



Reintegration As A Pillar Of National Resilience: Failed Reintegration As A Strategic Vulnerability Exploited By Non- Traditional Security Threats In Post-Conflict Aceh

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ABSTRACT

Twenty-one years after the Helsinki Memorandum of Understanding, Aceh is routinely presented as one of Southeast Asia's most successful cases of conflict resolution. That reputation, however, rests largely on the completion of disarmament and demobilisation, while the reintegration phase remains structurally unfinished. This article argues that failed reintegration should be conceptualised not as a residual welfare problem but as a strategic vulnerability that non-traditional security actors can exploit. Employing an interpretive case study design operationalised through framework-guided document analysis, the study integrates three analytical lenses: the international DDR framework, Indonesia's national resilience doctrine (Astagatra), and defence management standards, particularly the threat–vulnerability–consequence risk model. Four vulnerability clusters are identified: fiscal-economic failure marked by elite capture and an unresolved beneficiary data deficit; exploitation by transnational criminal networks operating along the Malacca Strait corridor; intergenerational transmission of conflict memory in the absence of completed transitional justice; and political-structural uncertainty arising from the scheduled expiry of Aceh's special autonomy fund in 2027. The analysis suggests that the Aceh case extends the remobilisation literature, and the emerging research on criminal recidivism among ex-combatants, in a direction those literatures have not yet examined: economically remarginalised ex-combatants are absorbed into transnational criminal economies that require no successor armed organisation, a trajectory that conventional DDR success metrics fail to register because it produces no armed conflict data. The article develops an indicative risk matrix ranking the four clusters and derives six cross-institutional early warning indicators. It concludes that reintegration policy functions as an instrument of vulnerability reduction, analytically equivalent in importance to enforcement action against threat actors themselves.

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1. INTRODUCTION

On 15 August 2005, the Government of Indonesia and the Free Aceh Movement (Gerakan Aceh Merdeka, GAM) signed the Helsinki Memorandum of Understanding (MoU), ending a separatist conflict that had lasted almost three decades. Twenty-one years later, the agreement continues to be cited as a benchmark of successful conflict termination in Southeast Asia. The basis of that reputation, however, deserves closer scrutiny. Only the first two phases of the disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration (DDR) sequence were unambiguously completed: weapons decommissioning and the demobilisation of combatants, both verified by the Aceh Monitoring Mission. The third phase, reintegration, is a longer and less visible process, and it is on this phase that the durability of peace ultimately depends.

This distinction matters because the absence of renewed armed conflict is frequently treated as sufficient evidence of reintegration success. This article argues that such an inference is analytically unsafe. Where reintegration falters, the resulting deficits do not necessarily manifest as a return to insurgency. They may instead manifest as a strategic vulnerability, that is, a structural condition that external actors with hostile or illicit interests can exploit for their own purposes. In the Acehnese case, the actors best positioned to exploit that vulnerability are not remnants of the former insurgency but transnational criminal networks operating along one of the world's busiest maritime corridors.

1.1 Reintegration Outcomes in Aceh: What the Literature Established

The empirical record on Aceh's reintegration is unusually strong for a post-conflict setting. The Aceh Reintegration and Livelihood Surveys (ARLS), conducted in 2008 across more than 750 villages with a sample exceeding 3,000 civilians and 1,000 ex-combatants, remain the most comprehensive dataset on the subject (Barron et al., 2009). Two findings from that body of work are central to the present argument. First, social reintegration succeeded to a remarkable degree: an overwhelming majority of civilians reported accepting former combatants back into their communities within three years of the MoU. Second, economic reintegration did not. Barron (2009) documents that the Aceh programme departed from international good practice by prioritising cash compensation over holistic livelihood development, and that a substantial proportion of male former combatants reported receiving no assistance at all, while others received multiple forms of support. The consequence was rising inequality and dissatisfaction within the ex-combatant population itself.

A parallel strand of scholarship explains why distribution was uneven. Aspinall (2009a) describes the emergence of a political economy in which senior former GAM figures converted their wartime authority into access to government contracts, procurement projects and resource licences, a transformation he captures in the phrase "combatants to contractors." Ansori (2012) traces the same dynamic into the bureaucratic and electoral spheres, showing how the entry of former combatants into local government produced patronage networks that channelled economic opportunity towards former elites while generating new horizontal antagonisms between those elites and the rank and file. Both accounts converge on a conclusion that Indonesian field studies have independently reproduced: the material dividend of peace was captured disproportionately at the top of the former insurgent hierarchy.

A third element of the reintegration agenda remains formally incomplete. Aspinall (2008) characterises the Helsinki settlement as a peace achieved substantially at the expense of transitional justice, and subsequent work has documented the delayed and constrained operation of Aceh's Truth and Reconciliation Commission (Avonius, 2012). The unresolved status of victims' claims is not merely a normative deficiency; it leaves a reservoir of grievance available for future political mobilisation.

1.2 Remobilisation, Non-Traditional Security, and the Analytical Gap

A separate literature addresses what happens when reintegration fails. Themnér (2011, 2013) argues that ex-combatant violence is best explained by the interaction of two conditions: the economic and social remarginalisation of former fighters, and the presence of "remobilisers" who can activate residual wartime networks through selective incentives and relational trust. Muggah (2009) similarly emphasises that fighters who are not economically absorbed remain a latent security variable long after formal programmes conclude. Much of this literature has been developed with reference to renewed organised armed violence, whether insurgent recurrence, militia formation or election-related violence. A related strand has, however, begun to examine criminal rather than insurgent trajectories. Studies of DDR practice have long cautioned that former fighters who retain wartime networks may redeploy them in illicit economies rather than in renewed rebellion (de Vries & Wiegink, 2011; McMullin, 2013), and quantitative research on Colombia finds that proximity to criminal groups is among the strongest predictors of ex-combatant recidivism into illegal activity (Kaplan & Nussio, 2018). The Colombian trajectory, in which demobilised paramilitary structures were partially absorbed into organised criminal successor groups, remains the paradigmatic case of this criminal pathway.

The non-traditional security (NTS) literature approaches the problem from a different direction. Caballero-Anthony (2016) defines NTS challenges as threats to the survival and well-being of peoples and states arising primarily



from non-military sources, including transnational organised crime, drug trafficking and human smuggling, and characterises them as transboundary, rapidly transmitted and beyond the capacity of any single state to address unilaterally. Applied to maritime Southeast Asia, this framework has generated substantial analysis of the Malacca Strait as a trafficking corridor (UNODC, 2025), yet that analysis typically treats trafficking as a problem of border control, maritime enforcement and interstate cooperation, largely detached from questions of post-conflict programming.

The gap addressed here is therefore a specific one. The criminal remobilisation literature has been developed largely in settings, most prominently post-paramilitary Colombia, where absorption occurred into organised armed successor groups whose violence remained visible to conflict and crime monitoring. The Aceh-focused scholarship documents elite capture and economic exclusion but generally concludes its risk assessment at the threshold of horizontal political conflict. The NTS literature observes intensifying criminal activity in and around Aceh without connecting it to the unfinished reintegration agenda, and recent corridor research documents the recruitment of economically vulnerable coastal populations into smuggling networks without reference to the post-conflict origins of that vulnerability (Prayuda & Sary, 2026). What none of these literatures captures is the configuration this article terms silent remobilisation: the absorption of economically remarginalised former combatants and conflict-affected coastal populations into transnational criminal economies within a celebrated DDR success case, through networks that produce neither renewed insurgency nor successor armed groups. Because this pathway generates no armed conflict events, it is invisible to the metrics by which DDR success is conventionally judged, and it is precisely this invisibility that makes it strategically consequential.

1.3 Contribution and Research Questions

This article makes three contributions. Conceptually, it reframes reintegration as an instrument of vulnerability reduction rather than post-conflict compensation, and situates it within Indonesia's national resilience doctrine, thereby connecting a locally grounded policy debate to the international DDR literature. Analytically, it applies defence management standards, specifically the threat–vulnerability–consequence risk model and capability-based planning, to a reintegration case, an application that is common in security planning but rare in peace and conflict scholarship. Practically, it produces an indicative risk matrix and a set of cross-institutional early warning indicators intended to be operationally usable by subnational authorities, and it does so at a moment of unusual policy salience, since Aceh's special autonomy funding is scheduled to expire in 2027 while the governing legislation is under active revision.

Three research questions structure the analysis. First, through what mechanisms has the failure of economic reintegration and reintegration governance eroded the social dimensions of national resilience as articulated in the Astagatra framework? Second, how have the resulting vulnerabilities been exploited in practice by non-traditional security actors, particularly transnational criminal networks operating in the Malacca Strait corridor? Third, what policy measures can close these vulnerabilities, and what indicators would allow their emergence to be detected before escalation occurs?

2. METHOD

2.1 Research Design

This study employs an interpretive single-case study design (Yin, 2018), operationalised through framework-guided document analysis (Bowen, 2009). The design is appropriate for three reasons. The research questions are interpretive rather than causal, seeking to establish how a set of documented policy deficits functions as a security vulnerability rather than to estimate the magnitude of a treatment effect. The relevant evidentiary base is documentary, consisting of legal instruments, institutional evaluations and peer-reviewed studies accumulated over two decades. And the analytical objective is the construction of a risk framework capable of guiding policy, a task for which structured qualitative synthesis is better suited than statistical inference on a single provincial case.

2.2 Data Sources

Data were drawn from four categories of documents, selected to permit triangulation across source types.

Primary legal and policy instruments. The Helsinki MoU (2005), Law No. 11 of 2006 on the Governing of Aceh, Law No. 3 of 2002 on State Defence, and Aceh Qanun No. 6 of 2015 on the Aceh Reintegration Agency were used to establish the formal commitments, institutional mandates and fiscal architecture against which implementation is assessed.

Peer-reviewed scholarship and institutional evaluations. These include the ARLS survey programme and associated analyses (Barron, 2009; Barron et al., 2009), the World Bank Multi-Stakeholder Review of post-conflict programming (World Bank, 2009), and the political-economy literature on post-Helsinki Aceh (Ansori, 2012; Aspinall, 2008, 2009a, 2009b), together with Indonesian field studies of programme delivery at district level (Yunanda, 2021; Zuhri & Khairulyadi, 2017).



International security and crime reporting. Assessments of trafficking dynamics in the Andaman Sea and Malacca Strait corridor were drawn from United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime reporting on synthetic drugs in East and Southeast Asia (UNODC, 2025) from recent scholarship on cross-border narcotics smuggling in the Strait (Prayuda & Sary, 2026), and from field reporting on post-conflict crime in Aceh (International Crisis Group, 2007).

Contemporary policy reporting. Developments occurring after the close of the peer-reviewed record, principally the parliamentary deliberation on revising the Law on the Governing of Aceh during 2026, were tracked through national news agencies. These sources were used only to establish the status of ongoing legislative and fiscal processes, not as evidence for analytical claims, and are identified as such in the discussion.

2.3 Analytical Framework

Three frameworks were applied in sequence. The Integrated DDR Standards (United Nations, 2006) provide the criteria against which reintegration outcomes are evaluated, defining reintegration as a long-term process with economic, social and political dimensions rather than a time-bound transfer of benefits. Indonesia's national resilience doctrine, and specifically the Astagatra formulation of eight interdependent dimensions of resilience comprising three natural aspects (geography, demography and natural resources) and five social aspects (ideology, politics, economics, socio-culture, and defence and security), provides the framework for tracing how localised programme failure propagates into aggregate national vulnerability (Armawi, 2020; Lemhannas RI, n.d.). Defence management and security risk standards supply the risk vocabulary: following the formulation established in the risk analysis literature (Willis et al., 2005), risk is treated as a function of threat, vulnerability and consequence, such that a capable threat actor encountering an open vulnerability under conditions of significant consequence generates risk, while the associated planning logic draws on capability-based planning (Davis, 2002). Within this vocabulary, reintegration policy is classified as an instrument of vulnerability reduction, and its performance is assessed accordingly.

2.4 Analytical Procedure

The analysis proceeded in four steps. First, documented reintegration deficits were thematically coded and grouped into vulnerability clusters on the basis of the mechanism producing the deficit rather than the sector in which it appeared. Second, each cluster was mapped to the threat actors empirically observed or plausibly positioned to exploit it. Third, each cluster was assigned an ordinal likelihood and impact rating, from which a composite risk level was derived. Fourth, each cluster was translated into one or more observable early warning indicators, each paired with the institution holding the relevant data.

Because ordinal risk ratings are frequently criticised as arbitrary, the criteria applied here are stated explicitly. Likelihood was rated High where exploitation of the vulnerability is documented as having already occurred; Medium where the causal pathway is established in the comparative literature and the enabling conditions are present but activation requires an additional trigger; and Low where exploitation is conceivable but neither documented nor structurally supported. Impact was rated according to two criteria: the number of Astagatra dimensions affected, and the reversibility of the damage within a single policy cycle. Impact was rated Very High where three or more dimensions are implicated and the damage would not be reversible within one cycle; High where the damage affects two or more dimensions or is reversible only over the medium term; and Medium where effects are largely confined to programme effectiveness and institutional trust. Composite risk was classified as Critical where either both dimensions were rated High or above, or where a Very High impact coincided with at least Medium likelihood.

2.5 Limitations

Four limitations should be stated. First, the risk matrix is analyst-assessed rather than statistically weighted; it is intended as a structured heuristic for policy prioritisation and as a set of propositions available for empirical testing, not as a validated measurement instrument. Second, the study relies on secondary data and includes no original fieldwork or interviews, which constrains its ability to characterise micro-level dynamics at village level. Third, the most comprehensive survey evidence on Acehnese reintegration dates from 2008, and no comparable instrument has since been fielded; inferences about the present condition of the ex-combatant population therefore rest on the assumption, supported but not proven by subsequent qualitative studies, that the structural pattern identified then has persisted. Fourth, certain contemporary enforcement statistics circulate primarily through national and local media rather than through published agency reports, and these are treated in the discussion as indicative rather than confirmatory pending verification against official sources. Together these limitations suggest that the findings should be read as an analytical framework requiring empirical validation, and the concluding section identifies the research designs best suited to that task.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The analysis identifies four vulnerability clusters. They are presented in the order of the causal sequence they jointly describe: a governance and fiscal failure that produces economic exclusion, an exploitation of that exclusion by



criminal actors, a slower-moving generational vulnerability, and a contemporary fiscal shock that threatens to intensify all three.

3.1 Cluster One: Fiscal-Economic Failure, Elite Capture and the Data Deficit

The Aceh Reintegration Agency (Badan Reintegrasi Aceh, BRA), established in February 2006 as the lead institution for reintegration, administers a beneficiary population encompassing three categories defined in its establishing regulation: former combatants, released political prisoners and detainees, and civilian victims of the conflict (Government of Aceh, 2015). Provincial estimates commonly place this population at around 150,000 individuals, although in the absence of a verified registry even this headline figure cannot be independently confirmed. An administrative burden of this scale presupposes a verified, unified beneficiary registry. The absence of such a registry is the foundational deficit from which the remainder of this cluster follows.

Field studies of programme delivery report a consistent pattern of constraints: limited institutional capacity, weak validity of beneficiary data, indications of budgetary misappropriation, misdirected assistance, and political influence over the distribution of business capital (Yunanda, 2021; Zuhri & Khairulyadi, 2017). The recurrence of this pattern across independent studies at different sites indicates a systemic rather than incidental failure. Its direction is consistent with the political-economy accounts discussed above: the material benefits of peace accrued disproportionately to former elites who converted wartime authority into contracting and patronage positions (Ansori, 2012; Aspinall, 2009a), while rank-and-file former combatants, the population for whom the programmes were nominally designed, remained substantially outside their reach. Barron's (2009) assessment that the programme's reliance on cash compensation rather than livelihood development produced rising inequality within the ex-combatant population is the mechanism that connects these two observations. The impact evaluation of the community-based BRA-KDP programme, which reached 1,724 villages, points in the same direction: the programme produced measurable short-term welfare gains, including an eleven-point decline in the share of villagers classified as poor by village heads, but little improvement in social cohesion, and some evidence that conflict victims who participated became less accepting of ex-combatants, a pattern attributed to perceived unfairness in the distribution of assistance (Barron et al., 2009).

Read through a defence management lens, the data deficit is not an administrative inconvenience but the most fundamental vulnerability in the reintegration chain, because it deprives the state of three distinct capabilities simultaneously: the capability to measure programme coverage, the capability to detect leakage, and the capability to distinguish legitimate claims from politicised ones. The consequences are observable in implementation outcomes. The commitments under paragraph 3.2.5 of the Helsinki MoU concerning the allocation of farmland, employment and social security have advanced slowly over more than a decade, with regulatory ambiguity and unreliable beneficiary data among the principal obstacles (Tarfi & Amri, 2021). Research on the land component reaches the same conclusion from the agrarian side: the farmland provision of the MoU remained substantially unimplemented for more than a decade after the settlement, owing to the absence of implementing regulations and clearly assigned authority, and its realisation is now argued to depend on alignment with national agrarian reform instruments (Tarfi & Amri, 2021). The fiscal-economic cluster is therefore best understood as a failure of information management that subsequently manifests as a failure of resource allocation.

3.2 Cluster Two: Exploitation by Transnational Criminal Networks

The second cluster differs from the others in an important respect: the vulnerability it describes is not merely prospective. The involvement of former combatants in post-conflict criminal economies was documented within two years of the settlement (International Crisis Group, 2007), and the recruitment of coastal populations along the corridor into trafficking functions is documented in current research (Prayuda & Sary, 2026). This distinction carries analytical weight, since a potential vulnerability warrants monitoring whereas an actualised one warrants intervention.

Aceh's geography places it at the northern approach to the Strait of Malacca, adjacent to the Andaman Sea corridor that carries synthetic drugs from production zones in mainland Southeast Asia towards regional markets. UNODC reporting has repeatedly identified this corridor as a principal maritime trafficking route into Indonesia and has documented a trend towards consignments of increasing size moving along maritime rather than overland routes (UNODC, 2025). Recent scholarship on the Strait similarly emphasises that its density of legitimate traffic and the unevenness of enforcement capacity across jurisdictions render it structurally attractive to smuggling networks, whose operational methods have adapted accordingly: research on the Riau-Johor segment of the corridor documents at least thirty unofficial landing points, mid-sea transactions conducted from local fishing boats, and single-year methamphetamine seizures in the hundreds of kilograms (Prayuda & Sary, 2026). Indonesian enforcement reporting indicates that Aceh accounts for a disproportionate share of national narcotics interdiction relative to its population and territory; while the specific proportions circulating in national media require verification against published agency data, the direction of the finding is corroborated by independent assessments identifying Aceh as a principal maritime entry point for narcotics into Indonesia.



What connects this enforcement picture to reintegration policy is the supply of labour. Trafficking networks require couriers, route security, storage and local distribution nodes, and they recruit these functions locally: the corridor research cited above documents the recruitment of economically vulnerable fishermen and coastal residents as couriers, route guides and providers of transport (Prayuda & Sary, 2026). Concentrations of unemployed former combatants and conflict-affected coastal communities constitute precisely the labour pool such networks seek. The criminogenic potential of failed reintegration in Aceh was documented early: within two years of the settlement, field reporting recorded persistent ex-combatant unemployment alongside a wave of extortion, robbery and illegal resource extraction involving former fighters (International Crisis Group, 2007). Indonesian sociological research has subsequently reinforced the warning that former combatants who fail to achieve economic reintegration are at elevated risk of transitioning into political enforcement roles, ordinary criminality, or participation in narcotics networks (Nirzalin, 2023; Zuhri & Khairulyadi, 2017). What remains to be established empirically is the degree to which recruitment into trafficking networks is concentrated among former combatants specifically, a question taken up in the concluding section. The same infrastructure, both physical and social, supports human trafficking and migrant smuggling along the same maritime routes.

This finding is where the case makes its clearest theoretical contribution. Themnér's (2011, 2013) account holds that remarginalisation renders ex-combatants susceptible to remobilisation when remobilisers can activate wartime networks through selective incentives and relational trust. The Aceh case satisfies the first condition, and the second condition is satisfied by an actor the theory did not anticipate. Criminal networks perform precisely the functions Themnér attributes to remobilisers: they offer selective material incentives, they recruit through existing social relationships, and they draw on residual wartime capabilities including territorial knowledge, logistics and the capacity for coordinated discretion. What differs is the output. Remobilisation of this kind produces neither insurgency nor militia formation, and therefore registers in no armed conflict dataset. It is, in the sense used here, silent. The pathway is consistent with the quantitative finding that proximity to criminal groups is among the strongest predictors of ex-combatant recidivism (Kaplan & Nussio, 2018), yet it differs from the Colombian pattern in a decisive respect: absorption occurs into transnational trafficking economies that require no successor armed organisation, so that even the criminal violence which renders remobilisation visible elsewhere is largely absent. The implication for DDR evaluation is significant: a programme may be judged successful by the standard criterion of conflict non-recurrence while having generated exactly the conditions that a different category of armed actor requires. This corresponds to what the Indonesian defence literature terms a latent asymmetric threat, characterised not by confrontation but by slow erosion of the security dimension of regional resilience.

3.3 Cluster Three: Intergenerational Transmission of Conflict Memory

The third cluster operates on a generational timescale. The first cohort born entirely after both the military emergency period and the Helsinki settlement has now reached adulthood. This cohort has no direct experience of the conflict but inherits its memory through three channels: family narrative, community narrative and, with increasing weight, digital media.

Two divergent trajectories are available. Inherited memory may be processed into what can be termed educative reconciliation, in which conflict experience is converted into transmissible knowledge about peace, strengthening the socio-cultural dimension of resilience. Alternatively, it may settle into a reservoir of inherited grievance: dormant in ordinary circumstances but available for mobilisation when political conditions favour it. Which trajectory prevails depends substantially on a variable that remains unresolved, namely the formal acknowledgement and settlement of victims' claims. Aspinall's (2008) characterisation of the Helsinki process as a peace substantially without justice, together with documented constraints on the operation of Aceh's Truth and Reconciliation Commission (Avonius, 2012), indicates that the enabling conditions for the second trajectory have not been removed. Grievance that is never formally acknowledged tends to be transmitted rather than resolved.

In risk terms this cluster presents a distinctive profile: medium likelihood but high impact. It does not demand the immediacy of response warranted by the criminal exploitation cluster, since mobilisation of inherited identity requires an activating trigger. Its consequences, however, would determine whether the settlement endures beyond a second generation, and digital circulation accelerates the propagation of grievance narratives considerably beyond the rate at which reconciliation narratives spread.

3.4 Cluster Four: The 2027 Fiscal Cliff and the Politics of Special Autonomy

The fourth cluster is the most contemporary and the most time-constrained. Article 183 of Law No. 11 of 2006 established Aceh's special autonomy fund at two per cent of the national General Allocation Fund for the period 2008 to 2022, reducing it to one per cent for 2023 to 2027, after which it lapses entirely (Republic of Indonesia, 2006). The declining schedule was designed as a transition. The difficulty is that Aceh's development financing, and directly or



indirectly the reintegration programmes within it, has remained substantially dependent on this instrument throughout the transition period.

At the time of writing, revision of the governing legislation is under deliberation in the national legislature, with proposals to extend the special autonomy allocation at 2.5 per cent of the General Allocation Fund without a terminal date, and with completion targeted before August 2026 in order to enter the 2027 budget cycle (Fajri, 2026a; Kompas, 2026). Two scenarios warrant anticipation. Under the first, the revision is enacted with a sustainable financing scheme; fiscal risk is closed, but the resolution is partial, because the governance deficits identified in the first cluster remain unaddressed and additional resources entering an unreformed allocation system would reproduce existing leakage patterns at greater scale. Under the second, the revision is delayed or the agreed scheme proves inadequate; a fiscal contraction would then affect reintegration programming at a point of continuing dependence, and the resulting grievance would be readily framed as a repudiation of the peace settlement itself.

This reading is not an academic projection detached from policy practice. Statements by the provincial executive explicitly linking the legislative revision to the avoidance of future conflict (Fajri, 2026b) indicate that the same risk framing has already been adopted by decision-makers. Where a subnational government characterises a fiscal question as a conflict-prevention question, the political-structural cluster ceases to be hypothetical and becomes an active policy agenda.

3.5 Comparative Risk Assessment

Table 1 arranges the four clusters according to the criteria specified in section 2.4. The purpose of the arrangement is to establish priority among vulnerabilities that are frequently treated as equivalent items on a list of problems.

Table 1. Risk matrix of reintegration vulnerabilities in Aceh

Vulnerability	Exploiting threat	Likelihood	Impact	Risk level
Concentrations of unemployed ex-combatants and conflict-affected coastal communities	Transnational narcotics networks; human trafficking and migrant smuggling	High	High	Critical
Fiscal uncertainty following the 2027 expiry of special autonomy funding	Political mobilisation of grievance; delegitimisation of the settlement	Medium	Very high	Critical
Beneficiary data deficit and reintegration governance failure (elite capture)	Organised corruption and patronage; erosion of state legitimacy	High	Medium	High
Transmission of conflict memory to the post-emergency generation without completed reconciliation	Narrative radicalisation; mobilisation of identity in digital space	Medium	High	High

Source: Authors' analysis, applying the rating criteria specified in section 2.4.

Two clusters reach the critical threshold by different routes. Criminal exploitation of ex-combatant unemployment does so because both dimensions are rated high: exploitation is documented as occurring, and the consequences extend across the economic and security dimensions of resilience simultaneously. Post-2027 fiscal uncertainty reaches the same threshold despite a lower likelihood rating, because the legislative outcome remains genuinely undetermined while the impact of an adverse outcome would extend to the political legitimacy of the settlement itself and would not be reversible within a single budget cycle. The asymmetry between these two pathways is instructive: risk prioritisation that considers likelihood alone would systematically underweight the second.

The remaining two clusters fall one level below. Governance failure carries high likelihood, since elite capture is consistently documented across independent studies, but its impact is rated medium because it principally degrades programme effectiveness and institutional trust rather than directly precipitating security escalation. Intergenerational memory transmission inverts this profile, combining medium likelihood with high impact. It should be emphasised that these ratings are indicative. Likelihood assessment at village level in particular would require micro-level social data that documentary methods cannot supply, which constitutes both a limitation of the present study and an argument for pairing macro-institutional analysis with ethnographic and community-based research.



3.6 Early Warning Indicators

A risk ranking is of limited value if it is produced once and archived. The early warning principle within defence management requires that each vulnerability be rendered observable through indicators monitored at regular intervals across institutions. Table 2 translates the four clusters into six such indicators, each paired with the institutions holding the relevant data.

Table 2. Early warning indicators for reintegration vulnerability

Indicator	Resilience dimension	Data custodian
Narcotics and trafficking interdiction trends in districts with ex-combatant concentrations (case count, volume, method)	Defence and security	National Narcotics Agency; Regional Police; Customs and Excise; Maritime Security Agency
Unemployment and poverty rates in ex-combatant base areas relative to the provincial mean	Economic	Statistics Indonesia; Aceh Reintegration Agency; district governments
Implementation progress on Helsinki MoU paragraph 3.2.5 (land, employment, social security) and beneficiary data validity	Economic; political	Aceh Reintegration Agency; National Land Agency; Ministry of Home Affairs
Regulatory and fiscal certainty: legislative progress on the revision and the post-2027 financing scheme	Political	National legislature; Government of Aceh; provincial legislature
Prevalence of conflict narratives and grievance sentiment in digital spaces used by young Acehnese	Socio-cultural; ideological	Regional political and social affairs offices; academic monitoring
Village-level social tension: disputes over assistance allocation; friction between ex-combatants and victims	Socio-cultural	Customary institutions; religious leaders; community-based research networks

Source: Authors' analysis, structured according to the Astagatra dimensions of national resilience.

The six indicators divide across two monitoring registers, and this division is itself analytically significant. The first four rest on institutional data generated at national and provincial scale through established bureaucratic channels, and are verifiable across agencies. They therefore fall naturally within the remit of regional coordinating bodies. The final two do not. Digital sentiment among young people and social tension at village level move through informal registers, everyday conversation, local social media dynamics, and the routine relations between former combatants and victims, that bureaucratic instruments capture poorly. Customary institutions, religious authorities and community-embedded research networks possess access and interpretive sensitivity that state agencies do not hold to the same degree. A complete early warning system consequently requires macro-institutional and micro-cultural data to operate in parallel, since neither substitutes for the other. This is a methodological requirement rather than an institutional preference.

3.7 Policy Implications

Five implications follow from the analysis, presented in the order of their logical dependency.

1. **A unified and verified reintegration registry.** Because the data deficit disables measurement, leakage detection and claim verification simultaneously, it conditions the effectiveness of every subsequent measure. A single beneficiary database, cross-verified between the reintegration agency, the ministry responsible for home affairs, village administrations and local institutions, is therefore a precondition rather than one option among several. Additional appropriations directed into an unreformed allocation system would reproduce documented leakage at greater scale.
2. **Transition from cash transfer to capability development.** Consistent with the IDDRS framing of reintegration as a long-term multidimensional process and with Barron's (2009) finding on the limits of compensation-based design, programme architecture should shift towards vocational training, market and credit access, and accelerated implementation of the land commitments under paragraph 3.2.5, ideally aligned with national agrarian reform mechanisms rather than administered as a parallel scheme.



3. **Reintegration safeguards within the legislative revision.** The current revision process should not be confined to the quantum of special autonomy financing. Performance-based earmarking for reintegration, coupled with strengthened oversight, would prevent the first scenario identified in section 3.4, in which fiscal continuity is secured without governance reform. The window for this intervention is defined by the legislative calendar and is therefore narrow.
4. **Integration of reintegration indicators into regional early warning systems.** The indicators in Table 2 should become standing components of subnational security monitoring rather than periodic research outputs, and should be paired with community-based early warning through customary and religious institutions in order to capture the two indicators that institutional data cannot reach.
5. **Development-based counter-exploitation.** Alternative livelihood intervention in ex-combatant concentrations along the exposed corridor should be treated as complementary to interdiction rather than subordinate to it. Enforcement addresses the threat actor; it does not reduce the labour supply on which the actor depends. Closing that vulnerability and interdicting the threat are analytically distinct operations, and the former is currently the less developed of the two.

4. Conclusion

This article has argued that the failure of reintegration in Aceh should be understood not as an unresolved welfare question but as a strategic vulnerability with implications for national resilience. The evidence assembled here indicates a sequence rather than a set of discrete problems. A beneficiary data deficit and the capture of programme benefits by former elites degraded the economic dimension of resilience first. That degradation propagated into the socio-cultural dimension through a generation inheriting conflict memory without completed reconciliation, and into the security dimension through transnational criminal networks recruiting from concentrations of economically excluded former combatants along the Malacca Strait corridor. The scheduled expiry of special autonomy financing in 2027 adds a further layer of risk to a vulnerability structure already formed.

The theoretical contribution lies in specifying a variant of remobilisation that existing frameworks accommodate imperfectly. The literature on ex-combatant violence anticipates that remarginalisation produces susceptibility to remobilisation into organised armed violence, and research on criminal recidivism has extended this expectation to organised criminal successor groups of the kind observed in post-paramilitary Colombia (Kaplan & Nussio, 2018; McMullin, 2013). In Aceh, remarginalisation appears instead to have produced susceptibility to absorption into transnational trafficking economies that require no successor organisation and generate no armed conflict events, a trajectory that consequently remains largely invisible both to conflict-recurrence metrics and to the organised-crime indicators developed for cases of armed criminal succession. A programme may thus be recorded as successful on the criterion of conflict non-recurrence while having produced precisely the conditions on which a different class of armed actor depends. This suggests that DDR evaluation frameworks should incorporate indicators of criminal absorption alongside conflict recurrence, and that the analytical boundary conventionally maintained between post-conflict programming and transnational crime policy is difficult to sustain in maritime settings.

The methodological contribution is the demonstration that defence management standards can be applied productively to reintegration analysis. Treating reintegration policy as an instrument of vulnerability reduction, rather than as post-conflict compensation, generates a prioritisation logic and a monitoring architecture that a purely developmental framing does not produce. It also reframes the relationship between security and development institutions: on this reading, reintegration expenditure is not an alternative to security expenditure but a component of it.

The limitations identified in section 2.5 indicate the direction of further work. The risk ratings advanced here are analytical propositions and would benefit from empirical validation, most directly through a contemporary successor to the ARLS survey capable of establishing whether the economic position of the ex-combatant population has changed materially since 2008. The proposed criminal absorption pathway requires testing through research designs able to establish whether recruitment into trafficking networks is in fact concentrated in ex-combatant populations, a question that documentary methods cannot resolve and that would require careful ethnographic work under appropriate ethical safeguards. Comparative analysis with other maritime post-conflict settings would establish whether the pathway identified here is particular to Aceh or represents a more general feature of reintegration failure along trafficking corridors.

Twenty-one years after the Helsinki settlement, the Acehnese case suggests a general proposition: the cessation of organised violence is achievable within months, while reintegration requires commitment across generations. Where that commitment is not sustained, the resulting vulnerability does not remain unoccupied. It is filled by whichever actors are positioned to exploit it, and those actors need not be the ones the peace agreement was designed to disarm.



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