantara is strongly contested. The study is important because it addresses a paradox in Minangkabau religious life: practices such as *maulid*, *badikia*, grave pilgrimages, communal recitations, *malamang*, and post-death rituals are embedded in local Islamic traditions, yet become suspicious when explicitly associated with Islam Nusantara. Using a qualitative approach, this research draws on semi-structured interviews with 16 informants, including *ulama*, Nahdlatul Ulama leaders and activists, *ninik mamak*, and community members in Padang Pariaman and Pasaman Barat. The study also analyzes online news reports, institutional statements, and public discourse materials published between 2018 and 2022. Data were examined through thematic analysis using Jan Hajda's theory of ambivalence. The findings show three main patterns: first, the coexistence of practice acceptance and label rejection; second, the role of ABS-SBK as a contested interpretive field rather than a fixed philosophy of Islam and *adat*; and third, the production of threat narratives through institutional authority, elite framing, digital circulation, and trusted informal networks. This study contributes to the literature on Islam Nusantara, local Islam, and religious authority by showing that resistance to a religious discourse may emerge not from the substance of practice, but from the stigma, authority, and symbolic burden attached to its label.

Keywords: ABS-SBK; Islam Nusantara; label politics; local Islam; Minangkabau; religious ambivalence.

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### **INTRODUCTION**

Since its formal introduction at the 33rd Nahdlatul Ulama Congress (*Muktamar NU ke-33*) in Jombang in 2015, the concept of Islam Nusantara (IN) has sparked debate among religious institutions and online communities (Aminuddin, 2020; Maimun, 2017; Safitri, 2017). This discourse has provoked nationwide controversy. Proponents argue that IN represents a crucial framework for cultivating a peaceful, tolerant, and culturally accommodating form of Islam (Mustofa, 2015; Setiawan & Stevanus, 2023; Sururi, 2019). Conversely, its critics express concerns that integrating local customs and religious doctrines may dilute the purity of Islamic teachings (Fata & Ichwan, 2017; Ridwan, Syahputra, Tarigan, Siregar, & Nofaldi, 2019).

Within this national controversy, the Minangkabau case in West Sumatra presents a distinctive and analytically important paradox. Several influential religious and customary institutions, including the West Sumatra Council of Ulama (MUI Sumbar), MTKAAM, Bundo Kandang, and the Regional House of Representatives, have publicly rejected IN on the grounds of protecting Islamic purity and Minangkabau religious identity (Benny et al., 2019; Lestari, 2023). On the other hand, their religious practices are deeply rooted in the philosophy of ABS-SBK. The

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process of integration began with "*adat basandi alua dan patuik*," which emphasizes local customs, then shifted to "*adat basandi syarak, syarak basandi dalil*," indicating that custom and Islamic law coexist side by side. It later developed into "*adat basandi syarak, syarak basandi Kitabullah*," (Azra, 2017) which signifies not only the accommodation of local customs but also the dominance of Islamic law over those customs. Substantively, ABS-SBK embodies the very spirit of cultural accommodation that characterizes the IN concept (Asrinaldi & Yoserizal, 2020; Jeffrey Hadler, 2010; Syafrina, 2021; Syamsuddin, 2004). ABS-SBK illustrates how the Minangkabau community has maintained Islamic values without abandoning indigenous traditions (Asrinaldi & Yoserizal, 2020). This integration is also sustained through Minangkabau social actors and institutions, including *Bundo Kanduang*, *Ninik Mamak*, *Alim Ulama*, and *Cadiak Pandai*, which play important roles in transmitting religious and cultural values within a matrilineal social system (Handrianto, 2017).

This condition produces a central puzzle: why is IN rejected in a society whose religious-cultural foundation already accommodates the relationship between Islam and local tradition? The paradox becomes sharper when one considers that several practices commonly associated with culturally embedded Islam—such as *maulid*, *badikia*, grave pilgrimage, communal recitations, and post-death rituals—remain part of everyday Minangkabau religious life. In practice, forms of Islam that are locally mediated are socially accepted; yet when these practices are named or framed as IN, they become contested. This suggests that the controversy is not simply about the substance of religious practice, but about the symbolic meaning attached to the label itself.

Studies on Islam Nusantara have generally developed into three major strands. The first examines its conceptual, historical, and normative foundations, describing Islam Nusantara as a model of Islamic thought and practice that integrates Islamic teachings with Indonesian local traditions through moderation, tolerance, cultural accommodation, and the use of *'urf* in contextualizing Islamic norms (Adis Duderija, 2022; Fuadi et al., 2024; Kato, 2021; Schäfer, 2021; Thahir, 2021; Thohir, 2022). Historically, this literature traces Islam Nusantara to the peaceful spread of Islam through Sufi networks and earlier projects of Islamic indigenization, which sought to counter excessive Arabization by recognizing local cultural forms as legitimate spaces for Islamic expression (Anshori et al., 2021). Normatively, it highlights the development of *Fiqh Nusantara* and the epistemological foundations of Islam Nusantara, including *mashlahah mursalah*, *istihsân*, and *'urf*, as mechanisms for harmonizing Islamic law with Indonesian sociocultural realities (Harisudin, 2021; Khoiri et al., 2025; Supena, 2021). Other studies also emphasize the role of Nahdlatul Ulama in promoting Islam Nusantara as a counter-narrative to radicalism and as an expression of religious moderation in Indonesia's plural society (Schmidt, 2021; Thohir, 2022). However, this strand tends to focus on the conceptual legitimacy, historical roots, and normative foundations of Islam Nusantara, rather than on how the label is socially received, contested, or rejected in specific local communities such as Minangkabau.

The second strand examines local Islam, Islamic indigenization, and the accommodation of Islamic teachings with local culture in Indonesia, particularly through the relationship between Islam and *adat*. In the Minangkabau context, this literature highlights Adat Basandi Syarak, Syarak Basandi Kitabullah (ABS-SBK) as a cultural-religious philosophy that mediates Islamic norms and customary traditions. Studies on Minangkabau show that the relationship between Islam and *adat* has historically involved not only harmony, but also compromise, contestation, and reconciliation among religious scholars, customary leaders, matrilineal traditions, and reformist Islamic

movements (Boenga, 2020; Darajat, 2015; Faisal, 2018; Hadler, 2008; Hoesterey, 2022; Kaçer, 2024; Qomar, 2019; von Benda-Beckmann & von Benda-Beckmann, 2012; Woodward, 2019). Recent studies further indicate that local Islamic accommodation can support religious moderation, pluralism, and culturally rooted forms of religiosity, as reflected in the integration of *adat*, Islamic humanism, and local religious practices in West Sumatra and other Indonesian contexts (Ashadi et al., 2025; Fuadi et al., 2024; Suleman et al., 2025). However, this strand has not sufficiently explained why cultural accommodation is accepted when framed as Minangkabau tradition, but becomes contested when associated with the label Islam Nusantara.

The third strand focuses on media discourse, public controversy, religious authority, elite contestation, and conservative opposition to Islam Nusantara. This literature shows that Islam Nusantara has become controversial not only because of theological disagreement, but also because it is entangled with struggles over authority, organizational identity, public legitimacy, and religious authenticity (Fahmi & Aswirna, 2019; Iktafi & Hakim, 2024; Kurnia Sari Wiwaha, 2021; Sururi Hsb, 2019). Other studies further demonstrate how conservative Islamic groups, regional religious authorities, and digital media debates frame Islam Nusantara through competing narratives of moderation versus radicalism, authenticity versus dilution, and local culture versus Islamic universality (Akmaliah, 2022; Benny et al., 2019; Safitri et al., 2016; Slama, 2020). This body of literature has clarified how public controversy, conservative contestation, and digital circulation shape perceptions of Islam Nusantara, including the broader challenges faced by NU and Muhammadiyah amid conservative turns and Islamic populism in Indonesia (Qodir et al., 2023). In Minangkabau, such contestation is also shaped by conservative and transnational Islamic actors who appropriate local symbols and identities to expand their influence (Zakirman et al., 2025). However, existing studies have not sufficiently explained the paradox between practice acceptance and label rejection, nor have they fully positioned ABS-SBK as an arena in which actors struggle to define the legitimate relationship between Islam, *adat*, and local identity.

This study advances the thesis that the rejection of IN in Minangkabau is not merely a resistance against “Javanese” or “NU” influences but reflects the manifestation of internal religious conservatism in contemporary Minangkabau society. This tendency is reflected in the positions of several religious and customary institutions, including MUI and MTKAAM, which have been associated in previous studies with efforts to defend a more hierarchical interpretation of ABS-SBK. (Zainal, 2014; Zulfadli, Dewi Anggraini, 2020). The acceptance of ABS-SBK by the same groups does not indicate a naïve endorsement of a harmonious “*dua jo tabiang*” (mutual adaptation) model; rather, it signifies a selective and hierarchical interpretation of the philosophy. For these conservative groups, ABS-SBK is interpreted as the domination of *syara'* (Islamic law) over *adat* (custom), even to the extent of negating the autonomous role of *adat* when it conflicts with their scriptural interpretations—such as in disputes between matrilineal inheritance and *faraidh* law (T. Abdullah, 1966; Hamdani, 2009; Rizal & Firdaus, 2022). IN, which emphasizes dialogical equality and critical accommodation of local culture, is thus perceived as a threat to their dominant interpretation of ABS-SBK and as a potential source of “unwanted cultural contamination.”

This study argues that the rejection of Islam Nusantara in Minangkabau cannot be understood simply as resistance to NU, Javanese influence, or theological difference. Rather, it reflects a deeper process of social ambivalence, in which local Islamic practices are accepted as part of inherited Minangkabau religiosity, while the label Islam Nusantara is rejected because it carries symbolic, ideological, and political burdens. Drawing on Hajda’s theory of ambivalence, this

study understands ambivalence not merely as individual hesitation, but as a social condition produced by conflicting meanings, roles, and expectations within social relations; in this case, between the acceptance of culturally embedded Islamic practices and the rejection of a label perceived as external or threatening. Practices such as *maulid*, *badikia*, grave pilgrimages, communal recitations, *malamang*, and post-death rituals remain legitimate when framed as Minangkabau tradition, but become controversial when associated with Islam Nusantara, a label perceived by some actors as NU-linked, Javanese, doctrinally suspicious, or incompatible with local identity. In this context, ABS-SBK operates not merely as a harmonious philosophy of Islam and *adat*, but as a contested interpretive field through which different actors define the boundaries of legitimate Minangkabau Islam. By foregrounding social ambivalence, label politics, symbolic rejection, and interpretive contestation, this study offers a framework for explaining why religious practices may be socially accepted while the discourse that names them is simultaneously resisted (Hajda, 1968).

## METHODS

This research employs a qualitative approach (Dorothy Pawluch, William Shaffir, 2005) to examine the paradox between the acceptance of ABS-SBK and the rejection of Islam Nusantara (IN) in West Sumatra. The study was conducted in the districts of Padang Pariaman and Pasaman Barat, two areas that represent important socio-religious dynamics within the Minangkabau community. These districts were selected because they are closely associated with religious discourse, institutional authority, and the reproduction of local Islamic traditions. Data collection was conducted over ten months, from January to October 2021.

Primary data were obtained through semi-structured in-depth interviews with 16 informants, consisting of religious leaders (*ulama*), Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) leaders, NU activists, traditional leaders (*ninik mamak*), and community members. Informants were selected using purposive sampling based on their relevance to the research topic, particularly their direct involvement in or familiarity with the discourse of ABS-SBK and Islam Nusantara. To expand the range of perspectives, this study also employed snowball sampling, in which initial informants recommended other participants who possessed relevant insights into the issues being examined. Interviews were conducted flexibly yet purposefully, allowing informants to express their experiences, interpretations, and responses to the tension between the acceptance of ABS-SBK and the rejection of IN. Each interview lasted between 60 and 120 minutes, was audio-recorded with consent, and was transcribed verbatim.

Secondary data consisted of a selected corpus of online news reports, institutional statements, and public discourse materials published between 2018 and 2022. These materials were used to contextualize the interview data and strengthen triangulation. The documentary sources were collected from selected online media and institutional sources, particularly reports and statements related to the public controversy over Islam Nusantara in West Sumatra. The materials were identified using keywords such as "Islam Nusantara," "MUI Sumbar," "ABS-SBK," "MTKAAM," "Jawanisasi," and "penolakan Islam Nusantara." These secondary sources were analyzed not as neutral factual accounts, but as discourse materials that reflect how IN was framed, debated, and contested in public and institutional arenas.

The data were analyzed using thematic analysis. Open coding was first conducted to identify recurring ideas, expressions, and patterns in the interview transcripts and documentary materials.

Axial coding was then used to examine relationships among categories, particularly those related to practice acceptance, label rejection, threat narratives, institutional authority, and political mobilization. Selective coding was subsequently employed to develop broader analytical themes that explain the ambivalence toward IN in Minangkabau society. Jan Hajda's theory of ambivalence (Hajda, 1968), particularly the concepts of psychological and social ambivalence, served as the main analytical framework for interpreting tensions at both individual and structural levels.

Several strategies were employed to ensure the trustworthiness of the findings. First, triangulation was conducted by comparing data from interviews, online news reports, institutional statements, and public discourse materials. Second, member checking was carried out by sharing initial interpretations with selected informants to ensure that the analysis remained aligned with their perspectives. Third, an audit trail was maintained to document the research process, including decisions made during data collection, coding, and interpretation, in order to enhance transparency and dependability.

The ethical aspects of the research were maintained throughout the study. All informants were informed about the objectives of the research and provided consent before participating. Anonymity and confidentiality were guaranteed by using pseudonyms and removing information that could identify the informants. Participants were also given the right to withdraw from the study at any time without any consequences. Through this methodological design, the study seeks to produce a credible and contextual understanding of ambivalence toward Islam Nusantara and ABS-SBK in West Sumatra.

## RESULTS

### 1. Practice Acceptance and Label Rejection

Interview data indicate that ambivalence toward Islam Nusantara in Minangkabau is most clearly expressed through the separation between accepted religious practices and rejected religious labeling. Practices such as *maulid*, *badikia*, grave pilgrimages, *Yasin* recitations, *sholawatan*, *malamang*, and post-death rituals were described by informants as familiar elements of Minangkabau religious life. These practices are widely recognized as part of local Islamic tradition and continue to be performed in everyday communal and religious settings. However, when the same practices are explicitly associated with Islam Nusantara, they tend to become objects of suspicion, hesitation, and rejection. This pattern suggests that the controversy is not primarily directed at the practices themselves, but at the label attached to them.

A NU preacher in Pasaman Barat explained that practices such as *malamang* and post-death rituals have long been incorporated into Minangkabau cultural and religious life. Although these practices may not always be explicitly grounded in classical Islamic texts, they are not perceived by local communities as foreign or newly introduced traditions. Rather, they are understood as part of inherited communal practices through which religious devotion, family solidarity, and local identity are expressed (Dr, personal communication, July 12, 2021). In this sense, such practices continue to occupy a legitimate place in everyday Minangkabau religiosity.

A similar pattern was described by M, a *majelis taklim* activist, who observed that community members continue to participate enthusiastically in *Yasin* recitations and *sholawatan*. These activities are commonly performed in communal religious gatherings and are accepted as familiar expressions of local Islamic practice. However, resistance tends to emerge when these activities are

explicitly associated with Islam Nusantara. As long as the practices are presented as part of ordinary Minangkabau religious life, community participation remains relatively unproblematic; the tension appears when the label Islam Nusantara is attached to them (M, personal communication, July 10, 2021).

This separation between practice and label was also evident among NU activists themselves. F, a member of the NU community in Padang Pariaman, acknowledged that several Minangkabau religious traditions, including *ziarah basapa*, *maulid* celebrations, and *badikia*, already reflect the substantive values associated with Islam Nusantara. These practices show how Islam has long been lived through local cultural forms without being perceived as a new or foreign religious orientation. From this perspective, the substance of Islam Nusantara is not entirely unfamiliar to Minangkabau religious life, because similar patterns of cultural accommodation have already been practiced within local traditions (F, personal communication, July 12, 2021).

However, F also explained that the term Islam Nusantara itself is difficult to use openly in public discussions. Although the practices associated with it are socially accepted, the label has become burdened with negative associations. Among some community members, Islam Nusantara is not understood as a cultural expression of Islam in the Indonesian archipelago, but as a concept linked to religious deviation, liberal thought, or external influence. As a result, NU activists may recognize the relevance of the concept, yet remain cautious in using the term because it can provoke suspicion or rejection (F, personal communication, July 12, 2021).

This situation shows that the label Islam Nusantara carries a social burden that is not attached to the practices themselves. For some NU actors, publicly using the term may expose them to accusations of promoting a deviant teaching, advancing a liberal agenda, being too closely associated with NU, or introducing religious ideas perceived as coming from outside Minangkabau. Therefore, the resistance toward Islam Nusantara is not only a matter of doctrinal disagreement, but also a matter of social risk. The label can create hesitation even among those who understand that its substantive values are already present in Minangkabau Islamic traditions.

The stigma attached to the label Islam Nusantara was intensified by the circulation of misinformation. D, a Banser member in Pasaman Barat, recalled that some people in his own family mocked him by asking, "So Banser now prays in Indonesian?" This remark refers to a recurring misconception that Islam Nusantara requires Muslims to translate ritual prayers, including the five daily prayers, into Indonesian. Although this claim does not represent the actual meaning of Islam Nusantara, its circulation contributed to the perception that the concept was doctrinally suspicious and potentially deviant (D, personal communication, July 12, 2021).

This example shows that the rejection of the Islam Nusantara label was not shaped only by public debate, but also by everyday social pressure within family and community settings. The association of IN with altered ritual practices made the label socially risky for those connected to NU or Banser. As a result, some individuals became cautious about publicly identifying with Islam Nusantara, even when they continued to practice local religious traditions that were substantively compatible with it. In this context, stigma operated through ridicule, suspicion, and fear of being associated with a religious idea perceived as foreign or deviant.

These accounts show that the rejection of Islam Nusantara in Minangkabau is not primarily directed at local Islamic practices themselves. Practices such as *maulid*, *badikia*, *Yasin* recitations, *sholawatan*, *malamang*, and post-death rituals remain accepted as familiar parts of Minangkabau religious life. Resistance emerges when these practices are explicitly named, framed, or publicly

identified as Islam Nusantara. The label activates suspicion because it has been associated with external influence, religious deviation, and ideological agendas. Thus, the first pattern of ambivalence lies in the coexistence of practical acceptance and symbolic rejection: the practices continue to be maintained, while the label attached to them is socially contested.

## 2. ABS-SBK as a Contested Interpretive Field

Interview data show that ABS-SBK was repeatedly described by informants as the main framework through which Minangkabau people understand the relationship between Islam and *adat*. Informants did not treat ABS-SBK merely as a cultural slogan, but as a familiar reference for explaining how religious values and local customs are connected in everyday social and religious life. However, the data also indicate that ABS-SBK is not interpreted in a single or uniform way. For some informants, it represents the historical integration of Islam and local tradition, while for others it functions as a standard for determining which cultural practices are religiously acceptable and which ideas are considered external or problematic. This variation shows that ABS-SBK serves as a shared foundation, but its meaning remains open to different interpretations.

In everyday religious life, informants described ABS-SBK as a framework through which *adat* and Islam are understood as mutually connected. This principle shapes not only general cultural identity, but also social norms, ritual practices, and the ways people evaluate whether a local tradition remains religiously acceptable. Within this framework, local practices are not automatically viewed as opposed to Islam. Instead, they are often understood as part of the historical process through which Islamic values have been embedded in Minangkabau social life.

TA explained that practices such as *badikia*, *maulid* celebrations, and grave pilgrimages have long been part of communal religious life in Minangkabau. These practices were not described as external innovations or newly introduced religious forms, but as inherited expressions of Minangkabau Islam that have been maintained across generations. Because they are already situated within the historical experience of ABS-SBK, such practices are widely regarded as legitimate elements of local religiosity rather than as deviations from Islamic teaching (TA, personal communication, July 14, 2021).

TA emphasized that *badikia*, *maulid* celebrations, and grave pilgrimages have long been embedded in communal religious life in Minangkabau. These practices were not understood as new religious forms introduced from outside the community, but as part of Minangkabau cultural and religious history. They have been practiced across generations and are commonly accepted as familiar expressions of local Islam. This account indicates that cultural accommodation is not rejected when it is articulated through the familiar language of Minangkabau tradition and ABS-SBK. In other words, these practices are accepted as part of Islam Minangkabau, rather than being identified with Islam Nusantara as a new or external label (TA, personal communication, July 14, 2021).

Alongside the acceptance of local religious practices within the ABS-SBK framework, informants also identified competing narratives that portrayed Islam Nusantara as a threat to religious orthodoxy. S explained that IN was often discussed not as a cultural expression of Islam, but as if it represented a new religious stream that could disturb established Islamic norms in Minangkabau society. In some public conversations, IN was also associated with *Javanization* because of its perceived connection with Nahdlatul Ulama and Javanese religious culture. This

framing made the concept appear external to Minangkabau Islam, even though several practices associated with cultural accommodation had already existed in local religious life (S, personal communication, July 11, 2021).

SS, a former head of the NU branch in Pasaman Barat, explained that such interpretations were largely shaped by limited public understanding of the term Islam Nusantara. According to him, IN does not refer to a new sect or a doctrine that changes Islamic teachings, but to Islam as practiced within the cultural context of the Indonesian archipelago. However, unfamiliarity with the term allowed it to be interpreted as an attempt to “Indonesianize” Islam or alter established religious practices, including misconceptions about the language of ritual prayer. This account shows that IN became controversial not because local cultural practices were absent from Minangkabau Islam, but because the term was framed as unfamiliar, external, and doctrinally suspicious (SS, personal communication, June 11, 2021).

These findings show that ABS-SBK functions not only as a shared cultural-religious foundation, but also as an interpretive field in which the meaning of legitimate local Islam is negotiated. Local practices such as *badikia*, *maulid*, and grave pilgrimages are accepted when they are understood as inherited parts of Minangkabau tradition and situated within the ABS-SBK framework. However, similar forms of cultural accommodation may become suspicious when they are associated with the label Islam Nusantara, which some informants described as external, unfamiliar, or doctrinally problematic. This pattern indicates that ABS-SBK is not interpreted in a neutral or uniform way. Rather, it becomes a space in which different actors define which expressions of Islam are considered authentically Minangkabau and which are viewed as threats to religious and cultural boundaries.

### 3. Institutional and Digital Production of Threat Narratives

Interview and documentary data indicate that suspicion toward Islam Nusantara in Minangkabau did not emerge spontaneously, but was strengthened through the interaction of institutional statements, elite framing, and the circulation of simplified narratives through sermons, social media, WhatsApp groups, and informal networks. Informants described that many community members encountered Islam Nusantara not through systematic explanation from NU or academic sources, but through narratives that associated the concept with external influence, doctrinal deviation, cultural intrusion, or political affiliation. These channels shaped public understanding of Islam Nusantara as a controversial and potentially problematic idea, rather than as a cultural discourse about Islam as practiced in the Indonesian archipelago.

Informants explained that institutional statements from religious and customary authorities strongly influenced how ordinary community members evaluated Islam Nusantara. In West Sumatra, institutions such as MUI Sumbar and MTKAAM were described as having symbolic authority in defining which religious views were considered legitimate and compatible with Minangkabau identity. F noted that official religious positions often became the main reference for people who did not follow the debate on Islam Nusantara directly. When respected institutions issued criticism or rejection, many community members treated such statements as sufficient guidance for assessing whether IN was acceptable within Islam and the ABS-SBK framework (F, personal communication, June 11, 2021).

TRS, a Banser activist in Padang Pariaman, similarly explained that many Minangkabau Muslims relied on a single fatwa, public statement, or institutional position when forming their views about Islam Nusantara. This reliance made institutional discourse influential in shaping public suspicion, especially among those who had limited access to alternative explanations from NU activists or academic discussions. Once institutional statements circulated widely, they tended to become dominant references in everyday conversations, making Islam Nusantara appear controversial even before many people understood its conceptual meaning (TRS, personal communication, July 14, 2021).

Informants also identified elite narratives that framed Islam Nusantara as a concept external to Minangkabau Islam. ES and F explained that some community members viewed IN as a Javanese or NU-based product, making it appear as a form of cultural influence from outside Minangkabau rather than as a description of Islam as practiced in the Indonesian archipelago. This framing resonated with local concerns over religious and cultural authenticity because Minangkabau society already possesses ABS-SBK as its own framework for relating Islam and *adat*. T similarly noted that IN was sometimes discussed as if it introduced a new religious doctrine or a deviant religious orientation, rather than describing existing Muslim practices shaped by local culture. Through this framing, Islam Nusantara became associated not only with external cultural influence, but also with suspicion of doctrinal deviation (ES and F, personal communication, June 11, 2021; T, personal communication, July 10, 2021).

The association of Islam Nusantara with Nahdlatul Ulama also contributed to public suspicion toward the concept. Informants explained that, in some local narratives, IN was not understood as a broad cultural expression of Islam in Indonesia, but as a discourse specifically promoted by NU. Because NU was often perceived as having stronger historical and cultural roots in Java, the concept was then read by some community members as carrying a Javanese religious identity rather than representing Minangkabau Islam. This association made IN appear politically and organizationally marked, especially among those who were already distant from NU networks. As a result, the rejection of IN was not only directed at the term itself, but also at its perceived connection with NU as an external religious organization within the Minangkabau context (ES and F, personal communication, June 11, 2021; T, personal communication, July 10, 2021).

Informants further explained that Islam Nusantara was often perceived as incompatible with Minangkabau because the region was already seen as having its own established religious-cultural foundation through ABS-SBK. TA emphasized that practices such as *badikia*, *maulid*, and grave pilgrimages had long been embedded in Minangkabau communal religious life and were understood as part of local cultural history rather than as practices introduced from outside the community (TA, personal communication, July 14, 2021). In this context, ES and F noted that the presence of ABS-SBK made IN appear unnecessary or external, since Minangkabau society was believed to have already developed its own framework for integrating Islam and *adat* (ES and F, personal communication, June 11, 2021). S also observed that IN was often discussed as if it challenged established religious norms, while SS explained that limited public understanding allowed the term to be interpreted as an attempt to "Indonesianize" Islam or alter existing religious practices (S, personal communication, July 11, 2021; SS, personal communication, June 11, 2021). Thus, the perception that IN "does not fit" Minangkabau was shaped by the belief that ABS-SBK already provides a more authentic local framework for Islam, while IN was framed as external, unfamiliar, and potentially disruptive.

A further doctrinal frame presented Islam Nusantara as a new religious stream or a form of deviation from established Islamic teachings. T, a Banser NU member in Pasaman Barat, noted that IN was often discussed as if it introduced a new doctrine, rather than describing existing Muslim practices that had been shaped by local cultural contexts. In this framing, IN was no longer understood as a cultural approach to Islam, but was associated with *bid'ah*, theological innovation, or an attempt to alter accepted religious norms. This perception contributed to the suspicion that IN was doctrinally unsafe and therefore unsuitable for Minangkabau Muslims, even though many local practices associated with cultural accommodation had already been maintained within the community (T, personal communication, July 10, 2021).

After these narratives framed Islam Nusantara as external, NU-associated, incompatible with Minangkabau identity, or doctrinally suspicious, the next issue concerns how such narratives circulated among ordinary community members. Interview data indicate that these perceptions did not remain limited to formal religious debates, but were reproduced through everyday communication channels, especially WhatsApp groups, sermons, study circles, social media, and informal conversations. ES explained that many community members encountered Islam Nusantara not through direct explanation from NU or academic discussion, but through fragmented narratives shared in everyday communication spaces. AT similarly noted that WhatsApp groups often became key arenas for circulating short videos, forwarded messages, religious statements, and simplified claims about IN. Because these messages were shared within trusted family, religious, or community networks, they were often accepted with limited verification and gradually shaped public suspicion toward the concept (ES, personal communication, June 12, 2021; AT, personal communication, June 12, 2021).

Religious sermons and *majelis pengajian* also contributed to the circulation of these threat narratives. MT and D observed that direct discussions about Islam Nusantara at the grassroots level rarely occurred unless they were triggered by content circulating through social media or messaging platforms. In many cases, community members became familiar with IN through polemical explanations that connected it with religious deviation, external cultural influence, or changes to established Islamic practices. These narratives were then reinforced through informal conversations within families and local communities, especially when the information was attributed to religious figures or institutions considered authoritative. This process shows that digital messages, sermons, and everyday conversations worked together in making IN appear controversial and doctrinally suspicious (MT and D, personal communication, July 14, 2021).

These findings show that threat narratives surrounding Islam Nusantara in Minangkabau were shaped through the combined influence of institutional authority, elite framing, digital circulation, informal communication, and politically charged interpretations. Institutional statements provided legitimacy for public suspicion, while elite narratives associated IN with external influence, NU affiliation, Javanese cultural identity, and doctrinal deviation. These narratives were then amplified through WhatsApp groups, sermons, *majelis pengajian*, social media, and everyday conversations within trusted community networks. As a result, many community members encountered Islam Nusantara less as a conceptual discourse on Islam and local culture, and more as a socially controversial label linked to religious uncertainty, cultural intrusion, and political contestation.

## DISCUSSION

The findings reveal that ambivalence toward Islam Nusantara in Minangkabau is not a simple expression of anti-NU sentiment, anti-Javanese resistance, or theological disagreement, but a layered socio-religious process shaped by competing meanings of Islam, *adat*, and local identity. This ambivalence appears in three interrelated patterns. First, local Islamic practices associated with cultural accommodation remain socially accepted, while the label Islam Nusantara becomes contested when attached to those practices. Second, ABS-SBK functions not merely as a harmonious philosophy of Islam and *adat*, but as a contested interpretive field through which different actors define the boundaries of legitimate Minangkabau Islam. Third, suspicion toward Islam Nusantara is produced and amplified through institutional authority, elite framing, digital media, sermons, WhatsApp groups, and informal community networks. Taken together, these findings show that the controversy over Islam Nusantara in Minangkabau is best understood as a struggle over labels, authority, and interpretive control rather than as a direct rejection of local Islamic practices themselves.

The acceptance of local Islamic practices and the rejection of the Islam Nusantara label can be explained through the logic of social ambivalence. Practices such as *maulid*, *badikia*, grave pilgrimages, *Yasin* recitations, *sholawatan*, *malamang*, and post-death rituals are accepted because they have been embedded in Minangkabau religious memory, family traditions, and everyday communal life. These practices are not perceived as foreign innovations, but as inherited forms of local religiosity that have long been accommodated within the Minangkabau understanding of Islam and *adat*. However, when similar practices are named or framed through the label Islam Nusantara, they become socially and religiously contested. Drawing on Hajda's theory of ambivalence, this tension shows that ambivalence is not merely an individual psychological hesitation, but a social condition produced by conflicting meanings and expectations within a community. In this case, the same pattern of cultural accommodation is accepted when it appears as Minangkabau tradition, but resisted when it is attached to a label perceived as external, ideological, or threatening (Hajda, 1968).

This finding also demonstrates the importance of label politics and symbolic rejection in explaining the controversy. The problem is not primarily the substance of the practices, but the symbolic and socio-political meanings attached to the name Islam Nusantara. The label carries a new burden because it has been associated by some actors with Nahdlatul Ulama, Javanese cultural influence, liberal Islamic thought, doctrinal deviation, or external intervention in Minangkabau religious life. As a result, practices that remain legitimate under the language of local tradition become controversial when classified under a national religious discourse viewed as politically and culturally marked. This symbolic rejection shows that communities may accept the religious practice while rejecting the identity, organization, or ideological meaning attached to it. By foregrounding social ambivalence, label politics, symbolic rejection, and interpretive contestation, this study offers a framework for explaining why religious practices may be socially accepted while the discourse that names them is simultaneously resisted (Hajda, 1968).

Previous studies have largely explained Islam Nusantara as a normative and conceptual framework for articulating a moderate, tolerant, and culturally accommodative form of Indonesian Islam. This literature emphasizes that IN is rooted in the integration of Islamic teachings with local traditions and is often positioned as a counter-narrative to Arabization, radicalism, and rigid forms of religious exclusivism (Adis Duderija, 2022; Fridiyanto, 2019; Fuadi et al., 2024; Kato, 2021; Schäfer, 2021; Thahir, 2021; Thohir, 2022). Other studies strengthen this normative reading by

discussing the epistemological and juridical foundations of Islam Nusantara, especially through concepts such as *Fiqh Nusantara*, *'urf*, *mashlahah mursalah*, *istihsân*, and religious moderation as mechanisms for harmonizing Islamic law with Indonesia's sociocultural realities (Harisudin, 2021; Khoiri et al., 2025; Supena, 2021). From this perspective, Islam Nusantara is understood as a legitimate Islamic discourse because it does not reject Islamic normativity, but contextualizes it within local cultural experiences.

However, the findings of this study complicate that literature by showing that conceptual or normative legitimacy does not automatically produce social acceptance. In Minangkabau, the problem is not only whether Islam Nusantara can be justified through *'urf*, *mashlahah*, moderation, or local wisdom, but how the label is socially interpreted within a specific religious-cultural setting. A concept may be strong at the level of theology, epistemology, or jurisprudence, yet still be resisted when its label is perceived as foreign, politically marked, organizationally associated with NU, culturally linked to Java, or threatening to local identity. This study therefore shifts the discussion from the question of whether Islam Nusantara is normatively valid to the question of why a normatively defensible discourse may fail to gain local symbolic acceptance. In doing so, it shows that the controversy over IN in Minangkabau is not only a debate over religious ideas, but also a struggle over naming, authority, and the social meaning attached to Islamic labels.

This shift constitutes one of the main contributions of this article. Rather than asking whether Islam Nusantara is conceptually, theologically, or epistemologically legitimate, this study asks why the label Islam Nusantara is rejected even when religious practices that resemble its substantive values continue to be accepted in everyday Minangkabau life. This analytical shift moves the discussion beyond normative debates over the validity of IN and toward the social life of religious labels: how they are named, framed, circulated, stigmatized, and interpreted within local communities. In this sense, the rejection of IN in Minangkabau cannot be fully explained by examining the doctrine or concept alone; it must also be understood through the symbolic burden attached to the label, the authority of actors who define it, and the local interpretive framework through which communities decide whether a religious expression belongs to "authentic" Minangkabau Islam. Therefore, the novelty of this study lies in showing that the controversy over Islam Nusantara is not merely about conceptual legitimacy, but about the politics of labeling and the social conditions under which a familiar practice becomes rejected when it is named differently.

The findings also reinterpret ABS-SBK not merely as a harmonious philosophical formula that integrates Islam and *adat*, but as a contested interpretive field in which different actors negotiate the boundaries of legitimate Minangkabau Islam. This interpretation is consistent with studies on Islam and local religion in Indonesia, which show that the encounter between Islam and local traditions often involves conflict, compromise, and accommodation rather than simple harmony (Hasse, 2016). Previous studies on Minangkabau have often emphasized ABS-SBK as a cultural-religious foundation that reconciles Islamic values with customary traditions and sustains Minangkabau identity (Asrinaldi & Yoserizal, 2020; Hadler, 2008; Syafrina, 2021; Syamsuddin, 2004; von Benda-Beckmann & von Benda-Beckmann, 2012). However, this study shows that ABS-SBK is not interpreted uniformly. Some actors understand it as a space of accommodation in which Islam and *adat* can coexist through historical negotiation, while others interpret it hierarchically, positioning *syarak* as the authority that disciplines, limits, or even overrides *adat* when local practices are seen as inconsistent with scriptural norms. This hierarchical interpretation of ABS-SBK helps explain why Islam Nusantara is perceived as disturbing by conservative actors: IN emphasizes

cultural accommodation and dialogical engagement with local traditions, whereas these actors seek to preserve a more restrictive boundary between acceptable Islamic practice and cultural elements considered excessive, external, or doctrinally risky. In this sense, the rejection of IN reflects a process of religious-cultural boundary making, where ABS-SBK becomes an arena for determining which forms of local Islam are recognized as authentically Minangkabau and which are rejected as alien, liberal, or threatening to religious purity (Zainal, 2014; Zakirman et al., 2025; Zulfadli, Dewi Anggraini, 2020).

This study complicates the literature on local Islam and the indigenization of Islam by showing that cultural accommodation is not always accepted or rejected on substantive grounds alone. Previous studies have demonstrated that Islam in Indonesia has historically developed through negotiation with local cultures, producing forms of religiosity that accommodate *adat*, local wisdom, nationalism, and community-based religious practices (Boenga, 2020; Darajat, 2015; Faisal, 2018; Hoesterey, 2022; Kaçer, 2024; Qomar, 2019; Woodward, 2019). In the Minangkabau context, the literature also shows that the relationship between Islam and *adat* has been shaped by long historical negotiations involving *ulama*, *ninik mamak*, matrilineal traditions, reformist movements, and customary institutions (Hadler, 2008; von Benda-Beckmann & von Benda-Beckmann, 2012; Yafiz et al., 2025). However, the findings of this study show that cultural accommodation is not automatically accepted simply because it resembles local Islamic practice. Rather, its acceptance depends on how it is named, framed, and authorized within local religious discourse. Practices such as *maulid*, *badikia*, grave pilgrimages, communal recitations, *malamang*, and post-death rituals are accepted when presented as inherited Minangkabau tradition, but become contested when associated with the label Islam Nusantara. This selective reception is consistent with studies showing that Minangkabau traditions continue to be maintained through negotiations among religious leaders, *niniak mamak*, customary leaders, mosque communities, and local society (Lisman et al., 2023). This indicates a selective reception of local Islam: cultural accommodation is legitimate when it is embedded in the familiar language of ABS-SBK and Minangkabau religious memory, but may be rejected when introduced through a label perceived as external, organizationally marked, or ideologically suspicious.

The production of threat narratives surrounding Islam Nusantara also shows how institutional authority, elite framing, trusted networks, and digital amplification interact in shaping public suspicion. In West Sumatra, institutions such as MUI Sumbar, MTKAAM, and other customary-religious authorities possess strong symbolic legitimacy, so their rejection of IN did not function merely as an institutional opinion, but became a reference point through which many community members assessed whether the concept was religiously and culturally acceptable. This institutional authority was reinforced by elite framing that associated Islam Nusantara with NU, Java, external cultural influence, incompatibility with Minangkabau identity, or even doctrinal deviation. Such frames were then circulated and intensified through WhatsApp groups, sermons, *majelis pengajian*, short videos, forwarded messages, social media posts, and informal conversations within families and local communities. Because these messages moved through trusted networks—religious teachers, family members, community leaders, and familiar digital groups—they were often treated as credible even when they simplified or distorted the meaning of IN. This process reflects the everyday circulation of religious suspicion: threat narratives were not produced only in formal institutional spaces, but were reproduced through ordinary communication practices that

made Islam Nusantara appear increasingly foreign, risky, and controversial in Minangkabau society (Akmaliah, 2022; Ridwan et al., 2019; Safitri et al., 2016; Slama, 2020).

The production of threat narratives surrounding Islam Nusantara also shows how institutional authority, elite framing, trusted networks, and digital amplification interact in shaping public suspicion. Previous studies have shown that debates over Islam Nusantara are closely tied to mediated struggles over religious authority, in which institutional actors and digital platforms shape whether IN is perceived as a moderate Islamic discourse or as a contested religious symbol (Akmaliah, 2020; Schmidt, 2021). This dynamic is further intensified in networked religious spaces, where credibility is not produced only by formal authority, but also through trusted interpersonal networks, repeated circulation, and digital visibility (Zaid et al., 2026). In this context, digital religious authority is increasingly constructed through narrative strategies, linguistic style, audience engagement, and the ability of religious actors to build legitimacy in social media spaces (Firdaus & Sidik, 2024). This helps explain why simplified narratives about Islam Nusantara could gain credibility when circulated through familiar digital networks, even when they did not accurately represent the concept.

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The findings also reveal the positive function of ABS-SBK in sustaining Minangkabau Islamic identity. Despite competing interpretations, ABS-SBK remains a strong cultural-religious foundation through which Minangkabau society defines the relationship between Islam, *adat*, and local belonging. Its continued authority helps explain why local practices such as *maulid*, *badikia*, grave pilgrimages, communal recitations, *malamang*, and post-death rituals remain socially meaningful and religiously acceptable when understood as inherited Minangkabau traditions. Similar studies on Minangkabau rituals show that local traditions are preserved because they sustain symbolic meaning, social cohesion, spirituality, and cultural identity within the community (Utami et al., 2023). In this sense, ABS-SBK provides a mechanism for preserving local religious continuity, allowing communities to maintain familiar forms of Islamic practice while also safeguarding what they perceive as the authenticity of Minangkabau Islam. Thus, the persistence of ABS-SBK shows that local society is not passively receiving external religious discourses, but actively filtering, authorizing, and preserving religious expressions through its own cultural and normative framework.

The findings also point to several dysfunctions in the social reception of Islam Nusantara. First, a religious label can be rejected not because of the substance of the practices associated with it, but because the label has been stigmatized and symbolically marked as problematic. Studies on religious labeling show that labels are never neutral; they are shaped by power, boundary-making, and identity politics, and communities may resist imposed labels when they feel that such labels misrepresent their religious practices or threaten their self-understanding (Farhan & Syed, 2025; Power, 2023; Ramey, 2007). Second, institutional authority may narrow the space for dialogue when dominant narratives are defensive or boundary-oriented. Religious institutions often function as gatekeepers of orthodoxy and public legitimacy, shaping how communities define acceptable and unacceptable interpretations of Islam (Cohoe, 2016; Neyazi, 2014). In the Minangkabau case, when authoritative institutions frame IN as incompatible with Islamic purity or local identity, alternative explanations from NU or other supporters may become harder to circulate. Third, digital media can accelerate misunderstanding because WhatsApp groups, forwarded messages, short videos, and social media posts allow simplified religious claims to spread rapidly through trusted networks. Studies on misinformation and digital religion in Indonesia show that WhatsApp and online religious spaces can amplify suspicion, hate speech, and fragmented understandings of religious issues, especially when messages are received from familiar or morally trusted sources (I. Abdullah et al., 2024; Fathurrohman et al., 2024; Hasanah & Busro, 2023; Wendratama et al., 2023). Thus, the dysfunction of the controversy lies in the way stigma, institutional authority, and digital circulation can transform a complex religious discourse into a simplified threat narrative that becomes difficult to correct once it is socially internalized.

This study offers both academic and practical implications. Academically, it contributes to the study of Islam Nusantara by introducing the concept of practice acceptance and label rejection, showing that local religious practices may be socially accepted while the discourse that names them is resisted. It also expands the literature on local Islam by positioning ABS-SBK not merely as a harmonious formula of Islam and *adat*, but as a contested interpretive field in which actors negotiate the boundaries of legitimate Minangkabau Islam. In addition, it enriches studies on media, religious authority, and public controversy by demonstrating how informal and digital networks, such as WhatsApp groups, short videos, sermons, forwarded messages, and family conversations—participate in producing stigma around religious labels. Practically, these findings suggest that communication about Islam Nusantara in Minangkabau must be more sensitive to local language, religious memory, and Minangkabau identity. NU and other actors supporting IN cannot rely solely on normative explanations of the concept; they need to show how its values are connected to familiar local practices that communities already recognize. This also requires more innovative digital counter-narratives, since moderate Islamic organizations such as NU and Muhammadiyah are increasingly challenged to respond to radical, conservative, or misleading religious narratives circulating in online spaces (Kuswana, 2024). Religious and customary institutions also need to create dialogical spaces that distinguish theological criticism, cultural anxiety, and misinformation, rather than allowing all concerns to merge into a single threat narrative. Finally, strengthening digital religious literacy is essential because WhatsApp messages, short videos, and forwarded claims can quickly shape public perception before more careful explanations have the opportunity to circulate.

## CONCLUSION

This study concludes that the rejection of Islam Nusantara in Minangkabau cannot be understood simply as opposition to Nahdlatul Ulama, Javanese influence, or theological difference. The central finding of this study is that ambivalence toward Islam Nusantara emerges through the separation between accepted local Islamic practices and the rejected label attached to them. Practices such as *maulid*, *badikia*, grave pilgrimages, communal recitations, *malamang*, and post-death rituals remain embedded in Minangkabau religious memory and everyday communal life. However, when these practices are named or framed as Islam Nusantara, they become contested because the label carries symbolic, ideological, and political burdens. This shows that the controversy is not primarily about the substance of religious practice, but about the social meaning of the label through which such practices are interpreted.

The study contributes to the literature on Islam Nusantara, local Islam, and religious authority in three ways. First, it introduces the concept of practice acceptance and label rejection to explain why communities may accept religious practices that resemble Islam Nusantara while simultaneously resisting the discourse that names them. Second, it positions ABS-SBK not merely as a harmonious cultural-religious philosophy, but as a contested interpretive field in which different actors negotiate the boundaries of legitimate Minangkabau Islam. Third, it shows that suspicion toward Islam Nusantara is not produced only through formal theological debate, but also through institutional authority, elite framing, digital circulation, WhatsApp groups, sermons, family conversations, and other trusted informal networks. By foregrounding social ambivalence, label politics, symbolic rejection, and interpretive contestation, this study offers a more nuanced framework for understanding how religious labels become accepted, resisted, or stigmatized in local Muslim societies.

Nevertheless, this study has several limitations. The research focuses on Padang Pariaman and Pasaman Barat, so its findings cannot be generalized to all Minangkabau communities or to all Muslim societies in Indonesia. The study also relies primarily on qualitative interviews and selected documentary materials, meaning that it does not measure the wider distribution of public opinion toward Islam Nusantara across different social groups. In addition, although digital media and WhatsApp circulation emerged as important factors, this study did not conduct a systematic digital ethnography or large-scale social media analysis. Future research could therefore expand the geographical scope, compare different Minangkabau regions, include broader categories of informants, or examine digital narratives more systematically. Such studies would help deepen understanding of how religious labels, local identity, institutional authority, and digital communication interact in shaping contemporary Islamic discourse in Indonesia.

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