

Desa Adat and Policy: Local Values, Environmental Balance, and Transactional Politics

Iwan Henri Kusnadi^{1*}, Wawan²

¹Sekolah Tinggi Ilmu Sosial dan Ilmu Politik (STISIP) Bina Putera Banjar

²Researcher at Idea Institute

*Correspondence Email: iwanhenri01@gmail.com

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Abstract: *The rights of origin and traditional rights of Indigenous Peoples are aspects mandated by law to be recognized and protected as the basis of recognition. However, these rights are often misunderstood by the state in the formation of customary villages or the management of indigenous communities, resulting in many traditional communities (Indigenous Society) not receiving full recognition. The state often views the issues of indigenous communities administratively, without touching on abstract aspects such as local values, which results in misguided policies. This phenomenon occurs among Indigenous communities in Lebak Regency, where the establishment of customary villages, instead of strengthening customary rights, is caught in the tug-of-war of elite political interests. This discourse shows that asymmetric democracy, which should be an inclusive mechanism, instead creates negative implications such as the politicization of customs, the erosion of local values, the disruption of ecological balance, and the introduction of transactional politics. This article dissects the dynamics of the formation of customary villages through the perspective of asymmetric democracy, highlighting its implications for local values, ecosystem balance, and political practices. Using qualitative methods with a phenomenological approach, this article seeks to explore the meaning of the experiences of Indigenous Communities in Lebak Regency in facing the challenges of democracy and the recognition of customary rights. This study found that the establishment of customary villages in Lebak Regency, which was expected to strengthen the recognition of customary rights, is instead influenced by the tug-of-war of political interests, thereby threatening local values and environmental balance and encouraging the politicization of customary practices within the framework of asymmetric democracy.*

Keywords: *Customs; Democracy, Asymmetric: Politics; Transnational*

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Introduction

The idea of democracy has long been agreed upon in Indonesia as concrete evidence of the people's sovereignty in accordance with the constitutional mandate. The genealogy of Indonesian democracy can at least be traced back to the first election in 1955, when the age of this republic was just a decade. Although after that, Indonesia had to struggle for a long time to purify its democracy. In short, the spirit of democracy began to be regained after the New Order regime collapsed in 1998, and it was then that the milestone of a new democratic journey began. Until the first simultaneous elections held in 2004, it had become evident, affirming the people's legitimacy in wielding power (Latief, 2009). The discourse on democracy indeed does not merely revolve around electoral aspects, but this part needs to be emphasized to understand how the derivation of democracy is perceived by its actors and becomes the genealogy of its emergence.

If we look at the historical aspect of democracy in Indonesia, its initial spirit began with the implementation of electoral democracy. However, the implementation of electoral democracy is not the best choice to continue today. Since the reform era until now, democracy has remained an abstract concept that only manifests materially through elections (Natsir & Ridha, 2018). In fact, the idea of democracy is more than just facilitating an arena for contestation. It is time for us to move from procedural democracy to a more substantial democracy, where the grand ideas of freedom, equality, rights, and other values must be reinterpreted implementatively in the life of the state. It means that democracy does not narrowly operate within the electoral corridor but is present in the lives of citizens as an idea that bridges many things, such as

tolerance, multiculturalism, recognition of local values, and others.

Democracy comes with a concept that is expected to reach that ideal, because democracy is designed as an empty signifier that can be filled with any diversity and familiarizes that diversity with the basis of freedom and equality (Laclau, 1996). This means that democracy recognizes and accommodates diversity, rather than homogenizing differences. This is the part that often becomes blurred in the implementation of democracy in Indonesia because democracy has not yet been able to manifest in several localities that should have their own space in democracy. Understanding the context of Indonesia with all its diversity from the perspective of democracy indeed needs to be reinterpreted, including the aspect of recognition. Unfortunately, the recognition of local values is often done universally, so local communities with their unique values must follow the working methods of the general community in their position as citizens (Purwo Santoso, 2018). The journey of Indonesian democracy, which has been recorded for more than two decades since the reform era, still explains the universality in understanding Indonesia's diverse uniqueness (Febrianto & Purwanto, 2020). This means that, in practice, Indonesian democracy has not yet been able to understand several distinctive characteristics of various unique communities in society (Longgina Novadona Bayo, Purwo Santoso, 2018).

In the last three decades, political discourse and global citizen discussions have tended to resonate similarly in almost all nation-states, which are beginning to realize that returning to tradition and culture is a rational alternative (Jiwa Utama, 2020). This situation increasingly emphasizes that the position of tradition

and culture embedded in the locality of society must be acknowledged and given its place, especially in democratic countries. In line with that assumption, Sulaksono and Purnomo, in their study, emphasize that in interpreting the context of local democracy, each reality must be viewed as unique; consequently, there must be a non-general treatment in understanding locality (Sulaksono & Purnomo, 2020). The narrative about the recognition of tradition and locality today is widely circulating in the increasingly established life of democracy, but unfortunately, this discourse almost never organically advocates for the rights of tradition. Instead, the narrow interests of a handful of elites often infiltrate the process of democratization and the recognition of localities. This situation is very dangerous because not only will tradition become morally biased, but it can also drag local communities with all their attributes of wisdom into practical political transactions. This situation clearly clashes with the initial spirit of democracy, which seeks equality, recognition, and participation of every community according to its will and uniqueness.

The discourse on the operationalization of democracy that does not prioritize uniformity (universalism) is largely driven by the idea of asymmetric democracy, which demands a deep recognition of locality or uniqueness (Longgina Novadona Bayo, Purwo Santoso, 2018). This narrative sounds simple, but in its implementation, it requires a complete awareness in understanding each uniqueness. Like how indigenous communities are recognized by the state or how they obtain their position in democracy. This process will determine policies, so a misunderstanding of uniqueness will lead to incorrect treatment and recognition. Such a

situation makes the recognition agenda with an asymmetric approach vulnerable to being hijacked by other interests that clash with the principle of locality.

A similar situation also occurs with the indigenous community in Lebak Regency, which today is striving for recognition through the establishment of an adat village. The spirit being offered contains the same chemistry, namely recognizing the indigenous community in Lebak Regency by granting legal status as an indigenous village with all the inherent rights according to the applicable laws and regulations. Visibly, this is an asymmetric idea because it seeks to promote stronger recognition of indigenous communities through the legality of adat villages. However, the consequence is that the existing conventional villages must transition or merge into customary villages. The process of formulating the Regional Regulation on Customary Villages in Lebak Regency is still caught in a complex whirlpool because several political party factions in the Lebak Regency DPRD do not agree with this agenda.

The existence of discordant views within the legislative body in Lebak Regency makes us question whether the concept of asymmetric democracy has become an idea in the formation of customary villages or if there is another agenda behind it that remains unresolved in negotiations among the elites. Simply put, those who agree believe that the indigenous community in Lebak is very deserving of being established as an adat village because it has traditional and historical values that are different from ordinary village communities; thus, its recognition must be legitimized through the formation of an adat village. On the other hand, those who disagree argue that the establishment of an adat village is not

yet needed by the indigenous community because

Recognizing indigenous communities does not mean having to establish indigenous villages. Before delving deeper into the political context surrounding the establishment of customary villages in Lebak Regency, we need to understand the customary situation in Lebak with its existing communities. Lebak, as a region with many traditions, is indeed not just an empty narrative, one of which is the significant potential of its indigenous communities. It is recorded that Lebak Regency has 522 indigenous and kasepuhan communities, as stated in Regional Regulation of Lebak Regency, Banten Province, Number 8 of 2015 concerning Recognition, Protection, and Empowerment of Kasepuhan Indigenous Law Communities (2015). The regional regulation has actually affirmed that the recognition of indigenous communities in Lebak Regency has been carried out, but establishing adat villages as legitimate is more than just recognition.

There are so many problems in the formation of customary villages in Lebak Regency, ranging from opposition from several parties and the existence of communities that do not agree to threats to the democratic rights of indigenous communities that could be compromised. Based on these various issues, the researcher sees that there is another agenda sneaking into the formation of customary villages, one of which is political interests. In other cases, these political interests often materialize in transactions with the traditional leaders. Because only through the traditional leaders can mass mobilization to support or not support someone be easily carried out. This situation has been explained by Wawan in his study that in several electoral agendas, there is an exchange of

resources with political support between elites and indigenous communities through traditional leaders (Wawan, 2023).

Understanding the context of customary law must also involve unraveling the fundamental rights inherent in the values they acknowledge; one indigenous community may have different needs because each has its own uniqueness (Fahmi et al., 2023). Without a firm perspective from the state in understanding customary needs, local customary values will be threatened by existing political penetration. Some studies do show positive implications of politics involving indigenous communities, such as increasing political participation and improving relations between the government and indigenous customs, and appropriate policies can be realized based on indigenous needs without eroding their traditional values (Jayma-Porquis, 2017). However, transactional politics involving politicians and indigenous leaders in several studies have negative implications, as seen in Papua, for example, when political mobilization involving customs and identity made money politics very massive, then the sacred values of customs became very political and full of interests (Senis et al., 2024). Transactions that occur in several political agendas between politicians and traditional leaders indicate that in the context of forming traditional villages, the same possibility is very open.

If this truly happens, it would certainly be very dangerous for the continuity of the traditions and moral values of the customs that are being fought for. Instead of protecting and recognizing customary rights through the Customary Regional Regulation, what actually happens is the subjugation of tradition within the vortex of elite transactions. Situations like this can only be avoided if

the transactional agenda behind the scenes is recognized early on. However, unfortunately, discussions on the establishment of customary villages based on the preservation of local values, ecological balance, and practical political potential involving indigenous communities are rarely heard.

Simply put, this research aims to explain the agenda for the establishment of traditional villages in Lebak Banten through two logics: the logic of asymmetric democracy as a foundation for understanding the uniqueness of customs and the logic of implications for local values, environmental balance, and transactional politics. These two aspects are often difficult to reconcile because they have different orientations. If asymmetric democracy is based on the recognition of local rights, then the implications of the agenda for establishing customary villages can be oriented towards narrower interests. Like the example of the Baduy Indigenous community, who have their own way of life in interacting with nature and each other, adhering to their own values. This aspect should be the main consideration in making any policy agenda so that the interests of customs and the wealth of traditions become the primary priorities that must be fought for.

This argument is not without reason, as the gestures of local elites, including politicians in Lebak, indicate that they are inserting interests outside of traditional values in the formation of the adat village. For example, the indigenous community group that vocally demonstrated the traditional village turned out to be those who benefited from the process, as they were promised the position of village head by the traditional leader for free under the pretext of an elder's mandate. This situation is very likely to occur when the formation of the

customary village has already taken place because one of the agendas being pushed is the election of leaders in the electoral agenda, which is based on customary decisions and determined by the customary chiefs.

Bringing together asymmetric logic with transactional political logic in the context of forming customary villages in Lebak Regency is very important to do because, on one hand, the formation of customary villages must be carried out with an asymmetric approach so that the results truly accommodate locality and enhance the dignity and status of customs. But on the process side, this will be difficult to achieve when the narrow interests of a group of people actually dominate its formation, and the bad news is that these interests are always smuggled through backdoor transactions in an arena that is actually very pragmatic. This situation is reinforced by Wawan's findings in his study that between the traditional leaders and local elites in Lebak, there is a strong clientelistic relationship, and the traditional leaders have bargaining power over the local elites, meaning that negotiations and bargaining over interests are very open to being conducted (Wawan, 2023).

The formation of customary villages in Lebak Regency is a complex phenomenon that requires an in-depth study using the perspectives of asymmetric democracy, clientelism politics, and the principles of ecology and environmental justice. First, through the lens of Asymmetric Democracy (Laclau, 1996; Bayo & Santoso, 2018), the formation of customary villages should accommodate the uniqueness of local and traditional values of indigenous communities, rather than standardizing them within a rigid administrative structure. However, the reality in Lebak

shows that this process is actually dominated by the interests of political elites and bureaucrats, who neglect the active participation of indigenous communities such as the Baduy Tribe.

This contradicts the principles of asymmetric democracy, which require the recognition of diversity and local autonomy. Second, the theory of clientelism politics (Aspinall, 2015; Berenschot, 2018) reveals that the establishment of customary villages is often exploited as a transactional tool by local elites to gain political support, resource allocation, or electoral advantages. These practices erode local values and threaten ecological integrity, as short-term interests are prioritized over environmental preservation. Third, the Principle of Ecology and Environmental Justice (Taylor, 2000) emphasizes that nature must be recognized as a subject with the right to be preserved, not merely an object of exploitation. However, the establishment of customary villages in Lebak actually neglects this principle, as it focuses more on administrative legitimacy and pragmatic interests rather than a commitment to environmental preservation and intergenerational justice.

The research gap that this study aims to fill is the lack of studies that integrate these three theoretical perspectives to analyze the dynamics of the formation of customary villages in Lebak. Research questions such as "How is the discourse on the formation of customary villages in Lebak Regency viewed from the perspective of asymmetric democracy?" and "What are the implications of the formation of customary villages on local values, environmental balance, and transactional politics in the customary communities of Lebak Regency?" aim to uncover the tension between the idealism of customary

recognition and the political realities that dominate the process. By combining these three theories, this research is expected to provide a holistic understanding of the challenges and opportunities in the formation of customary villages, as well as offer policy recommendations that are more favorable to indigenous communities and environmental sustainability.

Method

This article uses a phenomenological approach to identify the problem of moving from the world of meaningful sensory experiences to a world filled with meaningful objects, something that initially occurs in individual consciousness separately and then collectively, in the interactions between consciousnesses (Creswell, 2014). The primary data collection in this study was conducted through interviews using purposive sampling principles. Where the informants have been determined and grouped specifically based on the theme of information to be explored. The informants in this study are the Baduy Dalam Indigenous Community. In addition, this research also uses secondary data obtained from credible sources such as media information, regulations, and other academic sources presented in the form of literature review and descriptive analysis.

According to Creswell, the phenomenological approach postpones all judgments about the experienced attitudes until a certain basis is found. This postponement is commonly referred to as *epoche* (time period). The concept of *epoche* is to distinguish the realm of data (subject) from the researcher's interpretation. The concept of *epoche* becomes the center where researchers organize and categorize initial assumptions about the phenomenon to delay interpretation of what the

participants say (Creswell, 2014). This article uses phenomenological logic because it aims to see the meaning of a phenomenon, namely the formation of customary villages as a latent phenomenon on the surface. Then, interpretation will also be conducted from the perspective of asymmetric democracy to truly realize that the concept that has been promoted in the formation of customary villages is based on the struggle for traditional values. Then, to understand the political process behind the scenes in the arena of elite transactions, a deep interpretation of each reality is also necessary. Therefore, this research can only be deeply explored using a phenomenological approach.

Results and Discussion

Asymmetric Democracy in Local Politics in Lebak Regency

Democracy is not a new idea in the context of local politics in Indonesia. This is because decentralization, which triggers the emergence of political dynamics at the local level, is also nurtured by democratic ideas with all the values attached to them, such as freedom, rights, participation, and others (Laclau, 1996). Democratic values are considered to increasingly strengthen regions in carrying out their autonomous duties. However, the question is whether the idea is already asymmetric or merely imposes a uniform pattern on the uniqueness and needs of each existing region. This is the aspect that we will try to elaborate on: to what extent the idea of asymmetric democracy has been successfully translated into the local political reality in Lebak Regency.

The uniqueness of each region determines the power structure within its respective area, meaning the character of the communities present in the region or the available resources determines how

the patterns of power interaction work (Hakim & Qurbani, 2022). Thus, the democracy implemented at the local level must be able to embody this so that the existing uniqueness is preserved by the idea of democracy. However, to reach that stage, a sharp asymmetric approach is required from all parties, starting from the local government and the community to the regional representative council (Salinding et al., 2024). In the context of Lebak Regency, if viewed from the character of the region, including its cultural richness, ethnic diversity, and local wisdom, it indeed requires an uncommon perspective to understand these aspects. One concrete example can be seen in the unique Baduy Indigenous Community. On one hand, they reject the systems offered by the state, such as development, population registration, and even formal education. Visibly, they might not be recognized as part of the Lebak Regency community or even as Indonesian citizens because they lack residency documents. But on the other hand, they have a long history of shaping local identity and influencing the distribution of power in Lebak. So in situations like this, asymmetric democracy works.

Principally, asymmetric democracy is a concept that refers to a form of democratic interpretation for unique and diverse entities within a country. Each community has a different level of autonomy or freedom in managing their own affairs as citizens (Longgina Novadona Bayo, Purwo Santoso, 2018). In line with this concept, Lebak Regency should be a region rich in asymmetrical approaches in every aspect, considering the strong uniqueness of the existing social communities. However, if we look at the existing political dynamics and policies, it seems that the principle of asymmetry is still a foreign concept there. Nevertheless,

several policy steps have been taken towards certain social characteristics, such as providing conservation and recognition to local communities like the Baduy tribe and allowing space for informal aspects to negotiate in several agendas, as done with traditional leaders or elders in several regions like Kasepuhan Citorek, Kasepuhan Cisungsang, and others.

Some of these steps, although considered proactive towards the principle of asymmetry, are not yet sufficient to say that the existing political processes and policies are based on locality. Because asymmetry does not only operate on the dimension of recognition but must also reach the stage of producing what that recognition entails (Zuhri et al., 2024). The result in question, in its simplest form, is in the form of policies, while in stronger cases, it affects the social system. However, that certainly requires a long process. From that perspective, in reality, Lebak Regency has not yet shown the distinctive aspects of its political life. This serves as the main indicator that asymmetrical democracy has not yet taken root there. In the political aspect, the visible face is not much different from other regencies and cities in Banten Province. What is actually evident today are several negative indications of local democracy, such as the presence of political dynasties and a strong clientelism pattern that has emerged.

Meanwhile, in local communities such as indigenous societies, there is no visible political effort or fundamental policies to promote locality to a more advanced level. In fact, on several occasions, there have been discrepancies in opinions between the government with indigenous communities in tourism management that is considered not friendly to the cultural values of the Baduy community. This

shows that the concept of asymmetry is not used by the government in revitalizing local democracy in Lebak. In a more intense argument, this article wants to say that asymmetrical democracy does not occur at the local level in the context of Lebak Regency. The political and policy struggles present only create a conventional arena without any intense attention to the uniqueness of the existing social communities. In a more concrete example, we can see that most indigenous communities live with their own social systems without much intervention from the state in the form of policies or systems that facilitate their localities. For example, the Baduy Indigenous community, who live by farming daily, even if the state does not facilitate their economic system, merely providing markets and empowering Baduy farmers with a system that does not conflict with the local principles they adhere to.

"We here every day plant in the fields, starting with kencur, ginger, bananas, and rice." Some are consumed by ourselves, while others are sold. Usually, there are middlemen who come here, and for some other natural products, we usually sell them outside the Baduy area by walking. (Mr. N. *Baduy Dalam* Tribe)

Agenda for the Formation of Customary Villages: Actors, Targets, and Interests

Lebak Regency has significant cultural wealth. Based on data from the local government, it is recorded that Lebak Regency has 522 indigenous and kasepuhan communities, as stated in the Regional Regulation of Lebak Regency, Banten Province, Number 8 of 2015 concerning the Recognition, Protection, and Empowerment of Kasepuhan Indigenous Law Communities (2015). This number is quite large for a single regency, reflecting the richness of this region in

terms of cultural diversity. This wealth of customs is supported by the geographical conditions of Lebak Regency, which has extensive rainforests, hilly characteristics, and fertile plains. Administratively, Lebak Regency is also the largest area in Banten Province, making it a strategic region for the conservation of traditions and the environment.

The existing cultural wealth is then attempted to be legitimized through the customary village system, which is an implementation of state regulation through the Village Law, namely Law No. 6 of 2014, revised by Law No. 3 of 2024. This recognition, on one hand, is a positive step in granting customary rights while also facilitating the participation of indigenous communities in the local governance system. According to Solissa (2022), the concept of customary villages is essentially in line with the principle of asymmetric democracy, which aims to uniquely accommodate local needs. However, the agenda of establishing customary villages in Lebak Regency has given rise to complex dynamics, where the tug-of-war of interests predominates over the pure effort to preserve customs. This situation raises a fundamental question: is the agenda for establishing traditional villages truly aimed at recognizing local wealth, or is there a larger and hidden agenda? Moreover, there are concerns about the extent to which interests are creeping into this agenda, making the process of establishing traditional villages very complicated. To analyze it, it is important to look at two main aspects, namely the political side and the ethical side of the agenda. This analysis will include the identification of actors, those involved, the goals to be achieved, and the hidden interests behind the process of forming a traditional village.

The actors involved in the formation of traditional villages in Lebak Regency mostly come from politicians, bureaucrats, and several alliances of indigenous communities. Strangely, the involvement of the Baduy indigenous community, one of the most well-known indigenous communities in this region, is not prominently visible. On one hand, the desire to legitimize ordinary villages into adat villages is a good idea. However, the other side reveals hidden interests, such as electoral impacts, resource allocation, and natural resource management. As Aspinall (2013) revealed, local politics in Indonesia often involves elite maneuvers that exploit the recognition of local communities for political and economic gain. This agenda is currently being pushed by several politicians in the Lebak Regency DPRD and is still in the draft regional regulation (RAPERDA) stage. Although the aim of this policy is to provide legitimacy to indigenous communities through the establishment of customary villages, the existing political dynamics indicate a complex situation. The division among political party factions that do not agree becomes the main obstacle, and if forced, the process of establishing these customary villages can deviate from its original purpose. According to Ostrom (2009), the sustainability of local systems can only be achieved if decisions are made with transparency and full participation from the indigenous community.

Pragmatic interests in this agenda cannot be overlooked either. The indigenous alliance gains benefits such as rights to natural resources, including customary land, as well as the authority to elect village heads through customary means. These interests also serve as the reason why some indigenous communities propose the establishment of customary villages. However, as explained by Li

(2007), unbalanced external intervention can threaten the social and environmental integrity of indigenous communities.

The Politicization of Customs and Its Implications for Local Values and Ecological Balance

The process of forming customary villages cannot be separated from the political dynamics involving interest exchanges and short-term transactions by a handful of local elites. The elites often exploit this moment to gain political legitimacy or economic benefits, thereby distorting the original purpose of establishing the customary village. According to North (1990), political transactions usually involve the exchange of resources, such as power, money, or certain facilities, which have the potential to divert attention from the needs of indigenous communities to personal political agendas. This situation causes traditional villages to no longer be spaces for protecting traditions but rather tools for fulfilling the interests of certain parties.

This distortion directly impacts the local values that should be at the core of the existence of traditional villages. The traditional village, which is designed to preserve traditions and culture, often becomes a political instrument that benefits outside parties. This is in line with the findings (Li, 2007), which state that the dominance of external actors in decision-making can undermine the sustainability of local traditions. Traditional values become marginalized when the policies adopted reflect political transactions more than the interests of indigenous communities. As a result, local culture no longer develops in a pure context but is instead influenced by a biased political agenda. Moreover, political transactions involving indigenous communities and politicians reinforce the dependence of

indigenous people on political actors. In some cases, politicians' support for the recognition of customary villages is often accompanied by political agreements that benefit them. This creates an imbalance in the relationship between indigenous communities and politicians, where the voices of indigenous communities are often drowned out by political interests. Ostrom (2009) asserts that the sustainability of traditional systems can only be achieved if local communities have full autonomy to manage their traditions. However, with the increasing political intervention, this autonomy is becoming increasingly difficult to maintain.

Another equally serious implication is the disruption of the natural balance. Customary villages have long been known as guardians of harmony between humans and the environment through sustainable traditional practices. However, the politicization of traditional villages often opens up opportunities for the exploitation of natural resources by external parties, which contradicts traditional principles. Edward Aspinall (2015) explains that local politics often sacrifices environmental sustainability for short-term gains. As a result, the environment that was previously preserved by traditional values has been damaged due to uncontrolled economic and political interventions.

Overall, the politicization of the formation of customary villages has a significant negative impact on local values and environmental balance. The greater the involvement of political transactions, the further the traditional villages move away from their original purpose as spaces for the preservation of tradition and the environment. For that reason, more transparent, participatory, and pro-indigenous policies are needed to ensure that traditional values and environmental

sustainability are maintained. In this context, Geertz (1983) states that traditional values can only survive if managed in an environment that allows local communities to have full control over their traditions without external interference. The agenda for the establishment of customary villages in Lebak Regency has great potential to become an instrument for the preservation of customs and the environment, but this can only be realized if the process truly prioritizes the principles of transparency, accountability, and support for indigenous communities. Without these principles, this agenda will only become a symbol of formality without substance, detrimental to local values and environmental sustainability.

From a clearer perspective, the case of the formation of traditional villages in Lebak Regency can clearly be interpreted as an effort that does not favor environmental sustainability. This can be seen from the lack of environmental issues discussed in the agenda. In fact, indigenous communities naturally have a conservative function whose existence has been recognized in maintaining environmental sustainability (Wawan et al., 2021). The efforts to establish traditional villages in Lebak Regency, although formally aimed at preserving customs and the environment, in practice do not reflect the principles of environmental justice as explained by Taylor (2000). First, Taylor's ecological principle emphasizes that nature must be recognized as a subject with the right to be preserved, not merely an object of exploitation. However, empirical facts show that the agenda of establishing customary villages in Lebak is actually dominated by political and economic interests, as evidenced by the involvement of political elites and bureaucrats who

exploit this process for electoral gains and resource allocation.

This contradicts ecological principles, as nature is merely used as a tool for legitimacy without any real commitment to protect it. Second, the principle of justice Taylor demands that the utilization of natural resources be carried out with consideration for intergenerational justice and environmental sustainability. However, the process of forming traditional villages in Lebak actually neglects the active participation of indigenous communities, such as the Baduy Tribe, who should be the key holders in preserving local wisdom and the environment. The dominance of external actors in this process indicates that short-term interests, such as control over communal land and natural resources, are prioritized over ecological sustainability. Thus, the efforts to establish traditional villages in Lebak Regency do not meet Taylor's environmental justice principles, as they prioritize pragmatic interests over a commitment to nature conservation and social justice. Such a situation puts the environment in a vulnerable position because policies tend to ignore the principles of environmental justice and focus more on administrative integration and political interests rather than the empowerment of indigenous communities and environmental preservation, which are the essence of customary recognition (Jiwa Utama, 2020).

Conclusion

Asymmetric democracy in Lebak Regency has become an important instrument for accommodating political and cultural diversity, particularly in recognizing the rights of indigenous communities. However, its implementation faces significant

challenges, including the imbalance of political representation and the influence of certain actors' interests in the agenda of forming customary villages. Although ideally, the establishment of customary villages aims to protect traditional values and strengthen cultural identity, the reality is often dominated by political and economic interests that threaten the very essence of customary existence. The politicization of customary law, which uses traditional values as tools for political legitimization, further exacerbates the situation by neglecting the goals of cultural preservation and environmental balance. If this situation continues without transparency, inclusive participation, and strict oversight mechanisms, traditional villages not only lose their meaning as guardians of social harmony but also risk disrupting the balance of the ecosystem. Therefore, policy reforms that strengthen governance based on local values, environmental sustainability, and social justice are an urgent step to restore the function of asymmetric democracy as an inclusive mechanism that favors indigenous communities.

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