

Delegitimisation of Indonesian Traditional Leaders: An Analysis in Minangkabau, West Sumatra Province

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Abstract:

It is argued that an excessive euphoria of autonomy was the primary consequence of the first five years of decentralisation in Indonesia after the New Order. The euphoria of autonomy led to the emergence of ethnic nationalism perpetuated by traditional powers that regulated the control and exploitation of natural resources. The New Order government tried to control local democratic practices by weakening traditional leaders' legitimacy. This article explains how this reality occurs in West Sumatra Province. First, based on village and regional government laws following the New Order, local democracy led to the delegitimisation of traditional power. Second, the systematic implementation of local democracy erased the traditional leadership authority that relegated the Minangkabau ethnic and traditional values. It was concluded that the government enacted the local government and village laws to regulate the traditional authority.

Keywords:

decentralisation; local identity; traditional power; village; Minangkabau

Introduction

Traditional leaders in indigenous society were used to be recognised based on sovereignty in cultural and political power. Indigenous community traditional leaders actively played the roles of supervising the decisions. However, since Indonesian independence, the traditional leaders' authority in their societies gradually diminished. The 1998 democratic transition altered the dynamics of local politics in Indonesia with the consolidation of indigenous people across democratic practices (Tyson, 2010). The transition also led to the relegation of traditional power in the local-level governance and political processes (Buehler, 2010). It was argued that the government-controlled traditional leadership was used to implement local democracy. Leader authority was co-opted into government-led development activities. The aim is

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to make it easier for the government to mobilize informal institutions in carrying out a common development agenda. The merger between informal and formal institutions not only consolidated the position of state institutions, but informal institutions were also 'forced' to mobilise traditional community support in government-controlled projects (Helmske & Levitsky, 2004).

Although studies on government dominance in controlling traditional power are quite diverse, the issues discussed still focus on how to control the implementation of decentralization (Mietzner, 2014) which also has implications for ethnic conflicts due to control of natural resources (Bedner & Arizona, 2019) (Tanasaldy, 2012) (Bertrand, 2004). The region's emergence of inter-tribal and ethnic conflicts is due to the strengthening of traditional power due to state recognition (Wilson, 2006). They claim each other over control of natural resources around their respective territories. The government's acknowledgment of the community given to traditional powers based on Law Number 6 of 2014 concerning villages is a dilemma for the government. On the one hand, the government wants a stable and functioning society according to its respective roles. However, on the other hand, the recognition of traditional power in the regions encourages the emergence of ethnic sentiments that are so strong that they threaten the stability desired by the government. To balance this condition, the government tries to monitor the implementation of these traditional powers and intervene through policies if necessary to create conducive conditions from the regions' political, economic, social, and cultural aspects. For the government, supervision and intervention through the implementation of state functions are essential to strengthen the state power needed to realize its goals (Fukuyama, 2004). Especially during a democratic transition that requires state autonomy which must be implemented in the lives of citizens.

The article emphasising traditional powers described how the government-controlled traditional authority implemented a more inclusive regional local democracy. It was argued that the government played effective roles to bolster its position by restoring traditional order through the practice of decentralisation. As such, the government-controlled traditional authority was only involved in maintaining and preserving social and cultural values, while regional government oversaw the political power and governance across traditional communities. This article assumes that the strengthening of traditional power in this area aims to limit the role of local elites so as not to engage in politics with the community, especially to oppose government policies. On the other hand, this limitation of traditional elite power is used to mobilize community support for the success of development programs in the regions. By focusing on decentralised politics, readers were able to enrich their understanding of Indonesian central-regional administrative relations. Although initially, the implementation of government power during the reformation

gave flexibility to traditional power to accentuate leadership, the consolidation of traditionally ethnic authority threatened national integration. The empirical cases were used to explore several indigenous communities in Nagari (traditional village). How traditional power bolstered their position as they encountered the state in West Sumatra Province was the focus of the empirical cases.

State and Traditional Power in Indonesia

It is theorised that traditional power plays a vital role in the construction of modern Indonesian institutions. Traditional power comes from the authority attached to the local elite, which comes from norms, beliefs, and traditions. (Weber, 1947) explains that this traditional authority is a source of power that influences societal leadership styles. For example, traditional Indonesian societies sporadically fought against Dutch colonialism. Furthermore, the people in the regions fought against the colonialists to face colonial oppression at the initial stage. Through the mobilisation carried out by the traditional elites, the people resisted colonial oppressors. Although the traditional elites and the community retaliated, the elites and community members failed to defeat the colonialists. The resistance to colonialists was sporadic and inadequate to 'face' the Dutch colonialists. Thus, the resistance by the traditional elites and the people in the regions against the Dutch colonialists throughout the archipelago prompted the modern elite politicians to form Indonesia (Anderson, 1991).

One of the essential characteristics of local democracy included the provision of autonomy to traditional powers in administering current local government. The local democracy was justified because not many modern governments accorded the privilege to traditional power in government administration. Several countries advanced the efforts of incorporating local democracy by combining modern government and traditional power in hybrid forms. The collaboration of the two elites with different institutions positively impacted the community that formed these two institutions (Logan, 2009). The merger between the modern government and traditional power was materialised to accord the traditional communities the discretion to function in designated territories as specified by the current government. However, the incorporation between modern government and traditional power was met with an uneasy negotiation; the merger necessitated several clashes and conflicts (Goodfellow & Lindemann, 2013). It was found that traditional societies trusted the position of traditional elites for life-related decisions as opposed to modern governments (Zimbalist, 2021).

People in developing countries believed in the traditional power, particularly in helping the traditional communities. First, it was argued that the traditional communities constantly interact with one another so that the traditional elite understood the societal problems. Second, the traditional communities could relate to traditional elites because it seemed that the ancestors of traditional elites shared

several similar histories and hereditary relationships. Third, the traditional communities were conscious that the modern government elite was elected due to the legitimate state provision. It was inevitable that the traditional community had lesser trust in the government elite, particularly when the governing elite failed to meet the traditional community demands. Also, while traditional communities might support the modern elite as a consequence of elections, traditional communities did not necessarily share the same emotional sentiment. The participation of traditional societies was prompted by the elites who had ties to political elites or the ruling government. Studies concluded that clientelism as political patterns was still inherent in traditional societies; mobilisation and manipulation were inevitable in elections (Aspinall & Sukmajati, 2016).

However, the limited power of traditional elites also made it difficult for traditional communities to exercise their functions. First, the traditional elites were assigned as subordinates by the government. Thus, traditional elite authority implemented actions based on what was designed by law. The drafting of the law did not involve indigenous peoples. As such, the traditional elite authority was systematically reduced. Thus, the government hegemony and domination could be seen when the government only verbalised but did not necessarily materialise the space accorded to indigenous peoples in government administration. The concepts of hegemony and domination across Indonesian local-level regional governance were seen as the government strategy in controlling democracy. By focusing on political machinery such as political parties and local elite networks, the government seemed to have supported the agenda of the New Order regime (Tomsa, 2008).

The government attempted to control the politics in the traditionally authoritative regions by influencing the state in advancing government interests. By advancing the government interests, identity politics and local identities in developing countries were consolidated and reconceptualised globalisation (Tran & Bifuh-Ambe, 2021). It was found that the reinforcement of traditional power threatened the state power to exercise society-related functions across post-colonial countries. The emergence of neo-patrimonial symptoms, particularly when the state failed to control traditional power, transformed the state into a political force that only served a client network, as could be seen in Africa. Neo-patrimonial was considered a predatory force that used existing society-related resources to benefit personal interests and specific ethnic groups. It is interesting to note that neo-patrimonialism in Indonesia was visible in many areas because some traditional elites used vertical networks that could prompt national governmental networks to accommodate local interests. For example, in the case of regional expansion, which was relatable across Indonesian provinces, utilised traditional elite vertical networks. However, the Indonesian regional expansion resulted in problems, especially the failure to materialise community welfare across the region that was granted autonomy.

As a representation of state power, the government had no choice but to regulate and control the existence of traditional authority. The government substantiated laws that forbade individuals to be directly involved with the regional administrative government, as part of the regulatory function implementation. Traditional power must be contingent upon state rules because the state performed significantly more functions, primarily to benefit all people and not specific groups (Ribot, Agrawal, & Larson, 2006). The government emphasising traditional power showed the strength of the central government position, to reign supreme and demand recognition. During the Reformation Era, the government succeeded in controlling traditional authority, so the existence of traditional authority did not threaten the existing government power. However, the government policy to 'favour' traditional authority unwittingly led to the delegitimation of traditional power throughout Indonesia. First, to counter the increasing preoccupation of traditional power so that traditional power did not coincide with democracy, the government revised Law No. 23 of 2014 on regional government. Therefore, miscellaneous district government authorities in education, forestry, the environment, mining, mineral supplies, and marine resources were withdrawn. Second, the government introduced Law No. 6 of 2014 concerning villages and accorded the village government the privilege to carry out services in full autonomy. However, the implementation did not accommodate many Indonesians' expectations who 'authorised' traditional power in administrative government.

Law No. 6 of 2014 encouraged local communities to implement the customs and culture during the New Order restrictions (Antlov, Wetterberg, & Dharmawan, 2016). However, in reality, the implementation of adat and culture was only used as a symbol and did not emphasise the existence of traditional community authority. Consequently, local communities' real position was jeopardised when issues concerning the government were raised. Furthermore, ethnic politics merely functioned as a 'toy' emphasised by predatory elites who took advantage of indigenous peoples' support, particularly during general and local elections. Elite symbols appeared in all campaigns to magnify ethnic politics. The government-controlled decentralisation was considered part of a political agreement between the state and regions to regulate ethnic politics. However, the diminishing traditional elite authority was possibly caused by the government who accorded political protection to the traditional elites and restricted the traditional power. Subsequently, people's rage and anger escalated.

The government deliberately controlled two notions, decentralisation and local democracy. Specifically, while the government monitored decentralisation, the government implemented local democracy by restricting the autonomy of traditional regional authorities. Thus, multiple concerns were raised because traditional authority was emphasised in many multi-ethnic countries at local democratisation processes. For example, the success of the democratic consolidation in Namibia, Botswana, and South Africa demonstrated the centrality of traditional leaders (Dusing, 2000).

Furthermore, the existence of traditional authority in African countries solidified the ongoing democracy because everyday life practices supported democratic values. Thus, many local democracy practices in Africa considered people's activities that formed the government agendas. Similarly, several other studies exhibited the importance of traditional leaders as government agents in dealing with existing society-related problems (Baldwin, 2016) (Landman, 2005). However, Indonesian politics transpired differently. In Indonesia, it was found that the local democracy practices emphasised community-based government.

Although concerns were raised, the Indonesian government did not attend to the traditional leaders' aspirations; traditional leaders wanted to be 'heard' in local governance. Specifically, the Indonesian government failed to accommodate traditional requests to re-activate a custom government. It was an issue faced by the government to approve the requests of the traditional leaders. First, a recognition of traditional leadership to administer local governance could undermine the regional government power. The concern on involving traditional leadership could be equated with the issues on the 1) development of equitable redistribution of natural resources and 2) restoration of indigenous rights that unconsciously opposed government legitimacy. The experience of global government elites to realise the centralised state functions supported the policy on prioritising people's welfare. Second, the government elite needed to restrict the regional authority transition because it will affect the realisation of local community welfare. It was deemed impossible to materialise the local community welfare unless the government intervened to bolster the local government and financing systems (Sellers & Lidstrom, 2007). Third, the distribution of political power to traditional authorities to materialise people's welfare created an issue. The government considered traditional authority interests different from state ones. In the context of managing government affairs, meeting the demands of freedom and independence as promoted by traditional authorities was a problem for Indonesia that underwent a democratic transition. Traditional authorities did not centralise authorities alone; the state collaboratively reorganised power to exert a vertical impact on the state and horizontal consequence to miscellaneous ethnic groups living together in the same territory (Henly & Davidson, 2007).

Decentralisation during the New Order and Reform Eras

The implementation of democracy dramatically altered the political behaviour of Indonesian local communities post-Suharto era (Sulistiyanto & Erb, 2009). A democratic paradox that threatened state power was created because the state recognised the existence of local political entities that commingled with traditional power. The communities began to strengthen their local identity by accentuating the majority ethnic sentiments such as campaigning to control natural resources for their welfare. Traditional communities also urged the government to acknowledge traditional leaders' privileges and active roles in administering local governance.

Furthermore, during the New Order regime in power, traditional societies experienced marginalisation in all fields. Local people demanded that traditional rights that were once relegated be restored. Thus, the demands led to independence and separation from the Indonesian state (Kimura, 2013). A paradox was created between what people want at the local-level and what the local democracy implementation became. Traditional societies prioritised significant traditional rights to bolster political identities as opposed to promoting unity and cohesion during the reform era (Crouch, 2010).

During the Reformation Era, the consolidation of local identities was the culmination of regional community resistance that experienced marginalisation of roles in their regions during the New Order era. The regime in power established various policies to control the region for political purposes. Through the application of Law No. 5 of 1974, the New Order regime tightly controlled how local governments exercised their functions. Genuine and responsible autonomy that became the promise of the ruling regime did not materialise (Devas, 1997). Furthermore, through the application of Law No. 5 of 1979, the government repeatedly made controversial policies by homogenising the forms of government in villages and ignoring the diversity of Indonesian villages. As a result of the controversial policies, the people in the village lost their original identities, including social and cultural systems. The fall of the New Order regime and the rise of President B. J. Habibie who replaced Suharto from the government power substantiated a very progressive decentralisation policy. Law No. 22 of 1999 was introduced as a new regional government law that granted broad autonomy to local communities. Although Law No. 22 of 1999 received a positive response from the local community, the traditional power was found to implement local-level democracy. However, the attempts to apply traditional power did not fit the overall aims of decentralisation (Duncan, 2007).

The dramatic changes in how decentralisation occurred were more significant at the beginning of the Reformation Era. First, the central government repeated the New Order strategies using domination and hegemony. Thus, local governments became dependent on the New Order strategies. For example, when the local governments were obligated to consult supervision and coordination policies with the central government, the central government attempted to influence the regional government to comply with the central government agendas. As such, regional autonomy was hampered. The current condition of decentralisation under President Jokowi was destabilised; the decentralisation eventually led to a setback due to decisive government interventions. First, local governments were restricted because not only did local governments have to adjust community-needed programmes and activities based on regional conditions, but local governments also needed to comply with the Ministry of Home Affairs Regulation No. 90 of 2019. The meddling of the central government in local governments in observance of decentralisation hindered the implementation of local democracy. Second, the essence of decentralisation, namely

the autonomy and independence of the regions to manage finances and household affairs, did not materialise when the ruling regime began to control democracy following the ruling elites' interests (Power & Warburton, 2020).

Consequently, the government lost their political power because the governmental efforts to control the traditional authorities were in vain. Although the traditional community government was recognised, the recognitions mainly revolved around the protection and preservation of traditional community socio-cultural systems. Second, the authoritative political systems as recognised by the customary community were integrated into the lowest government system, as could be seen from the village in Java or Nagari in West Sumatra. A village government became one of the grounds on which the government used as a 'barometer' for other lowest level governments outside Java to politically emulate and adjust. Law No. 6 of 2014 involving the villages, although acknowledging the diversity of social and cultural systems in people's lives, must still comply with the existing political and economic power structures across villages. The socio-cultural system in communities outside the village must comply with the political and economic power structure as expressed in the law. Based on Law No.6 of 2014, Indonesian villages receive Village Funds to finance Indonesian village governments. Therefore, the government dictated the political and economic structure at the government discretion. Focusing on the Village Law created a paradox between 1) recognising the diversity of regional communities with government power systems and 2) consolidating traditional political power structures.

The article emphasising traditional government was based on research conducted in 2018. A qualitative approach was used. Specifically, interviewees as informants were carried out to obtain data design to respond to the research problem. Interviews across 17 informants of various backgrounds such as traditional leaders, former regents, government officials, religious leaders, and community leaders were presented. The interviews were completed in Solok Regency, West Sumatra Province, one of the areas in which the implementation of community customs across individuals in Nagari was still active. According to history, Solok and its surroundings, currently named Kubuang Tigo Baleh, were part of Luhak of Tanah Datar. Tanah Datar became the centre of the Minangkabau Kingdom, Pagaruyung. The Minangkabau traditional and cultural heritage was still preserved, particularly in Nagari, the lowest level of hierarchy in the context of Solok Regency modern governance implementation. Individuals' social and cultural systems in Nagari of Solok Regency could illustrate the research problem; how the state regulated the power of adat leaders in the lowest level of hierarchy in the context of governance practices was central.

First, interviews were conducted simultaneously involving researchers and research assistants using the official language, particularly when local officials were involved. Second, the local language was used when questions concerning the preference of using the local language as opposed to the official language in Solok

Regency were posed to traditional leaders. Third, observation concerning several activities across the Nagari government was carried out. The observation centralised on how Nagari traditional leaders completed the lowest level of hierarchy in the context of government administrative duties. Specifically, the delegitimisation processes were completed as part of government democracy strategy control at the local-level. Data from the interviews were clarified to establish validity. Interview data were compared with secondary data (research reports, books, relevant research articles, and government data). The secondary data focused on the lowest level of hierarchy concerning the Nagari government administration.

Weakening of Traditional Power in West Sumatra

West Sumatra Province houses Indonesian Minangkabau ethnic groups. In 2018, West Sumatra inhabitants constituted 2.73 per cent of the Indonesian population. Following Indonesian independence, Minangkabau community leaders helped establish the Indonesian state. The leaders included but were not limited to Mohammad Hatta, Mohammad Natsir, Syahrir, Tan Malaka, Mohammad Yamin, and Agus Salim (Bahar, 2018). The Indonesian Pancasila ideology that established the constitution was derived from Minangkabau traditional and cultural values. The traditional and cultural values were associated with deliberative democracy. It was found that individuals across Minangkabau practised the Nagari democratic systems across West Sumatra traditional villages. The democratic system emphasising villages also influenced Minangkabau elites' ways of thinking in national politics. Nagari functioned as a customary law community unit with clear demarcations of household duties such as land ownership, property, and social relations. The most crucial aspect of Nagari is the law of common matrilineality inheritance. Besides, Nagari governance centralised democracy, decision-making sovereignty, and autonomy (Vel & Bedner, 2015). Nagari was composed of tribes that made up territorial units that encompassed not only customs (*adat*) but also political units that executed their respective functions. However, with the changing times, Nagari is no longer sovereign. Now, Nagari sits at the lowest level of hierarchy of regional government administration.

The New Order government introduced Law No. 5 of 1979 to control the lowest level of hierarchy in the context of government power. The laws unified village governance structures, specifically Javanese village structures. Javanese formed the largest ethnic group in Indonesia, so Javanese might have dominated Indonesian political and governance processes during the New Order era. A diverse community with diverse cultural and traditional backgrounds formed Indonesia. Indonesian villages were adopted as the lowest level of hierarchy in the context of government. Subsequently, the customary and cultural order of outside-Javanese communities were affected. During the New Order, traditional leaders' authority was restricted

because the traditional leaders were no longer involved in Nagari governance affairs (Kahin, 1999). First, the administrative authority of the village head (wali Nagari) and their staff were under the responsibility of the district head (camat). The district head (camat) oversaw the implementation of the Nagari government function. The community constructed relationships with the village head, the district government units because the village head executed the lowest level of hierarchy in the context of government function. Consequently, community relations with the traditional leader began to diminish. Furthermore, the Nagari community prioritised initiatives to accommodate the economy as provided by the Nagari government through the development programmes.

The decline of traditional Minangkabau power was evident particularly following the New Order. The government issued Law No. 5 of 1979 concerning the main points of village governance. The government forced the community to accept the village as part of their lives in running the government. The village was considered a legal community unit that generated a well-known theory in the Javanese area. When the village participated in the lowest level of hierarchy in the context of government, all social, cultural, and political aspects outside Java began to disappear. Similarly, the Minangkabau social, economic, and political institutions were no longer able to carry out their functions.

One of the issues highlighted in the uniformity of the lowest form of government in the New Order period in West Sumatra was the position of the Village Traditional Council in Minangkabau community. In the past, the Village Traditional Council had full discretion in determining Nagari policies. However, traditional leaders no longer owned apparent authority in the community due to steady-state intervention that degraded traditional power. According to Nagari headman:

The role of KAN indeed declined and the role was increasingly not seen in Nagari. Usually, this role only existed when problems arose in Nagari or when conflicts erupted between villages, usually, the problem of Pusako (inheritance) was raised. If it continues, the traditional leader did not have to work anymore. KAN must carry out routine activities in the village so the traditional communities could feel its existence (Dalmenda, 2018).

Traditional leaders no longer assumed the roles of Nagari leaders as a consequence of the New Order government interference in village communities. The government used the influence of traditional leaders in certain activities to only advance government-controlled development policies so people could accept the policies. Unfortunately, the policies replaced the head of Nagari as a state agency to use the public for development purposes. Furthermore, village heads and traditional leaders were accorded certain privileges and freedoms to execute government projects. The 1998 democratic Indonesian transition made central-regional relations more democratic through the implementation of political decentralisation. However, the

democracy carried out also did provide space for traditional authorities to play a role in supporting the implementation of local democracy. There was a concern raised by the central government that did not consent to the distribution of power to traditional leaders to avoid power polarisation. In other words, the central government wanted to retain absolute power. Therefore, the government-controlled political policies restricted the role of Minangkabau traditional leaders and affected local democratic practices.

Many studies theorised that the traditional leaders' existence formed an essential part of the local-level democratic processes. Moreover, the Minangkabau communities are well-known for their deliberative democratic practices and influenced the formation of democratic Indonesian statehood. The drafting of the constitution before independence was generally established by Minangkabau communities (Bahar, 2018). It was expected that how local democracy was implemented across Minangkabau communities influenced the cornerstones of the Indonesian constitution, particularly when Indonesia gained independence. For example, how deliberation mechanism and consensus influenced decision-making illustrated the deliberative Nagari heads and democratic processes (Graves, 2007).

The decline of traditional power in West Sumatra has taken place in a structured and systematic manner, which has been going on since the New Order era. Law Number 5 of 1979, which is characterized by a centralized political policy, has a severe impact on the use of traditional elite power at the local level. Although the power of the New Order finally fell in 1998, followed by centrifugal political policies through the implementation of regional autonomy, it has not been able to re-strengthen traditional power in governance practices. Indeed, the issuance of Law Number 6 of 2014 concerning villages gives new hope to improve community welfare through strengthening village autonomy. However, in practice, it only relocates traditional power within a limited authority, namely in the social and cultural aspects of the village community. The practice of this village law only "recognizes" traditional power in terms of maintaining the customs and culture that exist in the village.

Meanwhile, in West Sumatra, the traditional elite power in Nagari only preserves the traditional values and culture of the community. Whereas the existence of traditional elites based on the customs and culture of the Minangkabau community also includes the fields of government and politics in Nagari. Even KAN, the institution where the traditional elites gather, namely the traditional leaders, only functions symbolically in traditional activities at the Nagari level.

The Condition of Minangkabau Traditional Power in the Present

Since their inception, Laws No. 6 of 2014 and No. 23 of 2014 brought to the fore significant changes of Minangkabau traditional leadership, the reduced power of traditional leaders (*Penghulu Adat*). First, the *Nagari* traditional leader was no longer fully autonomous in exercising authority. The Minangkabau traditional leader,

Datuak, used to rule the traditional territory, *Nagari*. Second, *Nagari* was sovereign and autonomous in executing its government affairs based on tradition and traditional systems. Traditional leaders had the customary law authority within *Nagari* jurisdiction. Third, before Indonesia gained independence, Minangkabau rulers represented traditional authority and monitored the obedience of traditional institutions. Given the centrality of traditional institutions, rulers governed and supervised people's behaviour. For example, the traditional leader was personally involved in accumulating and delivering coffee as part of the *Nagari* administrative government duties during the Dutch colonial period (Hadler, 2010). However, the traditional leaders' autonomy gradually faded when the ruling government held *Nagari* state power.

During the Reformation period, state power was solidified through the inclusion of several political government parties. Several political parties built coalitions collectively to win the presidential election. The consequence of the coalition government formation was the divisiveness of government, particularly the cabinet power over positions. Since the inception of President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono's leadership, the cabinet conflicts over positions continued through President Joko Widodo's existing government. The political party coalition in the government strengthened the function of the government as the organiser of internal state power. Thus, the political party coalition strengthened the state position on controlling community activities. The implementation of regulatory functions monitored: (1) how traditional powers in the regions executed regional autonomy, and; (2) traditional power weaknesses while dealing with the state. The role of existing regulatory functions was in stark contrast to what previously transpired.

At the beginning of the democratic transition, the traditional elite power was prominent; the traditional elite power threatened the government agenda on the regional autonomy implementation. Traditional elites wanted a position in village governance because state recognition posed severe governmental problems. The government dismissed the traditional authorities (tribal chiefs and customary leaders) as being inept in modern governance. On the one hand, modern government bureaucracy placed value upon stringent laws and regulations because the bureaucracy was equated with a rational-legal institution. On the other hand, traditional authorities could only govern the habits and personalities of village people concerning customs and traditions, a dimension contrary to rational-legal institutions. Furthermore, the government recognised traditional elites only as 'gatekeepers' of village customs and traditions and peripheralised traditional authorities in administering low-level modern governance. The government issued several laws, for example, Laws No. 6 of 2014 on villages and No. 23 of 2014 on regional governance to support this policy. The existence of the two laws also provided the basis for government intervention in traditional powers; the two laws were used to monitor how the local democracy implementation in the regions complied with the government

interests. The government intervention illustrated a model of the Indonesian state ability to execute various policies and enforce its laws as a form of institutional power.

Besides, during the Reformation Era, the issuance of Law No. 6 of 2014 concerning villages was not fully implemented. Traditional authorities in traditional villages (*Desa adat*) were not given flexibility because regulations concerning traditional villages did not exist. The Village Law emphasised speeding up the village development process and empowering village communities to become independent. The national budget (APBN) was used to respond to the financial needs of villages to accelerate village community developments by providing Village Funds (*dana desa*), which increased annually. For example, Rp. 70 trillion was allocated in 2019, an increase of 16.6 per cent in 2018 (Rp. 60 trillion) (Kemenkeu RI, 2018). Village Funds allocated for West Sumatra Province also saw a dramatic increase; Rp. 932 billion was given in 2019, an increase of 15.2 per cent from 2018 (Rp.790 billion) (Redaksi, 2019). However, the disbursement of Village Funds created pragmatic competition; traditional leaders were relegated and many individuals who used to be traditional leaders sought to run as village heads by using electoral systems.

The direct election system could serve the community in three ways. First, nearly everyone in the *Nagari* community could run as village heads, regardless of their traditional leadership statuses. Second, the individuals whose experiences as village heads were non-existent were considered to have no legitimacy of their clans or tribes. Specifically, the higher the competition on traditional head-elect following the Village Law, the lesser the recognition and influence of the Village Traditional Council (KAN). Third, individuals with no experience governing as village heads could encounter problems. With new government-picked authorities, the village head might encounter difficulty in organising the *Nagari* government. Consequently, traditional leaders only participated in minor duties such as conducting customs and cultural affairs with no direct contact with government affairs to avoid the dualism of *Nagari* leadership.

However, Minangkabau consistently practised deliberative democratic systems even before Indonesia implemented local democracy (De Jong, 1982). The notion of deliberative democracy was contextualised within traditional *Nagari* institutions, that involved traditional authority. Traditional leaders played significant roles in decision-making through community deliberation and consensus. *Nagari* housed traditional leaders who governed customs and state laws. Therefore, traditional leaders formed an institution that functioned strategically, the Village Traditional Council. One of the Village Traditional Council essential functions was to select and appoint a village head, internal and external traditional leaders, who were distinguishable across ordinary people. Consequently, the existing liberal democracy removed the traditional leader authorities and fragmented other *Nagari* functions. For example, the traditional leader was not accorded the political and governmental privileges in *Nagari* communities. Furthermore, the government relied on the head village for politics and governance and restricted the traditional leaders' authority. Consequently, the customary leader

authority experienced systematic delegitimation due to the enactment of the law. The systematic delegitimation indirectly eliminated the system of values, beliefs, and public trust in the traditional leader, a person whose traditional legitimacy was sourced.

The democratic processes in the regions exerted a significant influence on the loss of traditional authority. In West Sumatra, the value of freedom and equality in democracy caused *Nagari* dwellers to feel that their rights were equally similar to the traditional leaders' rights. The traditional leader's rights involved social, cultural, and political institutions. For example, in the past, usually, the traditional leader served as village head. However, individuals who were qualified could run in elections to vie for the position of the village head. Village Law No. 6 of 2014 regulated the direct election mechanism. The community directly elected the village head based on general unobstructed, confidential, honest, and impartial principles following article 34 of Village Law No. 6 of 2014. The democratic procedural model, generally known as a polyarchy, is common in many countries, particularly the United States of America (Dahl, 1971).

The village head selection was openly held and constituted a Village Law mechanism that replaced the deliberation processes, a Minangkabau community customs. The modern village head selection produced support groups in pragmatic societies. Consequently, the traditional leader's authority gradually diminished in the 'eyes' of *Nagari* dwellers. *Nagari* communities generally believed that they were capable of rivaling the traditional leader. First, the *Nagari* community held autonomy in making decisions irrespective of the traditional leader's advice. The democratic process that accorded equality to all individuals dismissed the traditional leadership position in the political process. Second, democracy changed the behaviour of many *Nagari* dwellers in the context of selecting leaders irrespective of customs and cultural systems. Third, concerns were raised concerning the shift in Minangkabau ethnic and cultural values as a consequence of social changes. The following interview transcripts with Syamsu Rahim, a former Regent of Solok (2010-2015), were recorded:

Traditional leadership is no longer an institution that is considered necessary in the practice of government today. Traditional leadership involvement in the *Nagari* government was subordinate. For example, traditional leaders were asked of their opinions and suggestions only when a development problem occurred in *Nagari*; the discussions took place in a forum, *Tigo Tungku Sajarangan* Deliberations, which involved the traditional leader, intellectuals, and religious leaders. Likewise, traditional leadership was employed to execute *Nagari* development planning deliberations. However, traditional leaders' roles were restricted; no significant role was given to them other than to position them as symbolic figures in *Nagari* (Rahim, 2018).

In Minangkabau history, the dynamics of competition in gaining power continued for generations. The dynamics of competition was understood as a form of

hunting to gain recognition and status. The ongoing competition among individuals within Minangkabau eliminated traditional power, especially when the government facilitated the competition. The traditional authority diminished because their positions were no longer active in *Nagari*. The village head replaced the position of headman following democratic elections. The lesser authority of the traditional leader in managing *Nagari* customary land exacerbated the existence of Village Owned Enterprises (*BUM Nagari*). *BUM Nagari* received full government support through the availability of Village Funds. The Village Funds provided by the government were generous and caused people to vie for the village head positions whose positions were directly community elected. Consequently, a paradox was created when the government succeeded in implementing liberal democracy, specifically transforming local institutions into shared institutions without discrimination. Therefore, the government policy removed the traditional leader's authority as the 'gatekeeper' of community customs and cultural traditional authority.

The issuance of local regulation (*Perda*) No. 2 of 2007 on the principals of *Nagari* government separated traditional leader's clan and tribe authority from political and governmental activities. Specifically, the traditional leader no longer served as *Nagari* main political actor because the traditional power was only used to signify clan and tribal symbols that only preserved *Nagari* customs and culture. In 2018, the Government of West Sumatra Province also issued *Perda* No. 7 on *Nagari* that replaced *Perda* No. 2 of 2007. *Perda* No. 7 provided an opportunity for people in the *Nagari* to revive traditional authority and accord KAN the privilege to elect the village head. However, *Perda* No. 7 did not receive the support of many *Nagari* in West Sumatra, particularly the *Nagari* community who directly elected the village head. The *Nagari* disinclination towards *Perda* No.7 was associated with the greater *Nagari* traditional authority and contradicted the local democratic practices held by the community. Consequently, Village Law precipitated *Nagari* conflicts, particularly between community individuals who supported traditional authorities to re-organise customs and individuals who currently pursue *Nagari*.

I. Implications of State Relations with Traditional Power in Democracy

The government-controlled regulation of West Sumatra local democracy implementation highlighted the strengthening of the state capacity to govern local institutions. Implementing local democracy was no longer associated with the reform mandate but the essential agendas also included widening the regional autonomy implementation. However, the government that intended to consolidate local-level democracy caused friction. The government intervened in the regional autonomy implementation, specifically at the village level. Several authorities and local government staff were withdrawn by the central government to help implement concurrent affairs. Regulation through the law was found to comply with the constitution. The government used the laws to intervene, control, disrupt, and remove

local-level democratic agendas. Furthermore, the support of legislature in political parties bolstered the government strength because the legislature, political and coalition parties were part of the oligarchic power that could disrupt the local-level political forces. The government intention to position community-supportive traditional elites “outside” the village government was in vain.

The democratic processes that took place during the Reformation Era did not impact Indonesian traditional power. The traditional leaders did not have greater authority as the traditional Minangkabau leaders had hoped. It was not uncommon for Minangkabau community to aim to revitalise their customs and cultural institutions that could create state tensions. Therefore, the issuance of Law No. 6 of 2014 on villages provided a problematic choice for village dwellers; whether the law consented to traditional village implementations or the law ‘favoured’ the current village models. In other words, Indonesians or Nagari villages in West Sumatra Province could select the ideals of a traditional village. However, the power of traditional leaders, particularly the village fundamental rights, was not necessarily restored. As long as it did not conflict with the unitary state principles, the community could form a customised village based on the law. What transpired was that the traditional leaders were only lawfully recognised as symbols of Nagari customs and culture.

Consequently, the traditional leadership authority in Minangkabau went through a dramatic shift at the removal of traditional authority in government administration. The traditional leaders only functioned as individuals who executed a procession of Nagari customs and culture, a stark contrast to prior traditional leaders’ roles. In the past, traditional leaders’ authority did not only organise the procession of customs but also held significant influence and extensive traditional power. By focusing on politics and government, traditional leaders were involved in all aspects of Nagari community lives, as could be seen in the following interview excerpt:

Indeed, since the issuance of regional government regulations, the role of Nagari heads do not commensurate with his position as the real leader. The traditional leader merely maintains that customs that develop within the society and tribe stays alive. Indeed, if there is a case concerning customs, the community asks the traditional leader to solve it, particularly issues concerning Nagari nephews and clans. However, the traditional leader was not involved in the day-to-day administration of Nagari government (Sova, 2018).

The intervention of the government in controlling traditional power through the enactment of the law only confined traditional leaders in a subordinate role, to safeguard community tradition aspects. Thus, traditional leaders operated at a remove of political and governance processes across the society. In other words, the state power during the Reformation Era had greater influence in controlling power in traditional society. Still, the government persisted that the euphoria of freedom granted at the beginning of the Reformation Era did not pose new local-level

democracy problems. Law No. 32 of 2004 on regional government was substituted by Law No. 23 of 2014 to heavily emphasise the direction of the government power. Thus, a centralised rather than decentralised pattern emerged. To reiterate, the issuance of Law No. 32 of 2004 prompted the re-centralisation of power in Indonesia after the New Order regime (Nordholt & Klinken, 2007, pp. 19-20).

The local government law was revised three times since the inception of the Reformation Era. The revised local government law posed serious implications not only in the context of traditional power. First, regional authority duties that executed household affairs were gradually diminishing. Second, the gradual removal of household affairs further peripheralised traditional authority, a political strategy to consolidate regional power. Third, the political strategy reinforced governmental influence at the local-level of democracy implementation. Finally, the reduced influence of traditional authority in indigenous communities magnified the central government dominance in local-level democracy implementation. Nevertheless, despite the consolidation of government power, traditional authorities secured government attention. The Nagari government was built to bolster authority at the lowest level of the hierarchy of government units.

The reality concerning the lesser role of traditional authorities was illustrated differently across the world. In some developing countries, traditional authority was recognised as a catalyst for democracy implementation. Scholars asserted that the role of traditional leadership could accelerate the process of democratic consolidation in an area. As Dusing (2002, p.2) explained:

The consolidation of a democratic regime not only requires the constitutional establishment of representative democratic rules and the legal legitimisation of institutions and political actors but also the careful recognition of specific culturally and ethnically bound, pre-constitutionally existing structures.

The position of traditional power in Indonesia was relatively unstable. On the one hand, the government wanted to solidify the central government position in the regions to maintain the unity and integrity of the constitutional mandate. On the other hand, democracy must also recognise traditional community rights. The dilemma concerning traditional power prompted the government to regulate traditional powers through the Village Laws and the Law on Local Government. Government policies that legalise traditional power affected the process of co-opting traditional powers to submit to government power. The formalisation of power under Village Laws and the Law on Local Government reduced the nature of power in traditional societies. A paradox was created during the implementation of Indonesian democracy; the government strengthened democratic values and delegitimised regional traditional power.

State control of traditional power in the regions is not something new. This process has its ups and downs following the character of the ruling regime. Although

historically, what has been dominant has been the decisive intervention of the central power rather than the granting of autonomous authority. Indeed, this government action is rational to control the democratic process, which continues to strengthen local communities, thus leading to excessive regionalism. The government feels this severe threat in its efforts to maintain a unitary state by the constitution. In this context, the state tries to ensure that no other forces in society can interfere with the democratic process at the local level. Moreover, the government has decentralized politics, administration, and finance to the regions, which, if not supervised, can be misused.

Conclusion

Since the enactment of Law Number 5 of 1979 concerning the basics of village governance in Indonesia during the New Order era, the traditional power position has been weak. The same condition also occurs in the people of West Sumatra. This law places a strong state in control of traditional power, including the elite in Nagari. As a unit of the customary law community, Nagari no longer lives by their customs and traditions, so they are far from the traditional elite, who are the guardians of this customary and traditional value system. In contrast, at the beginning of the Reformation period, the state again recognized the traditional power that existed in society, which resulted in the strengthening of the position of the traditional elite. Unfortunately, this traditional power in the state is interpreted differently by local elites in West Sumatra, so its practice is contrary to the spirit of democracy that the state wants to build. The principle of decentralization which is the basis for the recognition of traditional power, is practiced with an excessive regional spirit that worries the government. However, to keep the spirit of democracy at the local level running, the government changed the regional government law regulating government affairs in the regions. Likewise, to encourage progress in Nagari, the government issued Law Number 6 of 2014, which indirectly places traditional powers outside the administration of the Nagari government. They only had the authority to maintain the customs and traditions that live and develop in the community in Nagari. This law has been limiting the elite's power in Nagari. Whereas based on the original rights of Nagari, this traditional elite also has the authority to administer the government in Nagari. The aim is to direct the power of the traditional elite to help the government mobilize support and legitimize development programs with its traditional powers.

This article found the Nagari government in West Sumatra has autonomous authority granted by the government following the village law. However, this autonomous authority is not in the context of reviving the traditional power that once existed. Even though this traditional power is also part of the administration of Nagari based on customs and culture that characterizes the Nagari government in Minangkabau. However, the intervention carried out by the government through the village law has limited traditional positions of power when dealing with the Nagari

government with great authority in the fields of government and politics. This fact is indeed a paradox with the government's desire, which wants the participation of traditional elites to give legitimacy to the development programs they carry out in Nagari through the mobilization they must do to the people in Nagari.

Finally, the government democratic agendas were generally incompatible with local communities' will and aspiration. Democracy as witnessed by local people led to the delegitimation of traditional authority because traditional authority destabilised the government efforts to unite and integrate Indonesians. Local-level democracy might better be aligned to bolster traditional society. If traditional authority is kept at bay, the consolidation of democracy in Indonesia might not prevail. By focusing on traditional authority, the processes of democracy are consolidated, as demonstrated in many countries that employed local democracy elements.

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