

“BAKAS LEWU”: POLITICAL BROKER IN THE MANDUING TAHETA VILLAGE ELECTION, CENTRAL KALIMANTAN

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Abstract

Bakas Lewu is a group of elders in the Dayak Ngaju language of Central Kalimantan. Previous studies have been more oriented towards mapping brokers in mobilizing material resources to influence voters. The purpose of this article is to explore the role of Bakas Lewu as political brokers, especially how they work, involving culture and social power, which has been discussed to a limited extent. This study was conducted qualitatively and the main data source came from interviews with key informants who knew about the village head election (Pilkades) cases in Manduing Taheta, then analyzed in depth and interactively. This study shows that Bakas Lewu as political brokers play an important role in mobilizing political support based on social relations, kinship, and local Dayak culture by relying on interpersonal communication, narrative control, and social networks to build community trust and loyalty. This phenomenon emphasizes that political power in the village is more influenced by personal and social relationships than material transactions. This study challenges the dominant approach that sees political brokers in Indonesia as transactional actors, by highlighting the importance of local social and cultural dynamics. These findings indicate the diversity of political brokerage practices and suggest more research on how social relations, such as kinship and loyalty, play a role in mobilizing political support, opening up new perspectives in the study of local politics in Indonesia.

Keywords: political broker; Dayak culture; village elections; Central Kalimantan

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INTRODUCTION

The broker phenomenon is not unfamiliar in various literature in the world. What is a broker? Simply put, a broker is a process of connecting actors in social, economic, and political relations systems to gain access to valuable resources (Auerbach & Thachil, 2018; Obstfeld & Borgatti, 2008; Stovel & Shaw, 2012). This manuscript attempts to discuss brokers from the political contestation perspective. Their role as agents by holding the reciprocal principle is very effective in mediating between voters and candidates (Aspinall & Sukmajati, 2015; Gibbings et al., 2017; Leider et al., 2009; Ravanilla et al., 2017; Shrestha & Yeoh, 2018; Sobel, 2005; Van Klinken, 2013). Why are brokers so important for candidates? Of course, because candidates feel unable to interact directly with a very large number of voters, an alternative has emerged to use intermediary services as an intermediary to meet voters (Aspinall, 2014; Stokes et al., 2013).

In Indonesia, studies related to brokers are analyzed at various levels of contestation, such as presidential elections (Aspinall & Mietzner, 2019), legislative elections (Aspinall & Sukmajati, 2015; Tawakkal et al., 2018), regional head elections, (Ananta, 2017; Aspinall et al., 2017; Darwin, 2017; Haridison, 2021a; Paskarina et al., 2019; Tawakkal et al., 2017; George Towar Iqbal Tawakkal et al., 2020; Tawakkal & Garner, 2017; Wance & Djae, 2019). Many scholars have discussed brokers in village head elections in various segments. Aspinall & Rohman (2017) describe brokers in Pilkades in Java, as elite relations at various levels such as the New Order era. However, at this time the dynamics of village politics have shifted. In the New Order era, village elites obeyed centralistic rules. However, currently, village elites are more dynamic in building reciprocal relationships with elites who have interests above them, at the provincial and district levels. Village elites hunt for development programs to advance the village and at the same time become patrons for their villages. Each is committed and receives benefits during the contestation season, both Pilkades, regional elections, and legislative elections. Relatively the same as the research of Aspinall & As'ad (2015) in Tanah Laut, South Kalimantan, the village elite (village head) is referred to as a very effective state broker in hunting for votes. Village officials become reliable brokers in regional elections and legislative elections.

Research on Village Head Elections in Indonesia examines whether the presence of brokers can provide advantages or disadvantages for candidates. Brokers are addressed to village government officials, entrepreneurs, traders, and families, such as in the Village Head Elections in Tanjung Jabung Timur Regency and the Village Head Elections in Tanjung Kediri Regency (Hidayat et al., 2019; Pratiwi et al., 2020). However, in Abheseka's (2019) research in the Mekarsari Yogyakarta Village Head Election, it was found that candidates who relied on brokers

were no more profitable than candidates who maintained social ties with voters. This study shows the determination of brokers in the Village Head Election as centrality.

Village head elections have existed since the British colonial era, between 1811 and 1816. Under the Raffles government, the mechanism for filling the village head position was changed from being based on lineage to direct election (Nurcholis, 2011). Therefore, the study of Pilkades is very thick with its own uniqueness. Several studies have demonstrated that villages have distinctive local wisdom in describing village politics, especially studies on brokers. Ainillah (2016) revealed that the Bangkalan Madura Village Head Election involved a blater. Blater is the Madurese village elite who influences every policy, problem-solving, or village head election contestation. The cultural and historical elements of the blater elite place them very central to the agenda in Madura. In the past, blater was identical to a culture that was close to the terms Shandor, remote, and bull racing. When blater was known as a high social strata and had good morals. One level above the Blater is the role of Kia's in Plosorejo village (Azwar, 2016) and in Madura (Asmawati et al., 2021). The roles of Blater and Kia's are managed by candidates to gain voters' trust. Triantini Study (Aspinall & Sukmajati, 2015; Metera, 2018) in the Blera community, Central Java, it is known as Sabet (success team). His research found that Sabet is significant in capturing votes, namely by conducting voter data collection and administrative processes. The Sabet structure can come from structural community figures (RT and RW, village heads), ordinary people, and religious leaders. Then, in Mranggen Village, Tawakkal (2017) found the term gapit which he called a political machine in the Pilkades. The way Gapit works is by mapping voters, building opinions, holding community meetings, distributing candidate materials, and ensuring that voters have voted. A relatively similar study is the research of Asmawati et al. (2020) in Pamekasan Regency, Madura. According to him, the victory of the album (Village Head) is not only limited to the role of the Bejingan (broker) who acts as a vote broker. Voter loyalty is a central factor where candidates get votes according to the target of the Bejingan. Pilkades studies in Central Java and East Java, the community knows the term botoh who acts as a broker. In Central Java, Botoh gambles based on an agreement made between the candidate and the Botoh. In East Java, gambling is only done among gamblers who have no relationship with political candidates. The role of Botoh is said to have transformed, no longer purely gambling, but winning candidates, with the method of recognizing community dynamics, money politics, dominance, and financiers in Pilkades (Abbiyyu, 2020; Fitriyah, 2018; Hartati et al., 2019).

Moreover, Yuningsih & Subekti (2016) conducted a study in Neglasari Village and found a

central role of the elders/kokolot in recommending a candidate for village head. According to the results of their study, the village head is at least a descendant of the previous kuwu (the term for village head), or at least a descendant of a village official, or a village resident who has received the blessing of the elders/kokolot. The Neglasari Village community believes that the village head must be someone who has charisma in social life and is respected by the community both because of himself and because of his family. The elders/kokolot are involved in the informal selection process and this has become a tradition in the Neglasari Village Head Election. The main requirements to become a candidate for village head are to have behavior based on customs and religion, the ability to tell stories (good at speaking), dangung (authority), dangiang (charisma). Meanwhile, Tjahjoko (2020) finding resistance from a candidate in a rational way for another candidate who used spiritual powers (shaman) in the Sriharjo Village Head Election, Bantul Regency. Likewise, Haridison (2021b) found that there were Dayak cultural values, hapahari and handep applied by candidates in their daily lives that had an impact on their electability in the Tumbang Habaon Village Head Election, Central Kalimantan. The application of traditional values in the past touched the hearts of voters and became the determinant of the candidate's victory.

Several previous literature have discussed several related to the Village Head Election. First, they analyzed the role of brokers both in terms of their performance and structure. Brokers are seen as effective in conducting transactional politics in villages, as intermediaries for money politics for voters. Then, some literature found an expansion in the role of brokers, not only bridging money politics but also the development of broker work methods in contests. Meanwhile, several researchers said that brokers are not significant when associated with voter loyalty, no matter how good the broker's work is if voters are not loyal it will result in the candidate not being elected. Second, several researchers have found in the village context a local term that refers to broker actors, such as sabet, botoh, blater, gapit, bejangan, kokolot. Some also refer to actors who are known to the community to have spiritual power, such as kia'i and shamans. The first point places the performance of brokers as vote brokers or political machines in the village and its expansion. There is also a discussion related to the structure and work pattern but more reviewing the role of the village as the last network in legislative elections and regional elections, not fully reviewing the Village Head Election. The second point contains several explanations that complement the first point, local cultural events with structures and working methods that have been discussed by Tawakkal (2017), like *gait*. However, the second point with a complete study related to local events in the Pilkades with a comprehensive explanation of

broker performance has limited literature. In the local realm, especially in Kalimantan, literature on broker political studies is still limited. Contribution Aspinall & As'ad (2015) enrich the treasury of Kalimantan but not a pure study related to brokers in the Village Head Election but tends to measure the victory of regional head election candidates based on the variation of votes at the village level. Likewise, Haridison (2021b) more focused on the actions or deeds of candidates before the village head elections which are portrayed by the community as inheriting the values of hapahari and handep, not yet fully explaining how cultural strategies are used to approach voters.

This research was conducted in Manduing Taheta because the village provides a unique and compelling case for understanding the role of Bakas Lewu in the Village Head Election. While Bakas Lewu, a group of elders with cultural authority, may exist in other regions, their influence in Manduing Taheta is particularly prominent and well-documented, making it an ideal location for this study. The Bakas Lewu phenomenon reflects a distinctive blend of cultural and social power in mobilizing electoral support, which is deeply rooted in the Dayak Ngaju traditions of the region. Although their role has not been widely studied in other contexts, Manduing Taheta serves as a critical starting point for examining how cultural brokers operate in local political processes, with potential insights for broader applications. Bakas Lewu can be classified as political brokers because they actively mediate between candidates and voters, utilizing their cultural authority, traditional deliberations, and social influence to mobilize support and legitimize the election process. By focusing on Manduing Taheta, this study not only highlights the integration of cultural strategies in political brokerage but also addresses a gap in the existing literature, offering a nuanced understanding of how local wisdom shapes political behavior in Indonesia.

RESEARCH METHODS

This research was conducted during the implementation of the Village Head Election in Manduing Taheta Village from October to November 2021. Manduing Taheta Village was chosen because this village is still thick with local culture and customs and is classified as a traditional village typology. Primary data was obtained from in-depth interviews with 15 informants, consisting of Village Head Election candidates, campaign teams, village communities, Village Representative Body (BPD) officials, traditional leaders, and bakas lewu. This research is classified as a case study (Creswell, 2007) because it specifically explores the case of the Village Head Election in traditional villages. This qualitative research studies the

meaning of an event or incident related to the broker phenomenon in the Village Head Election. Data analysis is carried out interactively between interview data and other data sourced from related journals, documentation, reports, and other related sources. Data is interpreted in order to obtain the meaning behind the data, and build propositions based on the research setting.

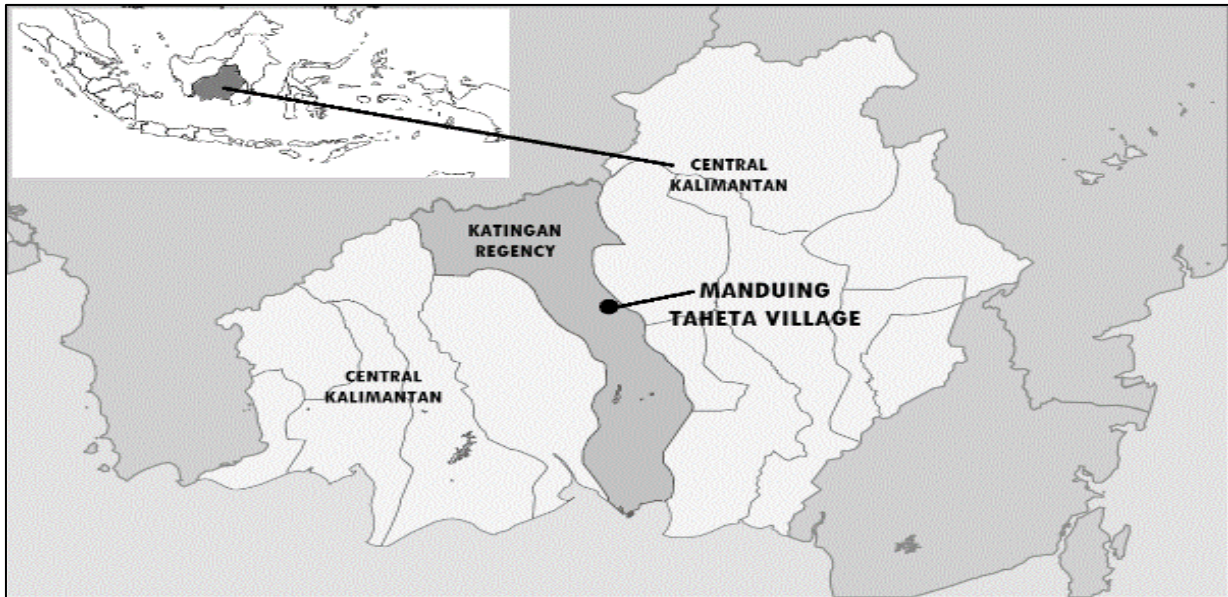


Figure 1. The location of Manduing Taheta Village in Katingan Regency, Central Kalimantan

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Village Head Elections in Manduing Taheta

Manduing Taheta Village was originally a hamlet inhabited by several families from neighboring villages such as Manduing Lama Village, Kuluk Bali Village, and Tumbang Lawang Village. This village was formed in 1963, the initial name of the village was Dukuh Lewu Tewang, but over time and population growth and to meet the demands of development, Dukuh Lewu Tewang became a definitive village in 1968. At the suggestion of Mr. Milson Rasa the Head of Pulau Malan District, Dukuh Lewu Tewang changed its name to Manduing Taheta Village. Manduing Taheta in Dayak language means "new", in accordance with the spirit of the founders of Manduing Taheta who always wanted change in a new direction. Manduing Taheta Village, which has an area of 3,905 Ha and is one kilometer from the capital of Pulau Malan District is strategically located in the middle of the District map. The distance from Katingan Regency is approximately 42 km. The village area borders directly with other areas, including, to the north it borders Manduing Lama Village, to the east it borders Gunung Mas Regency, to the south it borders Kuluk Bali Village and Trans Pulau Malan, and to the west, it borders the Katingan River. The majority of the population of Manduing Taheta Village are Dayak, in

addition to immigrants who inhabit this area. Based on statistical data in 2021, the population of Manduing Taheta Village was 812 people.

Candidate	Result	
	<i>vote</i>	<i>(%)</i>
Hola	174	41
Karyanto	246	59
valid vote	420	100
invalid vote	3	
no attended	42	
total voter	465	

Table 1. Recapitulation of Vote Counting (Source: Voting Committee, 2021)

The Village Head Election in Manduing Taheta is one of the simultaneous Village Head Elections in Katingan Regency with 465 permanent voters. There are 2 (two) candidates competing in Manduing Taheta Village, namely Mr. Karyanto as the incumbent and Mrs. Hola as the Village Government Treasurer. The two contestants uniquely live in the same neighborhood, namely in RT 03. Similar to the implementation of Village Head Elections in general, based on the voting results announced by the voting committee, the Manduing Taheta Village Head Election was won by Mr. Karyanto, as explained in detail in Table 1 above. Based on the data, it is known that Mr. Karyanto as the incumbent won the contestation by around 59% from Mrs. Hola who obtained around 41% of the votes. There were invalid votes because the voting method was not in accordance with the rules. Several voters were absent on the day of the election because they went to work outside the village.

Relationship Candidate–*Bakas Lewu*

Bakas Lewu, derived from the Dayak Ngaju language, refers to a group of respected elders or traditional leaders who hold significant influence within the community. Historically, *Bakas Lewu* emerged as cultural and social authorities responsible for guiding the community through deliberations, decision-making, and conflict resolution. Their authority is deeply rooted in the Dayak Ngaju tradition, where leadership is not merely about administrative roles but also about maintaining harmony and upholding cultural values. *Bakas Lewu*'s role evolved over time from traditional leadership to include political functions, especially in the context of the Village Head Election.

In Manduing Taheta, Bakas Lewu’s influence stems from their unique position as custodians of local wisdom and social cohesion. They are often individuals who have earned the community’s trust through their life experiences, moral integrity, and extensive kinship networks. Their decisions carry weight because they are seen as representatives of collective community interests. This traditional authority has naturally transitioned into the political realm, where they act as intermediaries between candidates and voters.

Bakas Lewu’s role as political brokers is an extension of their cultural function. They leverage their position to influence political outcomes by mobilizing support for candidates they deem suitable to lead the village. This influence is rooted in their ability to connect with the community on a personal level, often through kinship, mutual cooperation, and long-standing social ties. By framing their political endorsements within the context of cultural values and community benefit, Bakas Lewu plays a crucial role in shaping electoral dynamics in Manduing Taheta. This phenomenon illustrates that village politics is greatly influenced by the social and cultural dynamics that exist in the local community, where community leaders (Koter, 2013) play a central role in mobilizing political support



Figure 2. Relationship Pattern between Candidates and Bakas Lewu

Why Does Bakas Lewu Choose Candidates? The decision of Bakas Lewu as a political broker to support candidates in the Village Head Election in Manduing Taheta Village is based on several main factors. First, kinship and friendship. From interviews with Mr. Ulang Oriamampas and Mr. Muhammad Galy, it is clear that kinship and friendship are some of the main reasons why Bakas Lewu supports candidates. Key informants emphasized that their support for the incumbent stems from the long-standing friendship that has existed between them. In addition, they believe that the candidate has the ability to lead the village and fulfill his political promises. Meanwhile, other informants stated that their support for the candidate was influenced by the good relationship that has existed for a long time, as well as the belief that the candidate is the ideal candidate to lead the village. In a society that highly prioritizes family relationships, this personal bond is a strong basis for political decision-making. Bakas Lewu's support is not only based on the candidate's vision and mission but also on long-standing social

relations. Second, Reciprocity. Interviews with Mr. Termanto revealed a pattern of clientelism in which Bakas Lewu supports candidates in the hope of reciprocity, although this reciprocity is not always in the form of material that is immediately promised. This pattern of clientelism relationships shows that Bakas Lewu's decisions to support candidates are often inseparable from the hope of reciprocity in the future, whether socially, politically, or materially. This is also supported by evidence that political bargaining often involves consideration of long-term benefits, although this is not always expressed explicitly at the beginning of the relationship. Third, trust in candidates and personal sentiment. Interviews with several informants also showed that personal trust in candidates greatly influences Bakas Lewu's decisions in choosing. Many of them base their choices on the belief that a particular candidate has a good reputation, is able to lead, and is close to the community. For example, Mrs. Parida stated that as long as the candidate is good and can lead the village in a better direction, she will continue to support him, regardless of the advice of others. This confirms that in addition to kinship and clientelism, personal trust and the candidate's track record are also important considerations for Bakas Lewu in choosing.

Then, why do candidates use Bakas Lewu as a Political Brokers? From the candidate's perspective, the role of Bakas Lewu as a political broker in the Village Head Election is based on several strategic considerations, namely, First, the social influence of Bakas Lewu in the community. Bakas Lewu, as a respected community figure, has a great influence in shaping public opinion and directing the political choices of citizens. Interviews with voters show that many voters tend to follow the recommendations or advice of community figures they respect, including Bakas Lewu. In a society that highly prioritizes social ties and informal leadership, the influence of Bakas Lewu is very important for candidates to mobilize support and votes. Candidates take advantage of Bakas Lewu's respected social position in the community to direct political support towards them. Second, Bakas Lewu's ability to mobilize voters. As a political broker, Bakas Lewu has the ability to mobilize voters directly, especially because he has a strong network in the community. In interviews with several informants, it was emphasized that they tend to follow the advice and recommendations of community figures such as Bakas Lewu, especially because they feel that the decision has been well-considered by respected people. Bakas Lewu, with its position as an intermediary between candidates and the community, has direct access to the community and can mobilize votes more effectively than direct candidate campaigns. This explains why candidates rely on Bakas Lewu to reach voters and win their support. Third, the symbiotic clientelism relationship. The pattern of clientelism relationship between candidates and Bakas Lewu is also symbiotic, where both parties benefit from each

other. Candidates gain support from voters mobilized by Bakas Lewu, while Bakas Lewu gain recognition, social status, and in some cases, political or material reciprocity if the candidate they support wins the election.

The clientelism relationship between candidates and Bakas Lewu in the Village Head Election in Manduing Taheta Village is characterized by a reciprocal but asymmetrical dynamic, where the candidates function as the **patrons** and Bakas Lewu act as the **clients**. The candidates, as patrons, possess greater power and resources, including access to political authority, financial means, and the ability to fulfill promises of material or symbolic rewards. In contrast, Bakas Lewu, as clients, depend on these resources to maintain or enhance their status, influence, and relationships within the community.

This dynamic is evident in the way candidates rely on Bakas Lewu to mobilize voters and secure electoral support. Bakas Lewu's ability to influence the community through their social networks and cultural authority makes them indispensable intermediaries in the political process. In exchange, Bakas Lewu receive recognition, continued social prestige, and, in some cases, material or political benefits if the candidates they support win the election.

Concrete empirical evidence from interviews supports this relationship. For example, several informants highlighted instances where candidates provided resources for community events, supported cultural ceremonies, or promised development projects in return for Bakas Lewu's endorsement. Additionally, Bakas Lewu often leverage their relationship with the candidates to secure benefits for the community, such as infrastructure improvements or social programs, which reinforces their standing as leaders serving communal interests.

While the relationship is reciprocal, it is not equal. Candidates, as patrons, hold greater power due to their control over resources and decision-making authority, making Bakas Lewu reliant on their success for the realization of promises and continued access to benefits. This asymmetry illustrates the core principle of clientelism: the client provides support (e.g., mobilizing voters) in exchange for future rewards, but the fulfillment of these rewards ultimately depends on the patron's discretion.

Bakas Lewu Cultural and Social Strategy

This study reveals the important role of Bakas Lewu in the Pilkades which not only relies on material exchanges, but also cultural strategies rooted in personal communication and traditional surveys. As a bridge between candidates and voters, brokers play a central role in formulating, implementing, and controlling strategies designed to create profitable patron-client

relationships. Based on the results of interviews with several key informants, it can be concluded that the Bakas Lewu cultural strategy is realized through traditional communication and surveys based on kinship relationships, social loyalty, and trust in local community leaders. In the context of the Pilkades in Manduing Taheta, this strategy emphasizes emotional and social ties rather than material transactions, as is common in money politics practices.

Manduing Taheta Village is one of the traditional Dayak villages in Central Kalimantan, where the cultural and social structures are deeply rooted in Dayak Ngaju traditions. These traditions are characterized by a strong emphasis on kinship, mutual cooperation, and the role of community elders or leaders in decision-making processes. The village operates within a cultural framework that prioritizes communal harmony, respect for ancestral heritage, and adherence to traditional values and practices. One of the key cultural aspects of the Dayak community in Manduing Taheta is the institution of Bakas Lewu, which serves as both a cultural and social authority. This group plays a pivotal role in maintaining the village's cultural integrity by mediating conflicts, organizing traditional ceremonies, and upholding the community's collective identity. Their influence extends to the political realm, where they act as intermediaries between modern political systems and traditional community values.

The Dayak community's structural uniqueness is also evident in their hierarchical yet participatory social organization. While figures like Bakas Lewu hold respected positions, decision-making often involves deliberation and consensus among community members. This balance between traditional hierarchy and collective participation distinguishes Manduing Taheta as a traditional village community with unique cultural dynamics. Additionally, the Dayak cultural philosophy of "handep" (mutual cooperation) underpins many aspects of village life, including political behavior. This philosophy fosters a sense of shared responsibility and collective action, which candidates and political brokers like Bakas Lewu leverage during elections to mobilize support and align political decisions with community values.

Cultural communication strategies

One of the main findings of this study is the importance of interpersonal communication carried out by Bakas Lewu. In the interview, it was revealed that his main strategy was to utilize kinship networks and family relationships to build support for the incumbent candidate. Bakas Lewu approached voters directly, either by visiting their homes or through social gatherings, to convey messages that strengthened the performance of the candidate he supported. The communication used was persuasive communication that did not only focus on material promises

but also on the candidate's reputation and capacity to perform better. It was also emphasized that communication by relying on family ties and personal relationships could influence voter opinion in informal ways.

Bakas Lewu relies on historical and kinship relationships in conveying their support for the chosen candidate to the voters. This strategy shows that the main strength of political brokers does not lie in providing material alone, but rather in how they utilize social status and informal networks to organize support. Meanwhile, other informants revealed that the form of communication applied was by gathering community members informally regularly and building a narrative that could convince them of the candidate they supported. The important role of communication can be seen in how the narrative built by political brokers plays a key role in influencing public opinion. In the Manduing Taheta Village Head Election, Dayak Cultural concepts were often conveyed by Bakas Lewu, that "Dayak" (Haridison, 2021b, 2024; Haridison et al., 2023) is a central discourse to bind voters' emotions and at the same time emphasize that candidates are very concerned with the lives of the Dayak people at the level of equitable village development.

Traditional survey and social understanding

In addition to communication, the traditional survey strategy carried out by Bakas Lewu shows that there are unusual actions from the role of brokers that have been discussed by scholars. The surveys conducted are not formal surveys that are usually conducted by survey institutions, but rather surveys that are conducted personally through social networks that are built. For example, Mr. Ulang Oriamampas and Mr. Muhammad Galy rely on "telik sandi" who are trusted people who directly go into the community to collect information about the dynamics of support. These telik sandi are not only tasked with gathering information but also as an extension of the political broker in spreading the narrative of support.

This survey shows that Bakas Lewu has a deep understanding of the community support base, which is based on kinship networks and social relations. Thus, the survey conducted not only serves to map the mass base but also to anticipate the strategies of political opponents. This understanding allows political brokers to take tactical steps in determining the most effective communication approach for each existing social group. The interview results provide evidence of how to use "ciphers" to understand the issues circulating in the community, and then use them as a tool to form opinions and map support. This survey, although simple, is very effective because the relationships built are based on trust and loyalty.

The strong patron-client relationship in rural areas creates a bond that is difficult to break,

especially because there is a sense of reciprocity between them. Bakas Lewu utilizes this relationship to consolidate support without having to rely on material exchange. They show how the power of social and moral influence possessed by political brokers can be a major attraction to rally support for the candidates they support. Patronage is a central aspect of Bakas Lewu's cultural strategy, where the relationship between political brokers and voters is more than just a transactional relationship. In this context, political brokers play the role of patrons who provide social protection, either in the form of political advice, moral support, or direct involvement in social activities. As clients, the community provides political support to brokers in the form of voting loyalty.

From the facts obtained, the Bakas Lewu cultural strategy in the Pilkades is not only about material transactions or money politics, but more about personal communication, traditional surveys, and strong social relations. Bakas Lewu as political brokers rely on kinship networks, social loyalty, and patron-client relationships that are woven into the community to ensure the victory of the candidates they support. With communication and survey strategies based on these cultural values, they can control public opinion and choices effectively.

Spread of issues

Issue dissemination is one of the strategies used in local politics, including in the context of the Village Head Election, to influence public opinion and direct voter preferences. In Manduing Taheta Village, research shows that issue dissemination is carried out by political actors who have an interest in advancing the candidates they support, such as the Bakas Lewu Culture which also uses this tactic. Issue dissemination in this context can be seen as part of a political communication strategy that aims to change public perception, especially through the dissemination of negative information, either in the form of negative campaigns or black campaigns. This phenomenon in the context of the Village Head Election in Manduing Taheta is carried out systematically in the form of agitation and propaganda to disseminate certain information designed to influence public opinion and voter behavior.

Agitation is an effort to raise public awareness and emotion about an issue. This is done by providing information that tends to be real, but with a narrative that utilizes the emotional aspect of the issue. In the case study of Manduing Taheta Village, an example of agitation is the dissemination of information that the incumbent candidate is considered unsuitable because of his religious background which is considered exclusive. Although not entirely fabricated, this information is designed to trigger concerns among voters about the incumbent's ability to embrace all groups. Propaganda aims to expand and deepen the dissemination of this

information, regardless of whether the information disseminated is true or false. In this case, propaganda is carried out by leading the opinion that the challenger candidate can embrace all groups in society. This narrative is driven by the challenger's political broker to widen the gap in perception between the candidates while strengthening the challenger's position in the public.

The study findings show that the dissemination of issues as a cultural strategy of Bakas Lewu has an emphasis on "maintaining narrative control". By spreading negative issues about political opponents, they try to control the public conversation and public perception of opposing candidates. The depiction of the incumbent candidate as someone who is too religious and considered not inclusive is an example of this narrative control, which aims to shift support from the incumbent candidate to the challenger. Then, in another aspect, it can be "building an alternative image", where Bakas Lewu acts to form a positive image of their own candidate. The findings show the branding carried out by Bakas Lewu on one of the candidates, namely "the candidate is described as a more inclusive and populist leader". The use of such statements to "embrace all groups" is key to creating an alternative image that is more attractive to voters. Furthermore, electorally at the Manduing Taheta Village level, the dissemination of issues is also to "erode the opponent's support base". Negative campaigns that spread the issue that the incumbent is unable to embrace all groups aim to erode the support of the mass base from groups that feel unrepresented by the candidate. In this case, non-religious groups, or groups who feel marginalized by the incumbent's policies or attitudes, become the main targets for spreading this issue.

Bakas Lewu designed the dissemination of issues by forming a community network. These groups utilize individuals or "codes" who are close to the community to disseminate issues effectively. The dissemination of issues is also done informally, indirectly, and implicitly, for example through informal conversations at the community level. Information is disseminated in a more subtle and seemingly natural form, which then develops into a discussion among the community, creating momentum without being seen as a formal campaign. What is interesting is the strategy of "using social evidence". Statements from community figures in Manduing Taheta Village indicate that the issue is supported by local community figures, which strengthens the credibility of the issue in the eyes of voters. This is a tactic to utilize social influence and local authority in disseminating the issue that is to be built.

The spread of issues carried out by Bakas Lewu has implications for the dynamics of rural politics. On the one hand, it can cause "social polarization" where issues that touch on religious aspects or equality in government tend to trigger polarization in society. The spread of issues

about the incumbent's exclusivity, which is considered to only embrace religious groups, creates tension between different social groups and divides public support. On the other hand, the spread of issues can also "form a Deep Perception" where issues brought by this group, such as the ability of the challenger candidate to embrace all groups, form a deeper public perception of the candidate, thus influencing voter behavior. A strong and consistent narrative about the challenger candidate's inclusivity helps build a broader appeal to voters who were previously neutral or tended to support the incumbent.

In general, these findings indicate that the cultural strategy of spreading issues carried out by Bakas Lewu in the Manduing Taheta Village Head Election can be categorized as a form of negative campaign aimed at destroying the image of the opposing candidate while improving the image of the candidate they support. Through the use of citizen networks, indirect communication, and the formation of public perception influenced by community leaders, the spread of this issue was able to influence the course of the political contest. This strategy relies on structured agitation and propaganda mechanisms, with a focus on issues relevant to local social dynamics, to maximize political influence on voters.

CONCLUSIONS

This study highlights the central role of Bakas Lewu as a political broker in the Village Head Election (Pilkades) in Manduing Taheta Village in 2021, where strong patron-client relationships dominate political dynamics. Bakas Lewu's role extends beyond mere intermediaries to being central figures in mobilizing support through kinship, social, and cultural ties. These findings emphasize that local political power in Manduing Taheta relies more on personal relationships, trust, and social loyalty, rather than on transactional money politics often highlighted in the broader context of Indonesian politics. These findings indicate that local political power in Indonesia, especially at the village level, is still heavily influenced by informal social relations, where political brokers such as Bakas Lewu use interpersonal communication strategies and traditional surveys to build support. This study provides insight into how Bakas Lewu, as a political broker, relies on social and kinship networks, not only to mobilize material-based support but also by using cultural and social strategies. The patron-client relations that emerge in this study indicate that village politics in Manduing Taheta relies more on personal relationships, trust, and social loyalty, rather than the practice of money politics that generally occurs in the context of Indonesian politics. These findings show how Bakas Lewu uses approaches rooted in local Dayak culture, including ethnic and kinship narratives, conveyed through persuasive and informal communication to mobilize support.

From a practical perspective, policymakers and election organizers can draw lessons from this study by designing programs that strengthen community-based political education. For example, fostering transparency in electoral processes by recognizing and involving respected local figures like Bakas Lewu in non-partisan roles could ensure greater community trust. Village-level development programs could also leverage the cultural authority of traditional leaders to disseminate information and mediate community issues, promoting more inclusive and culturally sensitive governance. For political practitioners, this study highlights the importance of engaging with local social and cultural dynamics rather than relying solely on material incentives. Political campaigns should incorporate strategies that respect and involve traditional leadership structures to align candidates' messages with local values and community needs.

While this study provides insights into the socio-cultural aspects of political brokerage in Manduing Taheta, the findings are specific to this village and its unique Dayak Ngaju context. Generalizing these findings to all local political contexts in Indonesia would be inappropriate without acknowledging the significant variations in social and political structures across regions. Future research should examine similar phenomena in other villages to identify patterns and variations in political brokerage practices across diverse cultural settings in Indonesia.

This study makes a novel contribution by challenging dominant transactional theories of political brokerage in Indonesia and emphasizing the importance of socio-cultural dynamics. It introduces a contextualized approach to understanding political brokers, positioning them as cultural agents rather than merely facilitators of material exchanges. By considering the role of kinship, social loyalty, and cultural narratives, this study opens new avenues for research and provides practical insights for engaging with local politics in culturally diverse settings.

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