

# LOCAL POLITICS AND SUSTAINABLE REFUGEE MANAGEMENT: A STUDY OF INDONESIAN MUNICIPALITIES

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## Abstract

As a non-signatory to the 1951 Refugee Convention, Indonesia faces persistent challenges in refugee governance, particularly at the local level where everyday interactions between refugees and host communities occur. In the absence of a comprehensive national legal framework, municipal governments play a pivotal role in shaping refugee management practices. This study examines how local political dynamics influence the development of sustainable refugee governance in three Indonesian cities: Makassar, Pekanbaru, and Bogor. Employing qualitative methods policy document analysis, secondary literature review, and organizational reports the research analyzes the interplay of political interests, administrative capacity, and socio-cultural contexts in local policy responses. The findings reveal that variations in leadership, political commitment, and multi-stakeholder collaboration significantly affect the inclusiveness and sustainability of refugee management strategies. While some municipalities demonstrate emerging practices aligned with sustainable governance principles and the Sustainable Development Goals, implementation remains uneven and highly contingent on local political conditions. This study contributes to the literature on refugee governance in non-signatory states by highlighting the centrality of local politics and offers policy-relevant insights on strengthening coordination, clarifying governance frameworks, and enhancing community participation to improve refugee management in Indonesia. Keywords: local politics, refugee governance, sustainable policy, Indonesia

## 1. Introduction

### 1.1 Background

Indonesia's geopolitical context has consistently established the country as a pivotal transit nation for refugees and asylum seekers, despite its status as a non-signatory to the 1951 Refugee Convention and the 1967 Protocol. The non-signatory status poses distinct issues, as Indonesia lacks a comprehensive national legal framework for refugee governance. As a result, local governments bear significant duties for overseeing refugee populations, frequently lacking explicit mandates, suitable resources, or sufficient institutional ability (Lee et al. 2023). The responsibility of local authorities intensifies as the refugee population grows, exerting significant strain on towns that must reconcile humanitarian duties with local political contexts and social dynamics. The increasing refugee population in numerous Indonesian municipalities profoundly influences local political dynamics, affecting both the response to urgent humanitarian requirements and the management of prevailing social tensions and administrative deficiencies (Missbach 2021). Municipalities such as

Makassar, Pekanbaru, and Bogor illustrate the heterogeneity of policy responses influenced by local political contexts, wherein disparities in political leadership, community sentiments, and interactions with international organizations such as the UNHCR and IOM yield divergent strategies for refugee management (Prabandari and Adiputera 2019; Suyastri et al. 2023). The disparities illustrate the importance of local political will in influencing municipalities' decisions to implement collaborative governance frameworks that promote refugee integration or revert to more restrictive and improvised strategies motivated by xenophobia or resource limitations (Pepinsky and Wihardja 2011). Current scholarship predominantly emphasizes national policy deficiencies in refugee management, often overlooking the significant influence of local political dynamics on refugee administration at the city level. This academic oversight restricts the comprehension of how local settings might facilitate or obstruct sustainable refugee management strategies. The intricacies of decentralized government in Indonesia provide pertinent case studies, as towns exhibit varying levels of autonomy and authority. Research demonstrates that whereas national legislation delineates some responsibilities concerning refugees, the actual execution at local levels frequently deviates significantly due to disparities in competence and political involvement (Firdaus 2025). A concentrated analysis of local governance helps clarify the interdependencies and power dynamics that shape refugee policies in non-signatory nations. Furthermore, the relationship between local governance and sustainability principles necessitates additional examination, especially within the context of urban refugee governance in developing regions such as Indonesia. As urban areas face escalating urbanization, the problems presented by refugee populations underscore the necessity for sustainable governance frameworks that address humanitarian requirements while fostering social cohesion and economic stability (Prabandari and Adiputera 2019). The neglect of local political factors and their influence on refugee management creates an analytical void in contemporary understandings of how sustainable practices might develop in complicated and frequently demanding environments. This study aims to examine how local political settings affect the formulation of sustainable refugee management policies in Indonesian municipalities. This research seeks to enhance the current literature by integrating theories of local governance, political behavior, and sustainability principles, highlighting the importance of municipal dynamics in influencing the experiences of refugees and the policies that regulate them. The findings will improve our comprehension of refugee administration in non-signatory nations, offering significant insights for policymakers and practitioners addressing the intricacies of urban refugee matters.

## 1.2 Research Questions

1. How do local political dynamics shape municipal approaches to refugee management in Indonesia?
2. How do decentralization and administrative capacity contribute to differences across Makassar, Pekanbaru, and Bogor?
3. What local factors support or hinder sustainable refugee governance?

## 1.3 Purpose and Objectives

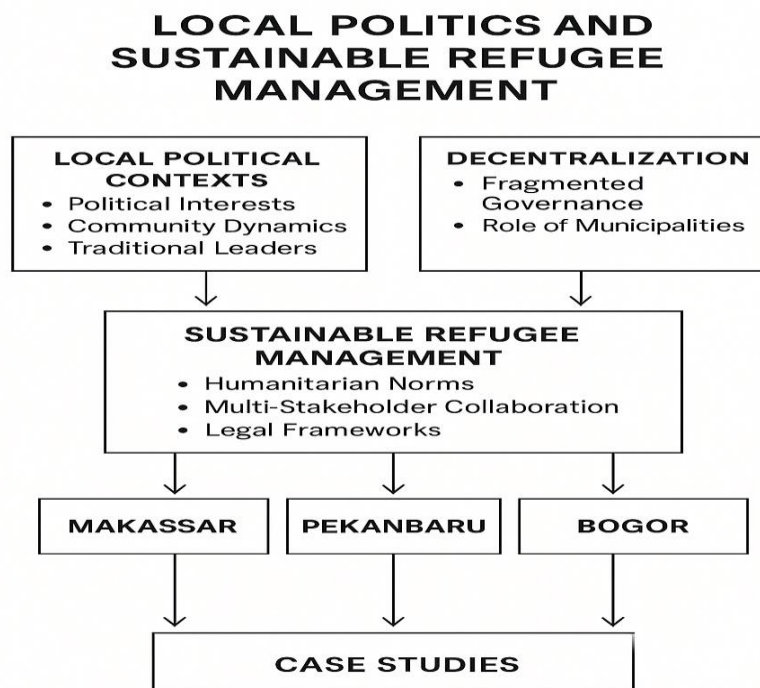
1. Purpose: This study aims to (1) shift the analytical focus from national-level to municipal-level governance, (2) explore the link between local political dynamics and sustainable refugee management, and (3) provide comparative

insights across three municipalities to inform policy and practice in non-signatory contexts.

2. Objectives: (1) To analyze the influence of local politics on municipal refugee governance. (2) To examine variations in governance models across three Indonesian cities. (3) To identify enabling and constraining factors for sustainable refugee management.

## 2. Literature Review

Figure 1 Conceptual Framework for Sustainable Refugee Management in Local Indonesian Contexts



Source: Conceptual Framework (author's synthesis), 2025.

This study's conceptual framework demonstrates the interrelatedness of local political dynamics, decentralization frameworks, and the development of sustainable refugee management methods in Indonesian municipalities. Indonesia's position as a non-signatory to the 1951 Refugee Convention results in local governments functioning under conditions characterized by insufficient national direction, unclear legal obligations, and disparate levels of administrative capability. The governance of refugees is hence heavily reliant on local political interests, leadership approaches, and inter-organizational cooperation. Local political conditions serve as a primary predictor of municipal responses at the apex of the framework. Political interests, electoral incentives, community perceptions, and the influence of traditional leaders collectively shape local authorities' opinions and responses to refugee issues. These political determinants can either promote inclusive and humanitarian policies or, conversely,

strengthen restrictive measures when the presence of refugees is perceived as socially or politically controversial. At the same time, decentralization offers local governments both opportunities and challenges. Decentralization enhances municipal autonomy in public affairs but leads to fragmented administration in the absence of national refugee policies. This fragmentation results in significant disparities in municipal strategies, frequently contingent upon the capacity and inclination of local authorities to interact with refugees and cooperate with international organizations. The two characteristics of local politics and decentralization combine to impact the key element of the framework: sustainable refugee management. Sustainable management is defined as a method that harmonizes humanitarian principles, collaborative efforts among multiple stakeholders, and contextually relevant legal interpretations within local governance frameworks. It encompasses the capability to address immediate refugee needs as well as to foster social cohesiveness, facilitate community involvement, and enhance institutional resilience over time. The lower section of the framework illustrates the varying manifestations of these overarching structural and political issues across municipal contexts. The instances of Makassar, Pekanbaru, and Bogor exemplify divergent trajectories influenced by differences in political leadership, administrative preparedness, community perspectives, and collaboration with organizations like UNHCR and IOM. Makassar exemplifies adaptive teamwork, Pekanbaru demonstrates responses bolstered by civil society, while Bogor underscores the limitations imposed by political sensitivity and resource scarcity. This paradigm offers an analytical basis for comprehending the variations in refugee governance results among Indonesian towns and how durable, localized solutions can arise in the absence of a national refugee protection system.

## **2.1 Local Politics and Decentralization**

### **2.1.1. Decentralization and Local Politics in Indonesia**

Decentralization in Indonesia has resulted in a complex and frequently disjointed governance framework, wherein local authorities possess considerable political and administrative independence. The decentralization reforms that took place after 1999 gave a lot of power to municipalities and districts instead of the central government. This allowed local governments to have a say in how policies were carried out, how budgets were made, and how public services were delivered (Pepinsky and Wihardja 2011). While some have praised this reform for strengthening democracy and increasing local government accountability, its effects on refugee governance are significantly more complex. Because refugee issues aren't officially handled by local governments, decentralization has led to different and sometimes contradictory policies across the country (Yusoff et al. 2022). Local politics, like how elections work, the personal goals of mayors, and ties to powerful social and religious groups, have a big impact on how cities address refugee issues. For example, if local leaders think that protecting refugees will hurt their political careers, cities may take restrictive measures or not become involved at all. On the other hand, in places where political elites see humanitarian action as consistent with local values or politically beneficial, governments may work better with international organizations (Yusoff et al. 2022). These differences show how decentralization lets local political interests directly affect the consistency of policies, the distribution of

resources, and the level of humanitarian aid available to refugees. Furthermore, in many places, traditional leaders have a lot of informal power that often works with formal government structures. They can help bridge the gap between government and local communities by mediating community concerns, swaying public opinion, and making policy decisions that are sensitive to different cultures (Chotib 2024). In the realm of refugee governance, particularly regarding vulnerable groups like Rohingya refugees, traditional leaders can promote acceptance, facilitate conflict resolution, and support more inclusive integration processes (Yusoff et al., 2022). Their participation illustrates that refugee policy in Indonesia is influenced not only by formal governmental frameworks but also by local sociocultural contexts and informal governance structures.

## 2.2 Sustainable Refugee Management

**Sustainable Governance and Managing Refugees** Sustainable governance frameworks emphasize the necessity for long-term public policy to incorporate social inclusion, economic viability, and environmental sustainability. These frameworks are increasingly utilized in humanitarian governance, as the protection of refugees necessitates a multidimensional strategy that addresses both immediate needs and fosters the resilience of refugees and host communities alike. In Indonesia, where refugees lack formal legal status and long-term integration options, sustainable governance provides an alternative framework for local governments to devise adaptable and contextually relevant solutions (Suyastri et al., 2023). Municipalities frequently depend on collaborations with international organizations especially UNHCR and IOM to mitigate the lack of national legislation, constrained financial resources, and ambiguous institutional mandates. These partnerships help local governments set up protection systems, plan emergency responses, and offer basic services like health care, education, and temporary housing (Prabandari & Adiputera, 2019). Sustainable governance relies significantly on multi-stakeholder collaboration, wherein the interaction among local authorities, NGOs, religious organizations, and international agencies constitutes the foundation of urban refugee management. Indonesia's position as a non-signatory to the 1951 Refugee Convention introduces further complexity. The state is still committed to following international rules like non-refoulement, but because there isn't a complete national legal framework, municipalities often resolve refugee issues through temporary policies, local discretion, and negotiated arrangements (Suyastri et al., 2023). This setting promotes innovative governance practices, as local stakeholders strive to harmonize international humanitarian standards with domestic administrative realities and culturally ingrained governance frameworks (Prabandari & Adiputera, 2019). These kinds of changes demonstrate how local people can establish sustainable governance by addressing institutional gaps.

## 2.3 Refugee Policy in Non-Signatory States

Non-signatory states frequently manage the intricacies of refugee protection absent the explicit legal responsibilities established by the 1951 Refugee Convention and its 1967 Protocol. Asserts that non-signatory nations such as Lebanon participate in informal procedures that embody humanitarian motivations rather than legally enforceable obligations. The absence of ratification can be

interpreted as a strategy to diminish governmental obligations regarding refugee welfare while concurrently engaging in humanitarian efforts and preserving international political legitimacy (Janmyr 2021). A comparative analysis of Malaysia and Indonesia demonstrates that both nations have established ad hoc and hybrid frameworks to meet refugee requirements, underscoring their dependence on international entities such as UNHCR for direction and assistance (Lee, 2022). This dependence frequently leads to sophisticated intervention tactics that take into account local settings and capabilities. The Principle of Non-Refoulement and Customary International Law The concept of non-refoulement, which forbids the repatriation of refugees to their countries of origin where they encounter grave dangers to their life or liberty, remains fundamental to international refugee protection. Customary international law recognizes this principle even in non-signatory nations, obliging local governments to avert refoulement despite the lack of institutional structures (Setyardi 2025). Asserts that non-refoulement mandates states to refrain from expelling or returning refugees without assessing the potential threats they may encounter, a responsibility that applies even to those that have not ratified the 1951 Convention.

The implementation of non-refoulement in Southeast Asia has been irregular. In Indonesia, the government frequently categorizes asylum seekers and refugees as irregular migrants, thus complicating the enforcement of humanitarian norms and resulting in numerous individuals lacking legal status or protection. Saleh & Howard (2023) demonstrate that Lebanon's non-signatory status has resulted in comparable risks among refugees due to the ambiguity of state commitments. Urban Refugee Administration in the Absence of a Legal Framework Managing urban refugees has become a major issue in countries that haven't signed the treaty, where cities often serve as unofficial safe havens for migrants. The lack of a defined legal framework results in unstable living situations for urban migrants. Janmyr (2017) contends that in Lebanon, the absence of formal refugee status frequently consigns refugees to a condition of liminality, rendering them susceptible to several forms of discrimination and exploitation. This scenario resembles that of urban refugees in Thailand, where current legislation fails to meet the distinct requirements of refugee groups, resulting in a context where numerous refugees encounter risks of arrest and incarceration (Kyaw, 2025). Consequently, effective governance of metropolitan refugees necessitates new strategies, frequently spearheaded by local civil society organizations. Turner (2023) underscores the imperative for collaboration frameworks between governmental entities and humanitarian organizations to enhance urban refugee protection in intricate environments characterized by insufficient institutional support. As these groups endeavor to address the gap created by governmental inaction, their ability to manage these people successfully is frequently impeded by constrained resources and coordination difficulties.

Comparative Analyses of Refugee Governance Frameworks Comparative analyses demonstrate a range of governance frameworks in non-signatory nations. Jittiang's (2022) examination of Thailand's National Screening Mechanism demonstrates a transition towards a more organized approach to refugee management, but one that remains constrained in both breadth and efficacy. The partnership dynamics in Jordan demonstrate a collaborative approach between UN agencies and local authorities, yielding more concrete services and protections for

refugee populations, despite the political and economic constraints encountered by the host state (Haider et al., 2021). Conversely, the governance frameworks in Bangladesh have encountered substantial challenges, as an emphasis on security has resulted in restrictive regulations and constrained access to fundamental rights for refugees (Coddington, 2018; Lee, 2022). The Role of UNHCR/IOM in Non-Signatory Nations The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and the International Organization for Migration (IOM) often address essential deficiencies in protection and assistance for refugees in non-signatory countries. Their collaboration frequently results in the creation of ad hoc protocols that adjust to local settings while striving to maintain worldwide norms. In Lebanon, UNHCR's initiatives furnish essential resources and support to mitigate the strain on local facilities; however, the absence of formal status persists as an obstacle to refugee integration (El-Khatib et al., 2013). Although their presence may be advantageous, there are criticisms concerning the effectiveness of these organizations in shaping governmental policies involving refugees. Numerous non-signatory nations exhibit reluctance to implement substantial reforms that would better connect them with international standards, frequently leading to a dependence on philanthropic rather than rights-based methodologies for refugee protection (Mcquaid, 2021; Nasir et al., 2019).

### 3. Research Methods

#### 3.1 Research Design

This study utilizes a qualitative research approach to examine the influence of local political dynamics and decentralization on refugee governance in Indonesia. In the lack of a national refugee protection framework, municipal responses are diverse and dependent on local circumstances. A qualitative method facilitates a thorough investigation of contextual variables by analyzing political views, administrative capabilities, collaborative patterns, and community dynamics across various municipalities. The research approach is informed by the previously outlined conceptual framework, which delineates three fundamental analytical dimensions: (1) local political environment, (2) decentralization processes, and (3) sustainable refugee management. These characteristics lay the groundwork for data collection and thematic analysis, allowing the study to identify causal patterns and assess governance outcomes in diverse urban settings. In non-signatory nations, where policies are informal, fragmented, and significantly influenced by political discretion, this design is especially appropriate for analyzing intricate governance contexts.

#### 3.2 Case Selection

The research employs a multiple-case study methodology, choosing three municipalities—Makassar, Pekanbaru, and Bogor based on their varying political orientations, administrative capabilities, and previous experiences with hosting refugees. The selection of these cities was conducted via purposive sampling based on three criteria: A substantial refugee population Over the past decade, each city has accommodated substantial refugee populations, rendering them pertinent locations for the analysis of municipal governance methods. Divergence in political and administrative reactions Makassar is recognized for its collaborative and

systematic governing style; Pekanbaru exemplifies a hybrid or civil-society-oriented model; and Bogor illustrates a more reactive and disjointed reaction. This variation facilitates significant cross-case comparability. Engagement with international organizations All three municipalities have collaborated though to varying degrees with UNHCR, IOM, and NGOs, offering insights into governance practices under Indonesia's non-signatory framework. The study examines a range of refugee management strategies within Indonesia's decentralized government system by selecting cities with varied features.

### 3.3 Data Collection and Analysis

The study draws on multiple sources of qualitative data, including municipal policy documents, secondary academic literature, reports produced by international and local organizations, and media coverage. Policy documents were analyzed to identify local governance arrangements and official responses to refugee management. Academic literature and organizational reports provided broader institutional and policy context, while media sources offered insight into public discourse and political narratives surrounding refugees at the local level. Data were analyzed thematically to identify recurring patterns and differences across the selected cases.

1. **Examination of Documents** The principal data collection strategy entailed the methodical analysis of municipal documents, encompassing local government legislation, mayoral directives, development plans, meeting reports, and public remarks about refugee management. Policy documents from UNHCR, IOM, and affiliated NGOs were examined to comprehend coordinating frameworks, program execution, and service delivery systems. These documents assist in identifying formal and semi-formal governing structures implemented at the local level.
2. **Secondary Scholarly and Policy Literature** Peer-reviewed journal articles, policy briefs, academic reports, and working papers were employed to elucidate the political, legal, and institutional framework of refugee governance in Indonesia and analogous non-signatory states. This literature offers theoretical foundations and underpins the analysis of municipal practices within extensive governance systems.
3. **Media Outlets and Accessible Interviews** Esteemed news organizations, press statements, and publicly disseminated interviews with local political figures, community representatives, and civil society participants were examined to ascertain local narratives, popular attitudes, political framing, and contemporaneous changes influencing refugee management. Public conversation and political signaling, rather than formal legal mechanisms, frequently influence policy decisions, making these sources essential.
4. **Reports and Observations from Global and Domestic Organizations** Data were obtained from evaluations, monitoring records, and program reports generated by UNHCR, IOM, and local NGOs involved in refugee support. These sources elucidate ground-level issues, service deficiencies, operational limitations, and the significance of multi-stakeholder engagement in municipal governance.

Table 1 Table 1 Overview of Data Collection Sources

| Source Type                                 | Description  | Purpose in the Study  | Examples of Data Collected  |
|---|--|---|---|
| <b>Municipal Documents</b>                  | Official regulations, mayoral decrees, development plans, meeting minutes, and local government statements relevant to refugee governance.       | To identify formal and semi-formal governance structures, policy orientations, and administrative arrangements in each municipality.      | Local government circulars on refugee housing; mayoral statements on public order; municipal coordination meeting notes.  |
| <b>International and NGO Reports</b>        | Publications, assessments, monitoring reports, and operational guidelines produced by UNHCR, IOM, and local NGOs.                                | To understand coordination mechanisms, service delivery processes, and operational challenges faced by organizations supporting refugees. | IOM shelter management reports; UNHCR protection updates; NGO program implementation summaries.                           |
| <b>Secondary Academic Literature</b>        | Peer-reviewed journal articles, policy briefs, academic working papers, and research reports focused on refugee governance and decentralization. | To provide theoretical grounding and situate municipal practices within broader scholarly debates and global non-signatory contexts.      | Studies on refugee protection in Southeast Asia; analyses of Indonesia's decentralization reforms; governance frameworks. |
| <b>Media Articles and Public Statements</b> | News reports, press releases, interviews, and public commentary from political leaders, community figures, and civil society actors.             | To capture local narratives, political framing, public perceptions, and contextual events affecting refugee governance.                   | Interviews with mayors; community reactions to refugee incidents; media coverage on local tensions or support.            |

Source: (author's synthesis), 2025.

## 5. Ethical Considerations and Limitations

Ethical considerations were addressed by relying exclusively on publicly accessible secondary data. The study did not involve direct interaction with human subjects and did not use personal or sensitive information relating to refugees or other vulnerable groups. All sources were referenced appropriately to ensure transparency and academic integrity. At the same time, the reliance on secondary data presents certain limitations. Policy documents, organizational reports, and media sources may reflect particular institutional perspectives or selective representations

of events. Although triangulation across different data sources was used to strengthen the analysis, the findings should be interpreted with an awareness of these constraints.

## 4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### 4.1 Overview of Refugee Presence in Indonesian Municipalities

Indonesia hosts a substantial population of refugees and asylum seekers, indicative of its geopolitical status as a key transit hub in Southeast Asia. Although the country is not a member of the 1951 Refugee Convention, it has emerged as a sanctuary for individuals escaping conflict and persecution from countries such as Afghanistan, Somalia, Sudan, Iraq, Myanmar (the Rohingya), and Sri Lanka, among others (Setyardi 2023). The majority of the refugee population lives in metropolitan regions, especially in municipalities where entities like the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and the International Organization for Migration (IOM) have set up operational facilities. The concentration of refugees in some towns results from both practical considerations, such as proximity to necessary services and temporary shelters, and local political climates that are more supportive of asylum seekers (Missbach 2017; Sapada et al. 2023). Prominent localities such as Makassar, Pekanbaru, Medan, Jakarta, Bogor, and Tanjung Pinang have developed into centers for refugee housing and assistance. The answers from these municipalities are inconsistent and frequently shaped by local governing frameworks. In the absence of a national legal framework that explicitly defines local government responsibilities for refugee management, municipal strategies may vary considerably regarding policy preparedness, institutional capability, and political motivation to collaborate with international entities (Dabaieh et al. 2020; Dube et al. 2021). This heterogeneity illustrates the essential influence of local political dynamics on urban refugee governance in Indonesia

### 4.2 Case Study: Makassar

Makassar, the provincial capital of South Sulawesi, has emerged as a frontrunner in pioneering refugee management strategies. The city's adaptation strategy is bolstered by robust local leadership that emphasizes humanitarian ideals and has cultivated established connections with UNHCR and IOM (Kyaw 2025). In Makassar, local authorities have enabled integrated management via IOM-operated community housing schemes, which offer temporary shelter and enhance access to key services, like healthcare and education. The city has instituted community integration programs that promote interaction between immigrants and local citizens, demonstrating a sociopolitical climate that prioritizes multiculturalism and international collaboration. Local authorities frequently contextualize refugee management within the city's dedication to humanitarian principles, thus mitigating possible conflicts between refugees and the host population. Initiatives such as intercultural community gatherings, collaborations with mosque-affiliated charities, and youth outreach programs have successfully fostered good contacts and strengthened mutual understanding (Missbach and Sinanu 2011; Sutiarnoto et al. 2020). This proactive governance approach demonstrates how political will and civil society engagement may alleviate

institutional constraints and promote sustainable, participatory models for refugee management.

#### **4.3 Case Study: Pekanbaru**

Pekanbaru offers a more heterogeneous environment for refugee management compared to Makassar. The city has maintained a considerable refugee population for many years; yet, its governance strategy encounters severe obstacles due to resource constraints and sporadic political backing at the local level [15]. Local authorities frequently rely on the International Organization for Migration (IOM), non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and faith-based organizations to address the daily necessities of refugees, such as food distribution, health referrals, and emergency shelter. This dependence produces a response structure defined more by ad hoc coordination than by systematic policy execution, potentially resulting in inconsistent support for refugees [16]. Social tensions may escalate, especially due to increases in refugee arrivals or negative media portrayals, aggravating local opinions of immigrants perceived as burdens on scarce resources. Nonetheless, the formation of local volunteer networks and Islamic humanitarian organizations has enhanced the assistance accessible to refugees, indicating a capacity for grassroots mobilization. Pekanbaru illustrates the adaptability of local governance to obstacles in the absence of comprehensive municipal policies; yet, the viability of these solutions is limited without constant political support or institutional investment

#### **4.4 Case Study: Bogor**

Bogor offers a more intricate landscape for refugee management. In contrast to Makassar, where local authorities typically support refugee aid, Bogor's municipal actions are influenced by increased community apprehensions, political sensitivities, and a perceived rivalry for local resources (Gerber et al. 2020). Refugees living independently in rental accommodations frequently intensify local apprehensions regarding congestion and the pressure on sanitation and social services (Kyaw 2025) The local government's strategy is predominantly reactive; authorities frequently engage only during crises, such as health issues or public disturbances involving refugees. Compared to Makassar, collaboration with foreign entities such as UNHCR and IOM is comparatively inadequate, resulting in a fragmented management approach that does not leverage the potential synergies of supportive local governance. Moreover, inconsistent political discourse can convey ambiguous messages to public opinion concerning refugee support. The local narratives, frequently magnified by media reports highlighting perceived refugee adversities, foster a climate of opposition among residents, rendering Bogor a salient illustration of how decentralized governance can result in disjointed and unsustainable refugee management in the absence of political alignment and community endorsement.

#### **4.5 Cross-Case Analysis: Key Findings**

A comparative analysis of Makassar, Pekanbaru, and Bogor demonstrates significant differences in the management of refugees by Indonesian municipalities within a non-signatory framework. Although all three cities function within the same national regulatory uncertainty and depend significantly on international organizations for refugee services, their governance strategies vary considerably

due to local political sentiments, administrative capabilities, community dynamics, and the efficacy of multi-stakeholder collaboration. These variances illustrate that refugee governance in Indonesia is not homogeneous but influenced by particular political and institutional dynamics.

Table 1 offers a comparative overview of the important dimensions affecting refugee management across the three municipalities, thereby elucidating these discrepancies more distinctly. The table consolidates essential variables—such as political will, relations with UNHCR/IOM, civil society involvement, infrastructure capacity, community acceptance, leadership style, governance model, and sustainability level to elucidate the patterns and discrepancies arising from the three case studies. This study establishes the basis for recognizing the structural and political factors that underpin more sustainable refugee governance models in decentralized environments.

**Table 2 Comparative Models of Refugee Governance in Three Indonesian Municipalities**

| Aspect  | Makassar   | Pekanbaru  | Bogor   |
|---|--|--|---|
| <b>Local Political Attitude</b>                   | Open and cooperative; strong political will toward humanitarian issues.                            | Moderate; political support fluctuates and often depends on public pressure and bureaucratic capacity. | Cautious and reactive; refugee issues are politically sensitive.  |
| <b>Relationship with UNHCR/IOM</b>                | Strong and well-structured coordination; community housing facilities actively supported.          | Generally positive; highly dependent on IOM and local NGOs for basic service delivery.                 | Weak and inconsistent; coordination typically occurs only during crises.                                  |
| <b>Role of Civil Society</b>                      | High; community groups, religious leaders, and local networks actively support social integration. | Mixed; NGOs and faith-based organizations fill governance gaps.  | Low to moderate; civil society involvement is limited and largely reactive.                               |
| <b>Infrastructure Capacity</b>                    | Relatively strong; access to health services, community housing, and integration programs.         | Limited; relies on temporary facilities and humanitarian assistance.                                   | Limited; refugees living independently face challenges in sanitation, housing, and community safety.      |
| <b>Social Dynamics &amp; Community Acceptance</b> | Generally positive; social conflict is minimal due to community engagement strategies.             | Mixed; support exists but tensions arise when refugee numbers increase.                                | High levels of resistance; residents frequently express concerns over competition for space and services. |

|                                |  |  |  |
|--------------------------------|--|--|--|
| <b>Local Leadership Style</b>  | Progressive and collaborative; leaders openly support humanitarian engagement. | Administrative and pragmatic; focuses on reducing municipal burdens. | Defensive and cautious; policy decisions influenced by community pressure. |
| <b>Governance Model</b>        | Collaborative and structured: <i>multi-stakeholder governance</i> .            | Ad hoc and NGO-driven: <i>civil-society-driven governance</i> .      | Fragmented and reactive: <i>problem-triggered governance</i> .             |
| <b>Level of Sustainability</b> | High → consistent practices and long-term cooperation.                         | Medium → dependent on external actors for continuity.                | Low → inconsistent, conflict-prone, and crisis-driven responses.           |

Source : (author's synthesis), 2025.

## 5. Conclusions And Recommendations

The current literature on refugee governance in Indonesia indicates that municipal responses differ markedly among cities, influenced by political will, administrative capability, civil society involvement, and the level of collaboration with foreign organizations. Research on Makassar continually indicates that the city exemplifies one of the most cooperative and organized frameworks for refugee management in Indonesia. (Walton 2018) and (Prabandari and Adiputera 2019) emphasize that Makassar's political leadership has traditionally embraced an open and humanitarian approach, facilitating the creation of community housing, robust collaboration with IOM and UNHCR, and the active participation of civil society and religious organizations. These variables enhance social acceptance and ensure program sustainability.

The literature on Pekanbaru depicts a more heterogeneous government model. (Saleh and Howard 2023) indicate that Pekanbaru's municipal authorities frequently encounter resource restrictions and administrative constraints, leading to improvised governance structures that rely significantly on IOM and local NGOs for service provision. Although public perceptions of refugees may vary, civil society organizations—especially faith-based and volunteer groups—are essential in addressing institutional deficiencies, guaranteeing that fundamental needs and humanitarian aid remain available despite weak municipal governance. Bogor is frequently characterized as a difficult setting for refugee administration. (Yacoub 2022) and McNevin & Missbach (2018) highlight that refugees in Bogor often face social difficulties, adverse public sentiment, and erratic local government responses. The inadequate collaboration with foreign entities, along with community opposition and media portrayals of refugees as disruptive, has led to a governing framework that is predominantly reactive and crisis-oriented. This sharply contrasts with Makassar's organized and cooperative methodology and Pekanbaru's model supported by civil society. Cross-cutting analysis by Pepinsky & Wihardja (2011), Kaban & Ramadani (2023), and Yusoff et al. (2022) elucidates that Indonesia's decentralization policies

enhance local-level disparities. The ambiguity of national refugee policy leads municipalities to interpret and address refugee issues according to their political objectives, administrative capabilities, and local sociocultural settings. This results in the development of various governance models spanning from multi-stakeholder collaboration to disjointed and reactive responses despite all cities functioning within the same national legal void. The literature consistently reveals a fundamental insight: local political dynamics, rather than national policy frameworks, predominantly influence refugee administration in Indonesia. Makassar exemplifies the efficacy of robust political will and cooperative networks; Pekanbaru demonstrates the compensatory power of civil society in the face of constrained local capacity; and Bogor underscores the weaknesses inherent in fragmented governance within politically sensitive contexts. These disparities highlight the necessity of contextualized, community-sensitive, and multi-stakeholder strategies in developing sustainable refugee management in non-signatory nations.

### 5.1 Summary of Main Findings

This study illustrates that refugee administration in Indonesia is predominantly influenced by local political processes, rather than national policy frameworks. Although functioning under the same legal ambiguity as a non-signatory state, Makassar, Pekanbaru, and Bogor demonstrate significantly divergent methods attributable to differences in leadership style, administrative capability, community sentiment, and the efficacy of multi-stakeholder collaboration. The organized, cooperative government of Makassar is significantly bolstered by forward-thinking political leadership and vigorous community participation. Pekanbaru, despite institutional constraints, advantages from the robust presence of civil society organizations that mitigate municipal deficiencies. In contrast, Bogor's refugee governance is impeded by political sensitivity, social opposition, and insufficient collaboration with foreign organizations, leading to disjointed and crisis-oriented responses. The research substantiates that effective refugee management in Indonesia necessitates political commitment, cohesive coordination structures, and locally informed solutions to address institutional deficiencies in the absence of a national refugee protection framework.

### 5.2 Policy Recommendations

This article provides multiple recommendations to improve sustainable refugee governance in Indonesia, derived from the cross-case analysis.

1. **Enhance National–Local Coordination.** The central government ought to establish more explicit directives for municipalities concerning their roles, responsibilities, and collaboration with UNHCR and IOM. A non-binding national framework would diminish policy fragmentation and improve consistency.
2. **Establish Local Governance Frameworks.** Municipalities ought to implement municipal rules, standard operating procedures (SOPs), or mayoral decrees that delineate coordinating frameworks for refugee handling. Formal processes enhance predictability, reduce ad hoc responses, and facilitate long-term planning.
3. **Augment Multi-Stakeholder Collaboration.** Local governments ought to prioritize collaborations with non-governmental organizations, religious

institutions, community associations, and international agencies. This collaboration improves capacity, cultivates community trust, and facilitates sustainable service provision.

4. **Foster Community Involvement and Social Unity.** Municipalities ought to establish community-oriented initiatives—such as intercultural events, youth programs, and religious dialogues—to foster constructive connections between refugees and host communities and alleviate xenophobic attitudes.
5. **Invest in Local Capacity Development.** Municipal authorities should be provided with training programs in refugee law, humanitarian ideals, and collaborative governance. Decentralized budget allocations can provide support for towns with constrained resources.
6. **Implement Contextual Strategies.** Policy actions must align with the distinct political, social, and administrative contexts of each municipality. The collaborative model of Makassar, the civil society-driven approach of Pekanbaru, and the conflict-prone environment of Bogor highlight the necessity for customized solutions.

### 5.3 Limitations and Future Research

This research recognizes multiple constraints. The analysis predominantly depends on secondary data, public papers, and organizational reports, with minimal direct fieldwork or interviews conducted. Future research should include comprehensive interviews, participant observation, or focus group discussions with refugees, municipal officials, and community stakeholders to yield more profound empirical findings. The study concentrates on three municipalities. Although these cities exemplify various governance types, the techniques for managing refugees differ throughout Indonesia. Subsequent research should expand its focus to encompass more host cities, such as Medan, Tanjung Pinang, Kupang, or Jakarta, to improve comparative validity. This study analyzes refugee governance at a certain moment in time. Local politics and administrative capability are fluid and may fluctuate owing to leadership changes, elections, or alterations in public attitude. Longitudinal research could monitor the impact of political change on the trajectories of refugee policies. Ultimately, comparative analysis with non-signatory nations—such as Malaysia, Thailand, Lebanon, or India—could enhance theoretical insights into refugee governance amid legal ambiguity and decentralization. This comparative analysis could elucidate effective practices and guide policymaking in Indonesia and abroad.

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