



# The Governance of Village Head Election in Sebrang Kota Jambi: A Political Culture Perspective

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## Abstract

This research discusses the governance of village head elections in Sebrang, Jambi City, using a political culture perspective as an analytical framework. The aim of this research is to retrace the existence of the village's governance system by examining it from several perspectives, including governance, the application of customary law and democratic values in the management of local elections (*Kepala Kampung*). The research methodology involves exploring, analyzing, and revealing the local values of the village's governance system that are still relevant to the current condition's context. This research is descriptive qualitative. The object of the research is the social condition in Seberang Jambi City, to be converted with the needs of the current village-level government system from a political culture perspective. In addition to tracing secondary data, primary data will be obtained from competent informants in the fields of governance, customary law, and local election management. The research findings reveal that the village's governance system as an original indigenous local government system, already possessed collaborative governance and the involvement of local stakeholders in village management. Furthermore, the norms regulated within customary law were capable of creating a sense of fair and equitable (restorative) justice, and democratic values were practiced in the management of the village head elections. This study concludes that the reform of village head election governance should consider aspects of community political culture in order to create a more transparent and participatory democratic process at the village level.


**Keywords:** The governance of election · Head of village · Local democracy · Political culture

## BACKGROUND

The area of Jambi City located across the Batanghari river is more popularly known as Seberang Kota Jambi or Sekoja for short. Sekoja is an area that holds a lot of history, civilization and Malay cultural treasures. Seberang Jambi has also been widely known from ancient times, given its position as one of the world's trade routes. The traces of business interaction with the outside world

are still visible from the existence of heterogeneous descendants, including Chinese, Arabs and Javanese and even Europe (Kunnappilly, 2018). The village of Seberang also has its own customary-oriented government identity, namely Kampung. Kampung is a government that developed in Sekoja at the same time as clan practices in Jambi and Kemendapoan in Kerinci.

Kampung has several meanings depending on the context in which we see it. Kampung is a form of infrastructure that provides material and immaterial support for community solidarity, despite being shaped by governmentality (Newberry, 2018). A collection of a number of villages is called a village. Kampung or village according to the universal definition, is a human

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settlement in the outer area of a city. It is usually smaller than a market's villages.

As in allied Malay countries such as Brunei and Malaysia (Parvin et al., 2021), the customary government system in Indonesia is also known as Kampung. Kampung is an indigenous village within the village government system, or by other designations (Nas et al., 2019). The term kampung is more popular in several provinces in Indonesia, including West Kalimantan, Central Sulawesi and South Sulawesi, including in Jambi Province. Villages are also found in Jakarta, for example there are areas called Kampung Melayu, Kampung Rambutan and others. Kampung as a traditional village in Aceh Province is popularized with the term Gampung.

Kampung as one of the units of government, both traditional villages and villages in general, has several characteristics that distinguish it from supra-village (sub-district, district/city and province). The village as a government system is characterized as follows, namely (Kusumastuti, 2017):

1. People who live in villages generally have warm and intimate relationships between residents;
2. People who live in villages generally have low social mobility
3. Villages generally have independent facilities;
4. Villages are usually inhabited by people who live outside urban areas and whose lives rely on the agricultural sector.

Thus, it is possible to draw a common thread from the description above that the Kampung is inhabited by a more homogeneous community so that social relations are quite harmonious, despite the low mobility of the community. Usually, the facilities needed tend to be provided by the village authorities themselves or obtained through mutual cooperation. The lives of the villagers are highly dependent on agricultural products, plantations and possibly fishing.

One of the customary government systems that once existed in Jambi Province is the Kampung. The emergence of this village was due to IGOB. Besides Kampung, in Jambi there is also a model of customary village government system (self-governing) consisting of clans in Sarolangun, Jambi clans, Bangko, Bungo and Tebo and Batanghari, Kemendapoan in Kerinci and Parit in Tanjung Jabung. In Jambi, Kampung is a neighborhood unit inhabited by a group of Jambi people. The group of

people is the Jambi Malay community who live across Jambi City. Jambi in the past was a trading center so that it was assimilated by the outside world, such as China, India, Erofa and Arabia. And, that is why the Kampung Community in Seberang Kota Jambi is quite heterogeneous because it is not only Malay, but also Chinese, Arab and Erofa ethnicities.

The villages in Seberang Kota Jambi at that time covered 11 areas that were elongated along the Batanghari River. Thus, the villages in Seberang Kota Jambi were categorized as following the river. The villages in question lined the banks of the Batang River starting from Pasir Panjang, Tanjung Raden to Tanjung Johor. The following are the names of the villages that once existed in Seberang Kota Jambi, in their time.

**Table.** List of villages in Seberang Kota Jambi

No	Name of villages	Name of villages head
1	Pasir Panjang	Anang Fahrri
2	Tanjung Raden	RD. Raden M
3	Tanjung Pasir	Kms H. Yusuf
4	Olak Kemang	M. Zainal Abidin
5	Ulu Gedong	H. Abdul Qosim
6	Kampung Tengah	H. A. Rahman
7	Kampung Jelmu	H. A. Syargawi
8	Mudung Laut	H. Abd. Qomar
9	Arab-Melayu	A. Jalil
10	Tahtul Yaman	Badjuri Usman
11	Tanjung Johor	Yahya Nawawi

Source: Cholif (2019)

The data above is corroborated by the results of interviews with community leaders in Seberang Kota Jambi (H. Ramli Azis and Sofwan H. Husein). Both figures mentioned that the names in the table above are figures or figures who have served as village heads in 11 (eleven) villages in Seberang Kota Jambi. Those who were elected as village heads were chosen figures who were authoritative and highly respected by their communities. In addition to Sekoja, villages are also found elsewhere in the Jambi City area.

It is interesting to discuss the management of the succession of village leaders in Sekoja in the past. When a village head dies or becomes ill and is no longer able to carry out his or her duties, or may be subject to religious or customary sanctions, a procession of village leadership is held. The process

of recruiting or replacing the village head or managing the election turns out to be a very impressive local democracy. The community flocks to the prepared election place, without having to be registered as a voter list like the current simultaneous elections or regional elections. As long as they know that there will be a village head election, they will vote happily with high self-awareness. This kind of local political activity deserves to be called democracy, which is in fact a people's party.

## METHODS

Researchers use qualitative research methods using an ethnographic approach, because qualitative research requires data and information in the form of descriptions to be able to reveal the meaning behind the description or description of the informant (Chai et al., 2021). The Ethnographic method is a very in-depth study of behavior that occurs naturally in a culture or a particular social group to understand a particular culture from the perspective of the perpetrators, one of which is Olak Kemang, a village located in the Danau Teluk sub-district, Jambi City, Jambi Province.

The object of this research is the community of the to balo tribe in Bulu-Bulu Village, Pujananting Sub-district, Barru Regency, South Sulawesi. This research was conducted in September 2025 which took place in Olak Kemang is a village located in the Danau Teluk sub-district, Jambi City, Jambi Province. In order to obtain the data and information needed in this study, the researcher used the following data collection techniques:

1. Primary Data
  - 1.1. Observation: Observation or observation is a daily human activity using the eye as the main tool in addition to other senses such as ears, smell, mouth and skin. There are several forms of observation, namely as follows.
  - 1.2. Interview: Interview is the process of obtaining information for research purposes by means of question and answer while meeting face to face between the interviewer and the respondent or interviewee, with or without using an interview guide.
2. Secondary Data
  - 2.1. Literature Study: Literature study is one of the data collection techniques using

library media as a source of information. The author explores information through various references related to the Olak Kemang community in the procession of selecting the village head in the past. Olak Kemang is a village located in the Danau Teluk sub-district, Jambi City, Jambi Province, Indonesia.

- 2.2. Internet Searching: Research using internet searching as one of the data collection mechanisms, namely by searching for articles and materials related to the problem being studied using internet media.

### Data Analysis Techniques

To obtain data and information in the study, the authors used the following data collection techniques. (1) Data Collection. The data analysis technique used is to process all research data collected from data collection from observations, interviews, literature studies and document studies obtained from the Olak Kemang community, a village located in the Danau Teluk sub-district, Jambi City, Jambi Province. (2) Data Reduction. Data reduction is an analytical process to select, focus, simplify, abstract and transform data that emerges from field notes. Reducing data means summarizing, selecting key things, focusing on important things, looking for patterns and themes and discarding things that are not considered important. Thus the researcher presents the data more specifically and focused on the research topic.

(3) Display Data. Presentation (display) of data is directed so that the reduced data is organized, arranged in a relationship pattern so that it is easier to understand. Data presentation can be done in narrative descriptions, charts, relationships between categories, flow charts and the like. Presentation in this form will make it easier for researchers to understand what happened and plan further research work. Presentation (display) of data is directed so that the reduced data is organized, arranged in a relationship pattern so that it is easier to understand. Data presentation can be done in narrative descriptions, charts, relationships between categories, flow charts and the like. Presentation in this form will make it easier for researchers to understand what happened and plan further research work. (4) Data Verification (Concluding Drawing).

The next step in the qualitative data analysis process is drawing conclusions based on the

findings and verifying the conclusion data. The process of obtaining evidence is what is referred to as data verification. If the conclusions put forward at an early stage are supported by strong evidence in the sense that they are consistent with the conditions found when the researcher returns to the field, the conclusions obtained are conclusions.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Conceptual framework: Political culture

Political culture refers to the pattern of behavior within a society concerning the life of the state, the administration of state affairs, governmental politics, law, and customary norms that are embraced by all members of society on a daily basis (Isaacs, 2018). Political culture can also be defined as a shared value system within a society that possesses the awareness to participate in collective decision-making and the determination of public policies for the entire community (Welzel & Inglehart, 2018). This political culture represents the behavioral patterns of society in responding to state and social life, as well as the values and awareness of the community. Naturally, the political culture of a region or society will be influenced by the prevailing norms and values as local wisdom patterns that have developed there, such as the political culture in Jambi, which is influenced by customs, beliefs, customary norms, and the Islamic religion.

One prominent social science expert in the field of politics attempted to create typologies of political culture by considering the social structure, the culture of its society, and the behavior and orientations of the individuals within that society. Based on these concepts, Almond and Verba (Sairambay, 2021) stated that political culture is a specific pattern of orientations toward the political system and its various parts, as well as attitudes toward the role of citizens within that system. Regarding political culture, Almond and Verba identified three types of political culture. These types include: first, Parochial Political Culture (Nzally, 2024).

This culture is indicated by a societal condition where life is still simple and traditional. Another indication of this political culture is that society tends to have a low interest in political issues and dynamics. Furthermore, parochial groups also tend not to expect much from political activities, consequently leading them to be inactive

in political participation and in following political issues.

Secondly, subject political culture. In this subject or subordinate political culture, a societal group begins to develop an awareness of the political system. This leads to higher public participation compared to a parochial society. Nevertheless, the community tends to remain passive in terms of participation. In this context, the public tends to focus on the outputs of the political system rather than its inputs. Subject political culture is often found in traditional societies where the development of their lives is starting to increase. And, thirdly, Participant Political Culture. This last type of political culture places individuals who belong to it in a position where they tend to have realized their responsibilities and rights in the political sphere. This causes the public not to accept the status quo passively; instead, they actively express their opinions and participate.

The types of political culture outlined above represent pure categories of political culture, distinct from one another. Almond and Verba added mixed types of political culture, namely the parochial-subject culture, the subject-participant culture, and the parochial-participant culture. These mixed political cultures are more aligned with the values, norms, and beliefs of the local community. The logic is that the varying culture of the local community has implications for the political culture.

### The structure of village government

A village, including a traditional village, regardless of its name, certainly has a structure as a system in running the government (Handam et al., 2024). The organizational structure of the village government that exists in every village or village is an extension of the supra-village government that has a role or strategy to regulate the community within its scope of power in order to realize government development. Based on this role, legislation is issued relating to the regulation of village government or other designations, so that the wheels of government run optimally.

Modern government administration systems such as the executive, legislative and judiciary do not exist in the Adat Government system. But the functions of the three government organizing institutions have been running automatically in the lives of indigenous peoples (Yani, 2018). The system of governance is not written. In addition, in

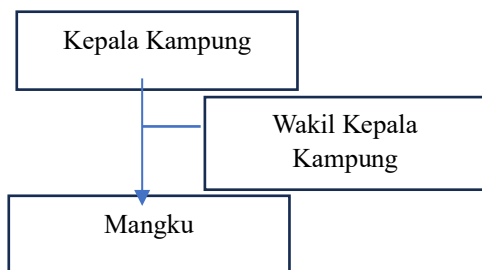
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indigenous villages, such as Sekoja, there is no smallest government structure, either neighborhood association (RT) or community association (RW). Even the Village Consultative Body (Bamuskam) does not exist. In essence, there is only the Village Head, his deputy and the Mangku.

Referring to the explanation of the community leaders of Seberang Kota Jambi, the government structure practiced in Seberang was very simple. It is said to be simple because there is only the Village Head as the top leader and oversees the Deputy Village Head and Mangku as the daily executor of government processes and administration. The village head is the leader who acts as the highest decision-maker, respected as well as a symbol of the authority of the leader in the scope of each village. Meanwhile, Mangku is the administrative executive element that serves the daily needs of the people and accommodates the proposals of the residents with the permission of the village head.

The following is a diagram of the Village Organizational Structure practiced in 11 villages in Seberang Kota Jambi, as shown in the table below.

**Chart 1. Organizational structure of Sebrang Jambi City**



Moving on from the above structure, it can be observed that the customary village government, which is held by the village head, is assisted by the deputy village head and mangku. The village head is the top leader and is accompanied by the deputy village head. While administrative activities, daily routines as a form of service for the villagers are handled by the mangku. Thus, the mangku is the main actor, the front guard of the village government who is directly dealing with the community.

In simple terms, the division of authority of village government officials in Sekoja can be described, namely that the village head serves as the Head of the Customary Village Government in charge of leading the administration of the

Customary Village (Kampung) Government. Among the duties of the village head are:

1. Organizing the village government, carrying out development, and community empowerment;
2. Enforcing Islamic sharia law as a guide for the life of the villagers;
3. Enforcing customary law known as the village head law.

The village head, as a customary leader, is tasked with adjudicating customary cases, imposing customary sanctions, and forgiving (clemency) mistakes that have been made. Throughout the Seberang Kota Jambi custom in the past, the punishment for customary violations was “20 bushels of rice, 1 goat, 20 gold, kecik babatu, gedang babungkal, baikou, bakupalo, peace and forgiveness” (Cholif, 2019).

The Village Head in exercising his authority is assisted by Mangku. Mangku is a direct subordinate of the Village Head. In his daily duties, it is the Mangku who is in direct contact with the community or the people. This means that government administration affairs, development programs, and basic services for citizens in an effort to improve the welfare and economy of the village are the direct responsibility of the Mangku. In short, the mangku is at the forefront in carrying out daily tasks.

**The process of village head election**

It is interesting to discuss the method of changing the leadership of the village in Seberang Kota Jambi. When a village head dies or becomes ill and is no longer able to carry out his duties, or may be subject to religious or customary sanctions, a procession of village leadership is held. The process of recruiting a replacement for the village head will bring out the value of democracy in the local realm. The community flocks to the election place that has been prepared, without having to be registered as a voter list like the current simultaneous elections or regional elections. As long as they know that there will be a village head election, they will vote happily with high self-awareness. This kind of local political activity deserves to be called democracy, which is in fact a people's party.

Due to the importance of the function and role of the village head, certain requirements, mechanisms and responsibilities are applied in the selection and determination of customary leaders (village heads). Especially if there is a change due to death or can no longer carry out their duties. In

Jambi traditional wisdom, it is stated: *once the aek is deep, once the cliff collapses; the cape breaks, the island switches; habis li, beganti li; lapuk puar jelipung grows; bak napuh diujung tanjung, hilang sikuk, berganti sikuk, patah tumbuh hilang berganti.*

The replacement of the village head is the responsibility of the state, including the burden of payments incurred for the customary density, the election day and the inauguration of the village head. This responsibility is reflected in the Jambi Malay traditional saying: *batin naik negeri berutang, batin turun negeri berutang, besuri bak sepasin, nan bejejak bebekas.* Thus, the budgetary needs for the election party are the responsibility of the country (village) by using the typical village. However, the subsequent needs after the elected village head is the responsibility of the elected village head.

In terms of the requirements to become a village head, it is determined that the main requirements are that the person knows and is knowledgeable about adat, and shara', baligh, rational, virtuous, Muslim, elected by the customary community, able to fill adat, pouring lembago according to the custom of the country, meaning economically sufficient. Azis said that the village head is a figure who is widely known in the community, respected and a figure who is considered to be a role model. Thus, candidates for the village head must be devout in worship, understand Malay customs and have a good temperament and be well-off. In terms of age, they must be baliq and usually a man ([Interview, September 28, 2024](#)). On the other hand, the opinion of experts or historians related to the requirements to become a leader/customary leader/the village head must fulfill the following conditions:

1. Maintain the adat nan kawi, harto peseko and dignity of self and country.
2. Carry out the commands of Allah, and comply with the sharia as well as possible by the children of the country;
3. Never make mistakes in the form of larang pantang in the community.

In short, a village leader in protecting religion, customs and children, the prospective leader must be smart, know and be good at religion, customs and social science in addition to other useful sciences. Thus, the elected leader is a role model and the hope of the community. In the Jambi

traditional seloko, it is said that traditional leaders are: *bekato benar, bejalan lurus; wear suci, eat halal; bejalan dulu selangkah, bekato dulu sepatah; go where to ask, return where to tell.*

In the tradition of the procession of changing the village head when there is a vacancy in the village government in Seberang Kota Jambi, the mangku together with the leaders prepare the working steps of the village head election procession. Usually the steps taken are under the command of the mangku, by taking the following steps:

1. Mangku informs the residents
2. Determines the day and place
3. Receiving registration
4. Announcing the winner
5. Inauguration or inauguration of the elected candidate.

The location for voting and counting usually uses a school room or madrasah or Islamic boarding school. In certain circumstances, the mosque is also used as a place to conduct elections for village leaders because the mosque is the center of the activities of the residents of Seberang Kota Jambi which is very thick with Islamic nuances.

The discussion above illustrates the unique and wise nature of the selection system practiced by the relatively traditional Malay community of Jambi. The Head of the Village is considered the main pillar of the community's social life, as all hopes are placed upon him. The requirements to become the Head of the Village are not easy; because the Malayu community is oriented towards Islamic law (Sharia), ethics, courtesy, and ([Marwazi & Abid, 2021](#)) adherence to Islamic teachings and customs are the primary criteria. In the process of replacing the Head of the Village, the committee work is carried out transparently and involves all components of society (traditional leaders, religious scholars, intellectuals, and youth). The implementation of candidate socialization is done simply, with the candidates visiting the community in public places such as mosques, village halls, local shops, and bathing areas while sharing their programs if they are entrusted to become the Head of the Village in the future

## CONCLUSION

This research concludes that the governance of village head elections in Sebrang, Jambi City, cannot be separated from the influence of the local political culture that developed in the community. A

political culture that tends to be patrimonial, with the dominance of personal and familial relationships, has shaped pragmatic patterns of political participation and opened up space for practices such as money politics, social loyalty-based vote mobilization, and the intervention of informal actors.

Although normatively village head elections are regulated through regulations that prioritize the principles of democracy, transparency, and accountability, in practice these regulations often do not run optimally due to the strong influence of local political culture. Thus, improving the governance of village head elections is not sufficient only through administrative or regulatory reforms, but must also be accompanied by efforts to build public political awareness, strengthen the capacity of election supervisory institutions, and encourage a more participatory and rational political culture. An in-depth understanding of local political culture is key to creating a fairer, more democratic, and more integrated village head election process. Furthermore, this research also concludes that:

1. A village head is a respected figure due to their charisma, adherence to religious and customary practices, as well as their ethics and politeness, which endears them to and earns them the respect of their community. This aligns with the concept of a leader in Islam, which prioritizes character, courtesy, and piety so that they are capable of improving the lives of their community.
2. In managing the Village Head election, the organizing committee involved all elements within the Jambi Malay community, namely the traditional leaders, the religious scholars, the intellectuals, as well as the youth organizations or young people. Consequently, transparency, collaboration, and cooperation were able to function well at that time. More importantly, the organizing committee did not interfere with the community's choices.
3. The awareness of voting rights among the Malay community in Jambi, particularly in Sekoja, is quite high, even categorized as very high because almost all residents participated in casting their votes. No one went to their plantations, rice fields, or fished in the sea (river), and even going to the Jambi market was done after the polling. Interestingly, the Malay community in Jambi is relatively traditional and simple, yet their level of awareness regarding the importance of voting

for leaders according to their conscience and their participation is very high. This does not fit into the category of pure political cultures (parochial, subject, and participant) as described by Almond and Verba. The community across the Jambi City area is traditional, simple, and within a smaller scope. Nevertheless, in local elections (village head elections), the Olak Kemang community, representing the Malay people in Jambi City, has proven that they are capable of practicing a fair, safe, and comfortable democratic celebration. Consequently, the Sekoja community falls into the category of a parochial-participant political culture.

In the context of regional autonomy, since the enactment of the Law concerning Regional Autonomy, regions have been able to be creative in reviving original (customary) governance systems that emphasize the application of sufficiently wise and prudent local values. Therefore, it is also fitting that we consider revitalizing the leadership values and customary governance systems that have functioned well. The issue that arises is that almost all traditional villages in the Sekoja area have transformed into urban villages (kelurahan) because they are within the Jambi City administrative boundaries. Consequently, for the Sekoja community, the values that have grown and developed have relatively shifted from the previous village atmosphere.

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