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How Indonesia Faces Identity Politics: The Review of Malay Identity Politics in Riau Province, Indonesia

Ali Yusri¹, Tito Handoko¹, M. Rafi², Tika Mutia³, Rini Oktiwi Ningsih⁴

¹ *Department of Political Science, Faculty of Social and Political Science, Universitas Riau, Pekanbaru, Indonesia*

² *Master of Government Affairs and Administration, Postgraduate Program, Universitas Muhammadiyah Yogyakarta, Yogyakarta, Indonesia*

³ *Department of Communication, Faculty of Da'wah and Communication Studies, UIN Suska Riau, Pekanbaru, Indonesia*

⁴ *Department of East Asian Studies, Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, University of Malaya, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia*

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Abstract:

This article analyzes the history and existence of Riau Malay identity politics in the modern era using various pertinent sources. This study employs qualitative research methods, in which some relevant sources will be analyzed using the NVivo 12 Plus software, accompanied by systematic explanations and visuals about ideas concerning the identity politics of Riau Malays in the modern era. This study concludes that, from a historical perspective, the efforts of the government and society in Riau Province to strengthen Malay identity have provided hope for a brighter future for Malay culture through strategic actions based on indigenous knowledge. However, many migrants from other regions and the lack of local government steps to strengthen the Malay culture sustainably, this has resulted in the marginalization of the Malay culture in Riau Province. This research is an important contribution to the local government in seeking more progressive and innovative steps in protecting the local values of Malay culture, which are currently threatened with extinction in Riau Province. This research is a follow-up study from the previous article, where the innovation of this study has visualized a historical review and the extent of the existence of Riau Malay identity politics in the modern era and emphasized the importance of Malay cultural identity for people in Riau Province.

Keywords: identity, politics, Malay.

印度尼西亚如何面对身份政治：印度尼西亚廖内省马来身份政治的回顾

摘要:

本文利用各种相关资料分析了现代廖内马来人身份政治的历史和存在。本研究采用定性研究方法，其中将使用英伟达 12 加软件分析一些相关来源，并附有关于现代廖内马来人身份政治思想的系统解释和视觉效果。本研究得出的结论是，从历史的角度来看，廖内省政府和社会为加强马来人认同所做的努力，通过基于土著知识的战略行动，为马来文化的光明未来提供了希望。然而，许多来自其他地区的移民以及当地政府缺乏可持续地加强马来文化的措施，这导致了廖内省马来文化的边缘化。这项研究为当地政府寻求更进步和创新的步骤来保护马来文化的当地价值观做出了重要贡献，这些价值观目前在廖内省面临灭绝的威胁。本研究是上一篇文章的后续研究，本研究的创新之处在于将历史回顾和廖内马来人身份政治在现代存在的程度形象化，并强调马来文化身份对人们的重要性。廖内省。

关键词: 身份，政治，马来语。

1. Introduction

Currently, the study of identity politics is still classified as an issue that is often present in the public sphere because many aspects and dimensions can be studied and analyzed systematically from various scientific perspectives (Damanik, 2020; Mietzner, 2020). Race, culture, political ideology, and local preferences are just a few examples of issues that Indonesian elites use to express their interests in identity politics (Syam, 2020; Wang, 2021). Then in the process, identity politics at the local level also becomes more viscous and dominant because each region wants to be led by its local son (Jubba et al., 2021a, 2021b; Rafi et al., 2020a, 2020b). This commitment to a strong national spirit is fundamental to the growth and development of Indonesia's Unitary State of the Republic as a nation. However, despite Indonesia's success in breaking down ethnic and religious divides through civil nationalism, the ethnic identity of community groups remains ingrained throughout its history. This shows that ethnicity is an inherent identity that is born from birth (Mietzner, 2020; Sabarudin, 2021). As a result, every person born in Indonesia will be able to claim various ethnic identities, including Javanese, Sundanese, Batak, Minangkabau, Chinese, and ethnic Malay, which the Indonesian population census divides into 1331 distinct ethnic groups (Badan Pusat Statistik, 2015).

According to Damanik (2020), it is explained that the recognition of a constructive identity paradigm will practically become a political tool because of this process. On the one hand, the organization of identity will be based on ethnic politics, which can be used to demand power-sharing. Additionally, there will also be identity sentiments that have implications for polarization, discrimination, and intolerance. Historically, identity politics is nothing new because it has taken root, especially in Indonesia. Theoretically, the strengthening of regional (local) identity brings new atmosphere to changes in the strategy of identity. Ethnic identity for example has been used as a political tool to show the existence of culture on the one hand, and

show the struggle on the other (Jubba et al., 2021a, 2021b). Thus, the interpretation of the past, the vision of the present, and the projection of the future are important parts of identity construction (Hardwick, 2014). The Malay people are one of the many ethnic groups still working on defining their own unique identity. In terms of how they relate to and interact with one another in their respective regions, the Malay ethnic groups in Southeast Asia and Indonesia have fundamentally different cultural presentations. Therefore, Indonesian Malay cultures have evolved because of the circumstances they found themselves in. Because of cultural and political pressures from the New Order government and the cultural homogenization of the New Order government that contributed to the Javanese ethnicity, the Indonesian Malay community was weakened (Alfarabi et al., 2019a, 2019b; Asrinaldi, 2018).

The province of Riau has a strong history of ethnic Malay identity, and this is one of Indonesia's provinces that continues to develop and strengthen its own identity (Artina, 2021; Suroyo et al., 2021). Riau's Malays have a strong connection to Malays in the Riau Archipelago, including Malays from Johor, Malacca, Singapore, and Minangkabau (Alfarabi et al., 2019a, 2019b). The lack of strategic positions held by Malays in Riau Province has been a major factor in the development and strengthening of Malay identity politics over time (Rafi et al., 2020a, 2020b). Also contributing to a stronger sense of place in Riau is the fact that large corporations control natural resources there, with little regard for the needs of the local Riau Malay community (Jubba et al., 2021a, 2021b). Furthermore, the local Malay elites in Riau Province took advantage of the newfound freedoms granted to ethnic Malays by the regional autonomy policy and the introduction of direct elections to the government (Alfarabi, 2019). To demonstrate the Malay community's existence, local elites have taken steps to strengthen their own cultural identity by erecting Selembayung flags on government buildings and dressing in Muslim garb. Meanwhile, in the political-

economic sector, demand for the Malays to hold strategic positions in their territory has been put forward (Rafi et al., 2020a, 2020b).

Furthermore, It is also worth noting that the Riau Provincial Government and the Riau Malay Customary Institution (LAMR) have worked together to promote Riau as a cultural epicenter for the Malay people throughout Southeast Asia through the Riau Vision and Mission 2020 initiative (Alfarabi et al., 2019a, 2019b; Rafi et al., 2020a, 2020b). According to Albintani and Ishak (2020), there is a risk that ethnic and ideological conflicts will arise in response to the presence of the Riau 2020 vision and mission set out by the Provincial Government and Riau Malay Customary Institution as an arena for "Malay" empowerment. Since "Malay" is legally-structured to mean that ethnic groups in the region must control regional power, this is the reason why this is the case. Although Riau Province has a higher percentage of Malays than any other province in Indonesia, this does not apply to all ethnic groups as shown in Figure 1.

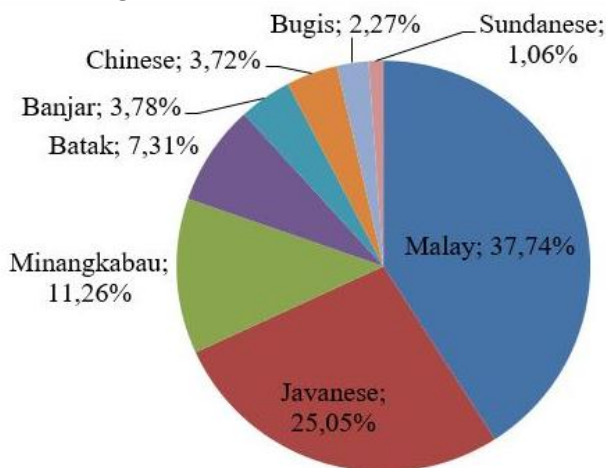


Figure 1. Number of ethnicities in Riau Province (Documentation of Riau Malay Customary Institution, 2021)

In Figure 1, it can be seen that the percentage of ethnic Malays is (37.74%), followed by Javanese (25.05%), Minangkabau (11.26%), Batak (7.31%), Banjar (3.78%), Chinese (3.72%), Bugis (2.27%), and Sundanese (1.06%). When viewed from the highest number of ethnicities, the Malays have the highest percentage. However, when compared further with other ethnic groups, ethnic Malays in Riau Province do not dominate as a whole in other ethnic groups. Then, although the political elites in Riau Province continue to try to build their Malay identity based on culture, language, and religion as a differentiator from immigrant community groups, this Malay identity is also still a subject of debate in the public sphere. For example, the east coast community on the island of Sumatra is considered coastal Malays and includes Dumai, Rokan Hilir, Bengkalis, Meranti Islands, some Indragiri Hilir, some Siak Sri Indrapura, and some Pelalawan. Meanwhile, mainland Malays are known as people from Pekanbaru, Kampar, Rokan Hulu, Kuantan Singingi, and parts of Indragiri Hulu and considered different from coastal Malays. The tendency of this

dichotomous perspective has weakened the identity politics of Malay ethnicity in Riau and has led to a desire for most elites in the coastal areas of Riau to redive Riau Province into Riau Pesisir Province (Asrinaldi, 2018; Rafi et al., 2020a, 2020b). Based on this, it is important to conduct this study to determine how Indonesia faces identity politics in the modern era based on a review of Malay identity politics in Riau province.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Identity Politics Concept

Identity politics has been developed for a long time and is present in various countries. Initially, identity politics emerged in the United States (USA) in the 1970s, when the country was faced with problems involving gender differences, feminism, race, ethnicity, and other social groups that felt oppressed and harassed (Sahabi & Nacho, 2020). In its development, the issue of identity politics does not only occur in the US but also in various other parts of the world, including Indonesia (Suryadinata, 2019; Yuwanto, 2013). In the Indonesian context, identity politics is more focused on issues of race, culture, and political power (Hamidah, 2018).

Adopting a firm and positive sense of shared identity to combat group marginalization is at the core of identity politics (Heywood, 2014). If so, according to Hellström and Tawat (2020), the struggle for political power does involve the increasingly common use of identity politics in everyday political practice. Meanwhile, according to Hamilton (2021), identity politics is always related to how to draw a clear line between who belongs to the group and who is not. Furthermore, the presence of identity politics is generally more oriented toward political interests to create opportunities and strengthen political careers, as well as easy access to economic resources and power (Damanik, 2020; Kolev, 2020; Sabarudin, 2021).

Several previous studies have shown that the construction of identity politics requires interpretation of the past, visions of the present, and projections of the future (Dunn, 2021; Hardwick, 2014). The stages of identity formation, according to Castells (2010), are as follows: First, legitimate identity is the image of institutions that regulate society and rationalize and maintain hegemony over social actors, such as state institutions that seek to enhance national identity by legitimizing the identity of its member communities. Second, resistance identity is a cycle of identity formation by social members who are under pressure from the domination and stereotypes of others to form opposition and create a different identity. Third, project identity is an identity through which members of a new culture can define a new position in society and fundamentally change the structure of society. Therefore, there are many ways that the public sphere can do to better understand the history of identity

politics, one of which is by looking through the eye of a systematic approach (Habibi, 2017).

2.2. The History and Existence of Riau Malay Identity Politics

Indonesia's experience reveals that the nature of the authoritarian regime in power has created how identity politics can become plural and evolve. Thus, ethnic-based identity politics in an area becomes very dominant, including the Malay ethnicity (Alfarabi et al., 2019a, 2019b; Hamidah, 2018; Yuwanto, 2013). After the hegemony of the new order, the reform era became a period in which regional identity in Indonesia was re-established. Throughout history, cultural and political pressures from the government during the New Order period have weakened society, especially the Malay ethnic community. This situation emerged because of the cultural homogenization of the new order government, which contributed to Javanization and eroded the Malay identity until reform arrived (Alfarabi et al., 2019a, 2019b). In theory, strengthening regional (local) identity creates a new environment for changing identity strategies. Where ethnic identity is always used as a political tool to show the existence of culture on the one hand, as well as show struggle on the other. So it can be seen that identity politics is not new because it has taken root, especially in Indonesia (Fautanu et al., 2020).

In Southeast Asian countries, ethnic Malays are always aware of the problems they will face as a group (Lian, 2016). However, ethnic Malays in Indonesia have narrowed and developed independently and are often dictated and adapted to the circumstances they face (Alfarabi et al., 2019a, 2019b). In the context of Malay Identity in Riau, several previous studies have explained that through three stages of identity formation (legitimacy identity, resistance identity, and project identity), the Riau people have been able to rediscover their Malay identity during the Reformation Period (Jubba et al., 2021a, 2021b; Rafi et al., 2020a, 2020b). Then, in the context of local democracy, the existence of Riau Malay culture is also still used in regional head elections as an additional strategy in political contestation (Rafi et al., 2020a, 2020b). Additionally, during the COVID-19 pandemic, all cultural arts activities that switched from offline to online impacted the decline in the existence of Malay culture, thus hampering efforts to inherit and develop Malay cultural arts in Riau (Utami et al., 2021). Thus, various previous studies have visualized the importance of Malay culture for the people of Riau, where Malay cultural identity has been degraded and further research is needed regarding historical reviews and the extent of the existence of Riau Malay identity politics in the modern era.

3. Research Method

This study uses a qualitative approach. According to Hennink et al. (2020), this approach can be used to

collect data about a phenomenon that is studied systematically. The data in this study came from primary and secondary data. The primary data in question were collected through interviews with Malay figures in the Riau Province. Meanwhile, secondary data were obtained from the various online news media content, government websites, books, journals, reports, proceedings, and several archives related to research. Documentation and interviews will be used to gather information about the various points of view of key figures in the Riau Province's Malay identity politics.

Then, NVivo 12 Plus software, which includes concept maps and crosstab queries, was used for data analysis in this study (Hai-Jew, 2020; Edwards-Jones, 2014). The three stages of data analysis used include:

- 1) The concept map analysis feature to review the process of developing Malay identity as a concept (node) in the study;
- 2) Using the crosstab query analysis feature, it is possible to visualize the percentage results of each actor being interviewed;
- 3) Synthesizing and interpreting the data from the results of the analysis systematically.

Thus, this study analyzes the ethnic-based modern identity politics in Indonesia.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1. Review of the History of Riau Malay Identity Politics

Riau Province is a Malay culture icon in Indonesia. According to history, the term Malay has been known since 644 AD, when Chinese writings mentioned the word "Mo-lo-ye" who sent envoys to China to bring agricultural products to the Chinese emperor. The word Malay became the name of the Kingdom at that time (Effendi, 2014). Indragiri Kingdom (1658–1838), Siak Sri Indrapura Kingdom (1723–1858), Pelalawan Kingdom (1530–1879), Riau-Lingga Kingdom (1824–1913), Tambusai Kingdom, Rantau Binuang Sakti Kingdom, Rambah Kingdom, Kampar Kingdom, and Kandis Kingdom were the Malay kingdoms in the province (Asrinaldi, 2018). Although the Riau Malay kingdom no longer exists due to its incorporation into Indonesia's Unitary State, Malay culture can still be found in Riau Province's community and government activities (Jubba et al., 2021a, 2021b; Rafi et al., 2020a, 2020b).

Rafi et al. (2020a, 2020b) explained that, after the arrival of the reform era, the people of Riau Province and their political elites have tried to strengthen Malay identity through three phases of identity development: legitimacy identity, resistance identity, and project identity. Based on the results of the analysis, the concept map of Malay identity politics in Riau Province is shown in Figure 2.

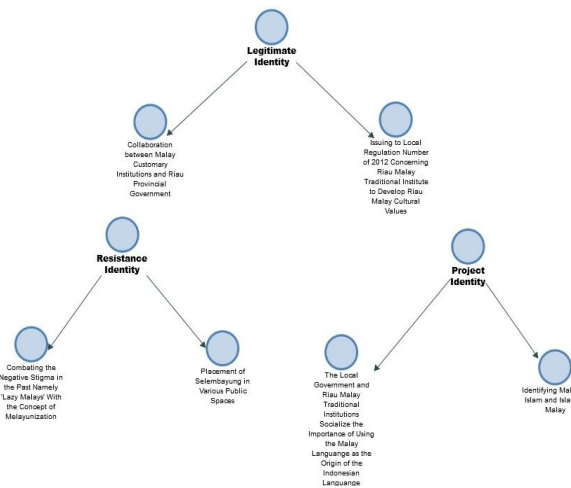


Figure 2. Analysis of the concept map of Malay identity politics in Riau (Analysis using NVivo 12 Plus, 2022)

Based on Figure 2, it can be seen that there are three phases of Malay identity development in Riau Province: legitimacy identity, resistance identity, and project identity. *First*, in the legitimacy identity phase, political elites of the Riau Provincial Government tried to strengthen Malay identity through policies and discourses. The Riau Malay Customary Institution was formed by Riau Province Regional Regulation Number 1 of 2012 to protect and preserve Malay cultural heritage by collaborating with the Riau Provincial Government to achieve Riau Vision and Mission 2020. The Riau Malay Customary Institution and Riau Provincial Government collaborate in policy-making. The Riau Malay Customary Institution also helps develop regional regulations, especially those about cultural inheritance and Malay community life in Riau Province.



Figure 3. Visualization of the collaboration between the Malay Traditional Institutions and the Riau Provincial Government (Cakaplah.com, 2019)

The Riau Provincial Government wants to preserve and develop the Malay culture as the collective identity of the Riau people. Then, the Riau Provincial Government also set a vision and mission that was extended from 2020 to 2025: *"The realization of Riau Province as a Malay Economic and Cultural Center in a Religious and Prosperous Society in Southeast Asia by 2025."*

Second, in the resistance identity phase, the

development of the concept of *"Melayunization"* is a concept used to respond to the negative views that were pinned on ethnic Malays in the past, such as "Malays are lazy people who don't work hard." Every ethnic group, at its core, wants to have a good reputation and even wants to do better than other ethnic groups. Ethnic groups with negative identities will always do their best to change their image by removing negative stereotypes. The Riau Malay community and its leaders are in a similar situation. They are trying to change how people think about their tribe. In the process, the negative stereotypes pinned on ethnic Malays have resulted in a negative Malay identity paradigm. Thus, through the discourse of Malay identity politics, efforts were made to eliminate these negative views. The process of changing this perspective includes the inculcation of Islamic values in all Malay community life, a concept known as *"Melayunization"* which is also reflected in the *"Selembayung"* in local government buildings and Riau people's homes. Selembayung is identification that shows the existence of Malay culture in Riau.



Figure 4. Visualization of the use of Selembayung in government buildings and people's houses in Riau (Salam, 2018)

In Figure 4, it can be seen that, on the roof of the building, Selembayung is used as the most impressive visualization sign to display. This is because Selembayung has a philosophical meaning in Malay identity politics itself. After the reform and regional autonomy, the policy of using Selembayung was carried out in stages. In particular, Selembayung is considered to represent the relationship between humans and their creator (God). When humans face difficulties in their lives, they are expected to remember God, worship, and surrender because all that is alive will eventually return to its creator. The position of Selembayung is also critical in Malay architecture because the values it symbolizes are comprehensive, starting from the most transcendent realm (divinity) to the most immanent realm (daily life). Contemporary Malay buildings or architecture in Riau, despite undergoing various modifications, have never left Selembayung as part of it. Because of its position, the government tried to formally include Selembayung as an element of Riau Malay identity.

Third, during the project's identity phase, the local government and the Riau Malay Customary Institution talked to people about how important it is to speak Malay in Riau Province. In Riau Malay identity politics, the Malay language is used to show that the people of Riau are Malay. Malay is a philosophical language that ethnic Malays use to decide whether

Islam is an important part of their lives. Islam will affect the Malay culture, including how the language is used. The Malay dialect is also used to spread Islamic ideas to keep Malay people from fighting with each other.



Figure 5. Government socialization of communities to use Malay in Riau Province (Hadiawan, 2017)

People in Riau think that Malays are people who speak Malay and follow Islam. People who do not follow Islam or use Malay in their daily lives are not considered pure Malays. According to several studies, the bond between Islam and Malay is compelling and difficult to break (Ishak & Abdullah, 2012; Solihin, 2017). This can be interpreted as that Islamic references always exist in the social practice of the Riau people today. This is the result of the previous identification. With their Islamic identity, the attitude of the Malay community will be measured by these Islamic values. Identification of Islam in the Malay perspective will be seen when there is a phenomenon of someone who will leave Islam, then that person is automatically deemed out of Malay itself. The same thing will also happen when someone who professes Islam will be said to be Malay in the eyes of the public. Therefore, this strategy is a way of identifying Malay as Islam and Islam as Malay. This is a historical look at the time when the Malay identity was being formed in Riau Province.

4.2. The Existence of Riau Malay Identity Politics in the Modern Era

According to the research of Utami et al. (2021) it was explained that in the modern era, there are differences in the existence of Malay cultural identity in Riau Province. Although not very significant, if the Riau government and people cannot adapt to the current situation, Malay cultural identity may decline in Riau Province. Then, based on the results of interviews conducted and analyzed using the NVivo 12 Plus software, the following is a visualization of the existence and challenges of Malay identity politics in Riau Province:

Table 1. Crosstab query analysis on the existence and challenges of Malay identity politics in Riau Province (Analysis using NVivo 12 Plus, 2022)

Number	Concept (Node)	Interviewees (Case)	Percentage
1	Legitimate Identity	Head of the Riau Province Culture Service	34%

2		Riau Province Community Leader	33%
3		Riau Province Political Actors	33%
4	Resistance Identity	Chairman of the Riau Malay Traditional Institute	50%
5		Riau Province Religious Leader	50%
6	Project Identity	Riau Province Political Observer	50%
7		Riau University Academics	50%

Based on Table 1, it can be seen that each stakeholder in Riau Province has various perspectives related to the description of the existence and challenges of Riau Malay identity politics in today's modern era. *First*, at the legitimacy identity stage, each actor such as the Head of the Culture Service (34%), Community Leaders (33%), and Political Actors (33%) has a view with relatively the same percentage. If explored further, the three actors are of the view that the image of the government and traditional institutions that regulate society and maintain Malay cultural identity in Riau fades along with the current developments. This can be seen from the lack of traditional Riau Malay cultural performances that pass on knowledge to the younger generation so that it can be preserved in everyday life. Then, another phenomenon that shows the waning of Malay identity in Riau is related to the difficulty of finding Malay cultural activities at this time, which may not survive Malay culture if it is unable to adapt. Furthermore, because of global flows and the entry of other identities into the Riau Malay region, it is suspected that the Malay identity will decline. Although the Malay identity still exists, the global scour has resulted in the lack of understanding the Malay identity by the Riau people. Additionally, another factor that causes this thinning of identity is the insincerity of the local government in realizing Riau as the center of Malay culture today, where the Malay tradition is displayed only in government ceremonies but does not take root in the lives of the people of Riau comprehensively.

Second, in the resistance identity stage, each actor such as the Chair of the Malay Traditional Institution (50%) and Religious Leaders (50%) places this stage of identity with the same percentage of stigma. If explored further, the two actors are of the view that the cycle of identity formation in which society members are pressured by the domination and stereotypes of others to form opposition and create a different identity is not found in Riau in real terms today and is very different from the movement of people partner in developing Riau Malay identity after the reform era. This can be seen from how the historical records of Malay culture have good manner in speech and dress customs. However, there is a shift, such as the use of youth clothing in Riau, which currently looks far from the substance of Malay cultural identity emphasized that

the existence of Malay culture is starting to fade in Riau Province. Based on this phenomenon, of course, various systematic efforts must be made so that the Malay identity does not become extinct, such as reintroducing Malay customs and culture to the community, especially the younger generation from elementary school to university level through subjects and courses. Additionally, the use of Malay customs is then required for all activities, both official and unofficial, forming Malay youth organizations, and actively participating in activities related to Malay customs and cultural habits.

Third, at the project identity stage, each actor such as Political Observers (50%) and Academics (50%) also has the same percentage of views. If traced systematically, the two actors believe that creating identity in new ways that build a new social position and change the whole structure of society does not do much to help the Riau Malay cultural identity move forward. This is clear from the fact that there is a native Malay community that is becoming less important as more people move there from other places and bring their customs and habits with them. Not only that, in the use of everyday language, the majority of Riau people in Pekanbaru City currently do not use the Malay language, but predominantly they use the Minangkabau language. Therefore, this phenomenon confirms the fading existence of the Malay culture in the Riau Province. Thus, it is necessary to strengthen the government's efforts to develop policies in Malay identity in regional regulations, establish Malay monuments, and reinforce the use of the Malay language in community activities, so that all of them can help strengthen Malay identity in Riau Province.

5. Conclusion

The main finding of this study concludes that substantially the existence of Malay culture has faded in Riau Province and requires reinforcement with more adaptive and innovative efforts.

In contrast to previous studies that only analyzed secondary data, this study complements previous findings that substantially review the history and existence of Riau Malay identity politics in the modern era and has emphasized the importance of reconstructing Malay cultural identity in Riau Province.

From a historical perspective, the efforts made by the government and people of Riau in the past to strengthen the Malay identity in Riau Province have offered hope that the future of Malay culture will be brighter. But in fact, Riau Malay identity in the modern era has decreased due to many immigrants from other regions who bring their customs and culture and are influenced by the insincerity of the local government in realizing Riau as a center of Malay culture because it tends to be only used and applied as a symbol during official agendas, but not rooted comprehensively. This then has implications for the marginalization of Malay culture in Riau Province.

This research contributes in the form of

recommendations regarding the importance of more progressive innovative efforts to preserve the local values of Malay culture in Riau, which are currently threatened with extinction to ensure the survival of local culture sustainably. Then, this study has limitations related to the fact that all data and arguments from several key figures in the realization of Malay identity politics have not been collected in Riau Province have not yet been collected. Thus, further research is needed to comprehensively explore data and arguments from key actors.

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Authors' Contributions

Ali Yusri and Tito Handoko provided the research design, theoretical framework, and data analysis. M. Rafi processed the data and prepared the script. Tika Mutia and Rini Oktiwi Ningsih helped write and prepare the paper for publication.

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