

The Persistence of Informal Authority in Indonesian Local Democracy

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ABSTRACT

Traditional authorities remain influential in many democracies, yet limited research explains how customary and formal leadership are integrated within Indonesian village governance. This study examines why informal leadership persists and how customary and administrative authorities interact in Dusun Sade, Rembitan Village, Central Lombok. It employs a descriptive qualitative design based on fieldwork conducted from June to December 2024, including in-depth interviews with village and community actors, observation, and analysis of relevant scholarly and institutional documents. The findings show that customary authority is sustained by *awik-awik adat*, moral expectations, genealogical-cultural legitimacy, and collective acceptance rooted in Sasak traditions. Rather than competing with formal institutions, customary and state authorities are integrated through a dual leadership arrangement in which the same actors may perform administrative and customary roles. This configuration supports dispute resolution, cultural preservation, community compliance, and the coordination of village governance. The study contributes to debates on informal institutions, hybrid governance, and state–society relations by demonstrating that traditional authority can persist through institutional incorporation rather than resistance to the state. It concludes that *adat* remains a functioning source of political legitimacy and governance within contemporary local democracy.

Keywords

Adat authority, hybrid governance, informal leadership, local democracy, traditional institutions, village governance

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INTRODUCTION

Traditional authorities remain politically consequential within many contemporary states, including electoral democracies. Recent comparative research has moved beyond the modernization assumption that legal-rational institutions necessarily displace customary authority. Instead, it shows that traditional institutions vary substantially in their *de facto* power, internal organization, downward accountability, and degree of state recognition (Holzinger, Kern, and Kromrey 2016; Baldwin and Holzinger 2019; Holzinger, Kern, and Kromrey 2020; Baldwin 2025). Their political effects are correspondingly conditional. Traditional leaders may mobilize electoral support for incumbents, coordinate collective action, facilitate public-goods provision, or strengthen trust in state institutions (de Kadt and Larreguy 2018; Goist and Kern 2018; Magaloni, Díaz-Cayeros, and Euler 2019; Chlouba 2020). In other settings, overlapping jurisdictions, elite capture, exclusion, or contests over customary office can weaken accountability and generate local instability (Mustasilta 2019, 2021; Chlouba 2024). The persistence of customary authority should therefore be treated neither as an anachronistic residue nor as inherently democratic. It is an institutional and political outcome that must be explained in relation to state structures, local legitimacy, and community practices.

A central issue in this literature concerns the relationship between customary and state authority. Comparative studies have documented governance arrangements in which citizens are simultaneously subject to formal state institutions and chiefly authority operating through parallel institutional hierarchies (Eggen 2011). Building on the distinction between formal and informal institutions developed by Helmke and Levitsky (2004), customary authority can be understood as deriving from socially recognized rules, norms, and practices that operate alongside, within, or in tension with officially sanctioned institutions. Some studies describe a dual institutional order in which traditional and formal authorities coexist but retain distinguishable jurisdictions (Holzinger, Kern, and Kromrey 2016). Traditional leaders may act as brokers, intermediaries, local governing authorities, or co-producers of governance, connecting communities with state institutions, public goods, conflict-resolution mechanisms,

and development processes (Honig 2019; Tieleman and Uitermark 2019; Chlouba 2020; Baldwin 2025).

Compatibility between the two forms of authority is possible, but not automatic. State recognition may strengthen customary institutions, subordinate them to incumbent political interests, or transform their social foundations. Conversely, customary legitimacy may supplement limited administrative capacity while also creating accountability problems for citizens who cannot sanction unelected leaders (de Kadt and Larreguy 2018; Baldwin and Holzinger 2019; Holzinger, Kern, and Kromrey 2020). Although this scholarship has substantially improved understanding of institutional coexistence, it generally conceptualizes customary and formal authorities as separate actors whose relationships range from competition to cooperation. It pays less attention to arrangements in which customary and legal-rational authority are concentrated in, or enacted through, the same officeholder. Earlier research on rural South Africa likewise documented the continuing renegotiation of chieftaincy alongside elected councils and emerging democratic institutions rather than its straightforward disappearance under democratisation (Oomen 2000). Customary authority should also not be assumed to distribute power or resources equitably: studies of customary land governance demonstrate that negotiated customary systems may generate unequal outcomes and disproportionately benefit traditional elites (Ubink 2008). Comparative research therefore cautions against equating customary legitimacy with inclusive governance, since traditional elites may derive disproportionate benefits when customary authority intersects with valuable resources (Ubink 2008). Survey evidence from Africa further indicates that citizens do not necessarily experience elected and traditional authorities as mutually exclusive spheres; they may understand them as participants in a single integrated political system (Logan 2009).

Indonesia provides an important setting in which to examine this problem. Since the democratic transition and decentralization reforms initiated after 1998, authority, resources, and political competition have been redistributed across districts and villages. Early post-Reformasi reforms altered the institutional relationship between village government

and local communities by expanding village autonomy and introducing representative institutions that constrained the earlier concentration of authority in the village head (Antlöv 2003). The 2014 Village Law further recognized villages as governing communities with expanded authority and fiscal resources while creating a legal pathway for the recognition of adat villages (Antlöv, Wetterberg, and Dharmawan 2016; Vel, Zakaria, and Bedner 2017). Yet decentralization has not produced a uniform model of democratic village governance. Studies of local service delivery, village elections, citizen participation, and accountability show that formal reforms interact with pre-existing status hierarchies, patronage networks, family connections, and informal relationships (Fossati 2016; Aspinall and Rohman 2017; Berenschot and van Klinken 2018; Berenschot, Capri, and Dhian 2021).

Recent comparative research confirms substantial variation among Indonesian village governance regimes, including differences in leadership recruitment, citizen participation, budget allocation, accountability, and the influence of customary leaders (Aspinall, Berenschot, Savirani, and Ruhyanto 2025a, 2025b). This variation helps explain why democratization and decentralization have generated mixed local outcomes rather than a linear replacement of inherited authority by elected institutions (Hidayat, Hospes, and Termeer 2025). Village politics must therefore be understood as an arena in which statutory institutions interact with historically embedded authority structures, social networks, and locally specific understandings of legitimate leadership. This is consistent with the broader literature on the ‘new local politics of democratisation,’ which argues that decentralisation creates political spaces whose democratic effects depend on the actors, power relations, and institutions operating within them rather than on institutional reform alone (Harriss, Stokke, and Törnquist 2004).

The politics of *adat* adds another layer to this institutional diversity. As documented by Davidson and Henley (2007), the post-Reformasi revival of *adat* created new opportunities for customary communities to claim recognition, representation, land rights, and governing authority. Post-Reformasi *adat* revival has also transformed *adat* from a primarily cultural idiom into a political resource through which customary communities

pursue recognition, rights, representation, and influence within local democratic arenas (Tyson 2010; Afala 2019). However, subsequent research demonstrates that recognition is mediated by legislation, administrative procedures, state classifications, and relations with public officials. Studies of *adat* villages and customary land show that formal recognition may integrate customary institutions into village governance, but it may also narrow, legalize, or selectively reconstruct living customary practices (Bedner and Arizona 2019; Utama 2020, 2021).

Empirical research further demonstrates that the realization of indigenous rights often depends on informal access to local officials and political networks rather than on formal law alone (van der Muur 2018; Berenschot and van Klinken 2018). In conservation and land governance, the gap between formal recognition and implementation can expose customary communities to exclusion or require them to conform to state-defined categories that do not adequately reflect local social arrangements (Barnes et al. 2023). Historical and contemporary work on legal pluralism likewise cautions against treating *adat* as a fixed and internally uniform body of rules. Customary law is continuously interpreted, negotiated, and reshaped through interactions among communities, state institutions, political actors, and changing social conditions (Manse 2024). These studies establish that *adat* remains politically consequential, but they focus primarily on legal recognition, land, rights, or administrative status rather than on the everyday organization of leadership authority.

Research on traditional leadership in Indonesia also reveals divergent trajectories. In some settings, democratization and statutory village institutions have reduced or reconfigured the authority of customary elites. In others, customary figures continue to influence dispute resolution, political representation, community mobilization, and local decision-making. Asrinaldi (2022), for example, identifies the delegitimation and reconfiguration of customary authority under changing village-government arrangements in Minangkabau. Waworuntu, Alkatiri, and de Archellie (2023) similarly show how decentralization and formal administrative structures have constrained the role of Mosalaki leaders in Nggela, Flores, even though those leaders retain ceremonial and cultural functions. In

Kerinci, by contrast, traditional leaders have been reported to participate in development planning and to influence policy processes within formal local government, illustrating a closer interaction between customary leadership and governmental institutions (Maulana et al. 2019).” In Sumbawa, the revitalised Lembaga Adat Tana Samawa was explicitly conceived as an intermediary between government and society, illustrating how customary institutions can be incorporated into contemporary local political arenas without becoming identical to formal government institutions (Permana 2015).

Studies of village elections demonstrate that democratic competition may open leadership positions to new actors while leaving family reputation, social status, and established networks politically valuable (Aspinall and Rohman 2017; Berenschot, Capri, and Dhian 2021). Meanwhile, research on customary tourism villages suggests that heritage preservation and tourism introduce market incentives that can change the meaning, distribution, and public performance of customary authority (Suyadnya, Prianti, Kanto, and Putra 2025). Taken together, this literature demonstrates that neither “adat revival” nor “village democracy” is sufficient to predict the position of traditional leaders. Their authority depends on the local configuration of law, office, legitimacy, social hierarchy, and economic change.

What remains insufficiently explained is how customary authority persists when it is not simply external to, parallel with, or subordinated by formal village government, but is institutionally joined to it. Existing scholarship has examined state recognition of *adat*, the democratization of village leadership, and the coexistence of customary and elected authorities. It has not adequately specified the mechanisms through which one person or a closely connected group of offices can embody both customary and administrative authority. Nor has it sufficiently examined how community members distinguish, combine, and evaluate these different sources of legitimacy in everyday governance.

This limitation is particularly important for assessing local democracy. Institutional complementarity may facilitate coordination, dispute resolution, and social acceptance. At the same time, the concentration of customary and formal authority may restrict contestation, blur lines

of accountability, or privilege particular lineages and culturally defined moral standards. These possibilities cannot be resolved by assuming either harmonious hybridity or inevitable conflict. They require close examination of the actual rules, practices, offices, and legitimacy claims through which authority is exercised.

This article addresses that problem through a qualitative case study of Dusun Sade, a customary hamlet within Rembitan Village, Central Lombok, Indonesia. Sade is an analytically useful case because customary institutions, village administration, cultural preservation, and tourism operate within the same local arena. Customary leaders derive authority from *awik-awik adat*, moral standing, knowledge of Sasak customs, and community recognition, while formal village institutions derive authority from state law and administrative office. This shows an overlap between customary and governmental leadership roles. These characteristics make Sade suitable for examining not merely the coexistence of two institutions but the potential fusion of two sources of authority.

This study addresses two research questions: Why does customary leadership continue to command authority within contemporary village government in Dusun Sade? And how are customary and formal authority related and enacted in local governance? To answer these questions, the study draws on fieldwork conducted from June to December 2024, including interviews with village and community actors, observation, and analysis of relevant scholarly and institutional documents. The article uses “local democracy” in a delimited sense: the organization and legitimation of authority within an elected village-government setting, including the relationship between formal office, customary institutions, community acceptance, and decision-making. It does not claim to provide a comprehensive assessment of electoral quality, gender equality, political participation, or overall democratic performance because the available data were not designed to measure those dimensions systematically.

The article argues that customary authority in Sade persists through a combination of normative continuity and institutional incorporation. *Awik-awik*, moral expectations, cultural knowledge, and community recognition provide a customary basis of legitimacy, while the overlap between

customary and administrative roles embeds that legitimacy within village governance. This arrangement differs from models in which traditional leaders and state officials operate as clearly separate authorities. The article conceptualizes it as hybrid leadership: an arrangement in which customary and legal-rational sources of authority are combined within an interconnected set of offices and, according to the manuscript's evidence, may be embodied by the same leader.

This argument is narrower than claiming that *adat* and democracy are inherently compatible. Rather, it identifies a mechanism through which traditional authority can be reproduced inside the modern state. Whether such an arrangement strengthens democratic governance depends on the procedures through which leaders are selected, decisions are made, disputes are resolved, and officeholders are held accountable.

The study makes three contributions. First, it extends comparative scholarship on traditional authority by shifting attention from institutional coexistence to role fusion and overlapping officeholding. Second, it connects research on *adat* recognition with the literature on village politics by showing how customary legitimacy operates not only through claims to culture, territory, or land but also through routine governance and leadership. Third, it provides an Indonesian case that qualifies predominantly African-centred debates on traditional authority and the state. The findings indicate that the democratic implications of hybrid leadership depend on how customary legitimacy is translated into decision-making, accountability, inclusion, and constraints on officeholders—questions requiring further comparative research.

METHODS

Research Design

This study employed a descriptive qualitative case-study design to examine two related questions: why customary leadership continues to command authority in Dusun Sade and how customary and formal authority interact in local governance. A qualitative design was appropriate because the study sought to understand locally embedded meanings, institutional

practices, and sources of legitimacy that cannot be adequately captured through numerical measurement alone (Hamilton and Finley 2019). The analytical focus was therefore the persistence and operation of traditional leadership within the contemporary administrative structure of Rembitan Village. Fieldwork was conducted from June to December 2024 in Dusun Sade, Rembitan Village, Central Lombok Regency, West Nusa Tenggara, Indonesia.

Case Selection

Dusun Sade was selected purposively as a single case because customary institutions continue to operate alongside formal village administration. The site is also publicly identified as a Sasak customary settlement in which traditional architecture, cultural practices, customary rules, village governance, and tourism coexist.

This combination made Sade relevant for examining the relationship between customary and legal-administrative authority. The case was not selected to represent all customary communities in Lombok or Indonesia. Rather, it was treated as an information-rich case through which the institutional persistence of informal leadership could be examined in depth.

This study attributes the continuity of Sade's customary practices to the historical legacy of the Pejanggik Kingdom. Because the present study does not report independent archival verification of that historical continuity, this claim should be presented as a locally maintained historical account unless additional documentary evidence is provided.

Participants and Sampling

Participants were selected through purposive sampling on the basis of their institutional roles, community involvement, and knowledge of social and governmental practices in Rembitan Village and Dusun Sade. Purposive sampling was appropriate because the study required information-rich participants who could explain the operation of customary leadership and its relationship with formal village government, rather than a statistically representative sample of the population (Ritchie et al. 2013).

Primary participants included the Head of Rembitan Village, who, according to the study, also held a customary leadership role. Additional participants included representatives of Dusun Sade's youth and members of the local tourism awareness group. These participants were included because of their involvement in community life and their familiarity with the interaction among customary institutions, tourism activities, and village administration.

Data Collection

The study drew on three forms of material: interviews, field observation, and documentary or scholarly sources. Interviews were conducted with participants who possessed direct knowledge of customary leadership, village administration, community activities, and the operation of local institutions. The interviews were intended to elicit participants' accounts of the sources of customary authority, the continued observance of customary rules, and the relationship between traditional and formal leadership. Field observation was used to develop contextual understanding of community life and the operation of customary and formal institutions in Dusun Sade.

Scholarly publications, books, conference proceedings, and other relevant documents were consulted to contextualize the empirical findings and position the case within research on traditional authority, informal institutions, and local governance. These materials supplemented the field data and informed interpretation. They should not, however, be presented as equivalent to primary empirical evidence unless the manuscript identifies specific institutional or historical documents that were systematically analysed.

Data Analysis

The interview, observation, and documentary materials were analysed descriptively using an interactive qualitative analysis process involving data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing. Data reduction involved selecting and organizing material relevant to the research questions concerning the persistence of customary authority and the

relationship between customary and formal leadership. Data presentation involved arranging the material into thematic narratives that made patterns, institutional relationships, and differences among sources visible. Conclusions were then developed by interpreting recurring explanations and comparing the accounts derived from the different forms of evidence.

Trustworthiness and Methodological Limitations

The use of interviews, observation, and documentary materials provided multiple forms of evidence through which the institutional context could be examined. This combination created a basis for comparing participant accounts with observed practices and published information.

The study has several methodological limitations. First, it is based on a single case and is therefore intended to support analytical understanding rather than statistical generalization. Second, the participant categories reported in the draft are limited and may not capture the perspectives of women, customary elders outside the formal administration, ordinary residents, religious leaders, political opponents, or individuals who question customary authority. Third, the apparent overlap between formal and customary office may make it difficult to distinguish institutional rules from the personal authority of particular leaders. Finally, because the study relies partly on participant accounts of historical continuity, historical claims require corroboration from archival or other independent sources.

Accordingly, the findings should be interpreted as a context-specific account of hybrid customary and formal leadership in Dusun Sade. Their transferability to other communities depends on the similarity of institutional arrangements, customary practices, leadership structures, and relationships with the state.

RESULTS

The findings are organised around the study's two research questions: first, why customary leadership continues to command authority in Dusun Sade; and second, how customary and formal authority are related in local governance. The available evidence identifies three foundations

of customary authority: an institutional structure connecting hamlet- and village-level customary bodies, the continuing normative force of *awik-awik adat*, and the overlap between customary and administrative leadership roles.

Institutional Structure of Customary Authority

Dusun Sade is one of 21 hamlets within Rembitan Village and is publicly recognised as a customary Sasak settlement. Customary affairs are organised through institutions operating at different territorial levels. At the hamlet level, the *Pengemban Adat* is responsible for maintaining customary norms, mediating disputes, and overseeing customary practices. At the village level, the *Majelis Pamusungan Adat* addresses matters that cannot be resolved within an individual hamlet. According to the documentary account used in this study, the village head chairs the *Majelis Pamusungan Adat*, while the hamlet head leads the *Pengemban Adat* (Suarsana et al. 2015).

This arrangement indicates that customary governance is not conducted solely through personal influence. It is organised through a nested institutional structure in which disputes may move from the hamlet to the village level. The reported division of responsibility also suggests that customary authority operates within, rather than entirely outside, the territorial structure of village administration.

The available evidence nevertheless leaves some institutional relationships unclear. The manuscript uses the terms *Pengemban Adat*, *Pangemban Adat*, *Majelis Pamusungan Adat*, *jero klian*, and *pengemong krama adat*, but it does not establish whether these terms refer to separate offices, equivalent titles, or hierarchically related roles. These distinctions must be clarified because the article's argument about overlapping leadership depends on identifying precisely which customary and formal positions are combined.

Customary Law as a Source of Normative Authority

The first major explanation for the persistence of customary leadership is the continuing authority attributed to *awik-awik adat*. The Head of Rembitan Village described community life as being regulated through three normative frameworks: customary law, religious law, and state law. In his account, customary law occupies a particularly important position because it provides the rules through which community identity, social conduct, and local obligations are understood (interview with LM, July 22, 2024).

The significance of *awik-awik* is most visible in the regulation of community disputes and leadership conduct. The customary institutions are reported to address matters involving marriage, land disputes, breaches of customary norms, and other interpersonal conflicts. Cases are initially addressed through deliberation and customary mediation rather than being referred immediately to formal law-enforcement institutions. The evidence therefore suggests that customary authority persists partly because it remains relevant to problems encountered in everyday community life.

The study also finds that customary knowledge and compliance are treated as qualifications for leadership. Prospective leaders are expected to understand Sasak customs, religious values, and local social obligations. They are also expected to demonstrate moral integrity and to have avoided customary sanctions. The village head stated that an officeholder who violates customary rules may be required to relinquish a leadership position (interview with LM, July 22, 2024; Suarsana et al. 2015). Leadership legitimacy in Sade is not derived exclusively from electoral procedures or administrative appointment. It also depends on adherence to locally recognised standards of customary knowledge, moral conduct, and social responsibility.

Cultural Knowledge, Moral Standing, and Leadership Recruitment

Customary leadership is also sustained through locally defined expectations concerning personal character, cultural competence, and social background. The evidence identifies several qualities associated with legitimate leadership: knowledge of customary and religious rules, the ability to

communicate with community members and outsiders, educational competence, maturity, and a reputation for honesty and concern for the community (interview with LM, July 22, 2024; Suarsana et al. 2015).

The findings suggest that kinship with previous leaders may influence leadership selection because particular lineages are associated locally with inherited knowledge, honesty, or responsibility. This suggests that genealogical considerations remain relevant, but they do not appear to operate as the only criterion. Cultural competence, moral reputation, and the ability to undertake administrative responsibilities are also presented as important.

This indicates that leadership recruitment combines customary and contemporary expectations. A leader is expected to possess knowledge derived from local tradition while also being capable of interacting with government institutions, tourists, and actors outside the community. The evidence does not, however, establish the relative weight of genealogy, election, appointment, education, and customary endorsement in actual recruitment decisions. A stronger account would require examples from recent leadership selection processes and testimony from participants other than current officeholders.

The Practical Functions of Customary Institutions

Customary authority persists not only as a symbolic expression of Sasak identity, but also through the functions performed by customary institutions. The reported responsibilities of these institutions include dispute mediation, interpretation of customary rules, organisation of rituals, preservation of customary architecture, and transmission of cultural knowledge.

The study identifies the teaching of Sasak script, including *hanacaraka*, as one example of cultural transmission supported through customary programmes. It also reports that the preservation of traditional houses and rice-storage buildings is connected to Sade's status as a customary and tourism settlement. These activities provide customary leaders with a continuing role in defining which practices and material forms are recognised as part of Sade's cultural identity.

The evidence therefore supports a limited conclusion: customary institutions remain relevant because they perform recognised social and cultural functions that are not fully replaced by routine village administration. The data do not demonstrate how widely residents participate in these programmes, how their effectiveness is assessed, or whether community members disagree about which traditions should be preserved. These issues require additional evidence from youth, women, ordinary residents, tourism actors, and customary elders.

Differentiation between Customary and Administrative Functions

The findings suggest that customary and formal authority are differentiated by function. The formal village government is responsible for administration, public services, budgeting, infrastructure, and compliance with state regulations. Customary institutions are more directly concerned with rituals, customary norms, conflict mediation, cultural preservation, and moral guidance.

This differentiation is visible in the reported use of village funds. Administrative expenditure is governed by formal regulations, whereas customary programmes focus more directly on cultural preservation and transmission. Nevertheless, decision-making in both spheres is reported to involve deliberation and consideration of customary expectations.

The two systems should therefore not be described as fully separate. Formal administration provides legal authority, public resources, and access to state institutions. Customary authority provides social legitimacy, cultural knowledge, and locally recognised mechanisms of mediation. The findings indicate functional differentiation combined with institutional interaction.

Overlapping Customary and Formal Leadership

The most important finding concerns the overlap between customary and formal leadership roles. The manuscript reports that the Head of Rembitan Village also occupies a senior customary position and that hamlet-level administrative leaders may simultaneously exercise customary

responsibilities. Through this arrangement, legal-administrative and customary authority may be embodied by the same officeholder or by closely connected offices.

This overlap means that relations between customary and formal leadership in Sade cannot be understood only as interaction between two independent sets of leaders. Instead, the same person may derive authority from two sources: state law and administrative office on the one hand, and customary recognition, moral standing, and knowledge of *awik-awik* on the other.

The evidence does not demonstrate a complete merger of all customary and administrative institutions. Rituals, customary disputes, budgeting, infrastructure, and public administration remain associated with different rules and responsibilities. The arrangement is more accurately described as an overlap of officeholding and legitimacy within a functionally differentiated institutional structure.

No overt conflict between customary and formal authorities is documented in the material presented. However, the absence of reported conflict should not be interpreted as evidence that competition, disagreement, or exclusion does not exist. The reported participants are closely connected to village administration, tourism activities, and community leadership. Without testimony from critics, unsuccessful leadership candidates, women, marginalised residents, or individuals sanctioned under customary rules, the study cannot exclude alternative experiences of the leadership arrangement.

DISCUSSION

Persistence through Normative Legitimacy and Institutional Incorporation

The findings suggest that customary leadership in Sade persists through two interconnected mechanisms. The first is normative legitimacy. *Awik-awik*, moral expectations, customary knowledge, and community recognition provide locally meaningful reasons for accepting the authority

of customary leaders. The second is institutional incorporation. Customary authority is connected to formal village governance through overlapping offices, territorially organised customary bodies, and cooperation in decision-making and dispute resolution.

This finding confirms comparative research showing that customary institutions are not necessarily displaced by modern state-building or democratisation. Traditional authority may endure when it continues to regulate socially important matters and when communities regard its institutions as legitimate (Baldwin and Holzinger 2019; Chlouba 2020; Baldwin 2025). The Sade case also supports research demonstrating that customary authority can coexist with formal administration rather than operating exclusively in opposition to it.

The case nevertheless refines the conventional model of coexistence. Much of the comparative literature treats customary leaders and state officials as separate actors who compete, negotiate, or cooperate across institutional boundaries. Whereas Eggen (2011) describes parallel state and chiefly organisations, the Sade case suggests a different configuration in which the two sources of authority may overlap within the same officeholder. In Sade, the available evidence indicates a more integrated arrangement in which the same officeholder may exercise both customary and administrative authority. The article therefore shifts attention from institutional coexistence to role overlap or role fusion.

Hybrid Leadership as Overlapping Sources of Authority

The findings are consistent with the concept of informal institutions developed by Helmke and Levitsky (2004), but they also reveal the limitations of treating formal and informal rules as belonging to clearly separate institutional spheres. In Sade, customary rules are not merely external constraints on formal officials. They may shape the qualifications, conduct, legitimacy, and community expectations attached to formal officeholders.

The case can therefore be conceptualised as a form of hybrid leadership. Hybrid leadership refers here to an arrangement in which

customary and legal-administrative sources of authority are combined within an interconnected structure and may be embodied by the same leader. This definition does not imply that customary and formal rules become identical. Their functions, procedures, and sources of legitimacy remain distinguishable. Hybridity arises from their institutional interaction and overlapping enactment.

This interpretation extends studies of traditional leaders as intermediaries between states and communities (Tieleman and Uitermark 2019; Chlouba 2020). The Sade leader is not merely positioned between two separate systems. According to the evidence reported, the leader participates in both. The case therefore illustrates how customary authority may be reproduced through incorporation into formal governance rather than through institutional isolation or resistance to the state.

Relationship to Indonesian Village Governance

The findings also contribute to scholarship on decentralisation, village governance, and *adat* recognition in Indonesia. Previous studies show that the Village Law and decentralisation reforms have expanded the authority and resources of village governments without eliminating informal hierarchies, local networks, or customary institutions (Antlöv, Wetterberg, and Dharmawan 2016; Aspinall and Rohman 2017; Berenschot, Capri, and Dhian 2021).

The Sade case confirms that formal village institutions do not operate on an empty institutional terrain. Administrative authority is interpreted and exercised within an existing configuration of customary norms, leadership reputations, cultural expectations, and community institutions. At the same time, the case refines broad accounts of *adat* revival. The persistence of *adat* in Sade is not presented only as a claim for legal recognition or cultural identity. It is embedded in routine practices of leadership, dispute resolution, cultural preservation, and village administration.

This finding is relevant to research showing that formal recognition may selectively reshape customary institutions rather than simply restoring an unchanged traditional order (Bedner and Arizona 2019; Jiwa Utama 2020). The Sade case likewise should not be interpreted as evidence that

an unaltered institution has survived from the Pejanggik Kingdom to the present. The available evidence more plausibly indicates continuing reinterpretation and institutional adaptation within contemporary village governance.

Democratic Implications

The overlap between customary and formal leadership has potentially contradictory implications for local democracy. On one hand, combined authority may facilitate coordination, increase the social acceptance of decisions, and provide culturally familiar mechanisms for dispute resolution. Customary leaders may possess local knowledge and community trust that formal administrative institutions cannot generate through legal authority alone.

On the other hand, concentrating customary and administrative legitimacy in the same officeholder may blur lines of accountability. Citizens may find it difficult to distinguish whether a decision is based on state law, customary rules, personal discretion, or a combination of the three. Genealogical expectations and moral qualifications may also restrict access to leadership or privilege particular families and culturally dominant definitions of appropriate conduct.

The current evidence cannot determine whether the arrangement strengthens or weakens democratic accountability. It does not systematically examine elections, political competition, dissent, gender inclusion, participation in deliberation, access to customary justice, or mechanisms for sanctioning leaders. The findings should therefore not be used to claim that hybrid leadership is inherently democratic, harmonious, or effective.

Alternative Explanations

Several alternative explanations for the persistence of customary leadership require consideration. First, Sade's status as a tourism destination may create economic incentives to maintain visible customary institutions and cultural practices. Traditional leaders may retain authority partly because they help define and protect the cultural authenticity on which tourism depends.

Second, overlapping leadership may persist because it provides administrative convenience. Appointing or recognising individuals who already possess community legitimacy may reduce coordination problems between customary institutions and village government.

Third, the arrangement may reflect the continuing influence of established families or local elites rather than broad community endorsement. The present evidence, which relies substantially on accounts from officeholders and institutionally involved participants, cannot distinguish fully between community legitimacy and elite reproduction.

These explanations are not mutually exclusive. Customary authority may be sustained simultaneously by normative commitment, institutional functionality, economic value, and local power relations. Further evidence is required to assess their relative importance.

Contribution and Limitations

This study makes an empirical contribution by documenting an Indonesian case in which customary and administrative authority are not simply juxtaposed but institutionally interconnected through overlapping leadership roles. Comparative scholarship has largely examined traditional and state authority as distinguishable institutional domains that coexist, operate in parallel, compete, or cooperate with one another (Eggen 2011; Holzinger, Kern, and Kromrey 2016; Baldwin and Holzinger 2019). Other studies have shown that traditional leaders may function as intermediaries between communities and state institutions, development programmes, or political authorities (Honig 2019; Tieleman and Uitermark 2019). Logan (2009), moreover, demonstrates that citizens may perceive elected and traditional authorities as components of an integrated political system even when the offices themselves remain institutionally distinct. The Sade case extends this literature by identifying a configuration in which customary and legal-administrative authority may be exercised by the same officeholder or through closely overlapping offices. Its empirical significance therefore lies not simply in demonstrating the persistence or coexistence of customary authority, but in showing a more institutionally integrated form of state–customary relations.

The study also contributes to scholarship on *adat*, decentralisation, and village governance in Indonesia. Existing research has demonstrated that democratisation and decentralisation have created new arenas in which customary authority may be revived, politicised, constrained, or incorporated into formal governance (Antlöv 2003; Harriss, Stokke, and Törnquist 2004; Tyson 2010; Antlöv, Wetterberg, and Dharmawan 2016; Afala 2019). Research on *adat* recognition has further shown that customary institutions are transformed through legislation, administrative classification, and interaction with state authorities rather than simply preserved in an unchanged form (Bedner and Arizona 2019; Utama 2020, 2021). At the level of political practice, studies from Sumbawa and Kerinci demonstrate that customary leaders and institutions may act as intermediaries between government and society or influence formal development and policy processes (Permana 2015; Maulana et al. 2019). The present study builds on these findings by shifting attention from recognition, intermediation, or policy influence to the organisation of authority itself. It shows how customary legitimacy may become embedded in routine village governance when customary and administrative roles overlap institutionally.

The theoretical contribution follows from this empirical distinction. The study conceptualises hybrid leadership as a mechanism through which customary authority may persist within, rather than merely alongside, formal village government. Whereas much of the existing literature explains persistence through parallel institutional orders, brokerage, state recognition, or functional complementarity (Eggen 2011; Holzinger, Kern, and Kromrey 2016; Honig 2019; Baldwin 2025), the Sade case suggests that persistence may also occur through role overlap and institutional incorporation. In this configuration, formal office supplies legal-administrative authority and access to state resources, while *awik-awik*, cultural knowledge, moral standing, genealogy, and community recognition provide additional sources of customary legitimacy. Hybrid leadership therefore refers not to the disappearance of boundaries between customary and formal institutions, but to the combination of distinct sources of legitimacy within an interconnected structure of governance. This formulation also qualifies overly harmonious interpretations

of hybridity. Comparative research shows that traditional authority may facilitate cooperation, mediation, development, and institutional legitimacy, but may also create problems of accountability, unequal access, elite advantage, or exclusion (Ubink 2008; de Kadt and Larreguy 2018; Mustasilta 2019, 2021; Chlouba 2024). The contribution of the Sade case is therefore explanatory rather than normative: it identifies one mechanism through which customary authority can be reproduced within contemporary democratic institutions without assuming that such institutional integration is inherently democratic or beneficial.

The practical implications of the findings are correspondingly limited. The study suggests that analyses of Indonesian village governance should examine not only the formal distribution of administrative responsibilities but also the customary rules, sources of legitimacy, social expectations, and overlapping roles through which authority is exercised. However, the findings do not provide sufficient evidence to recommend the Sade arrangement as a governance model or to conclude that overlapping customary and administrative authority necessarily improves participation, accountability, inclusion, dispute resolution, or service delivery. The claims are further bounded by the single-case design, the limited range of participants, unresolved distinctions among some customary offices and titles, and the absence of systematic evidence from women, ordinary residents, political critics, unsuccessful leadership candidates, customary elders outside the formal administration, and other potentially marginalised groups. The findings should therefore be understood as analytically rather than statistically transferable. Their applicability to other cases depends on the presence of comparable combinations of customary legitimacy, overlapping officeholding, village-government structures, community recognition, and cultural governance.

CONCLUSION

This study explains why customary leadership persists in Dusun Sade and how it interacts with formal village authority. Customary leadership remains influential because it is grounded in *awik-awik adat*, locally recognised

moral standards, cultural knowledge, and community acceptance. Its persistence is also reinforced by the institutional overlap between customary and administrative roles, through which formal officeholders may simultaneously exercise customary responsibilities. Rather than operating as entirely separate or competing systems, customary and state authority are functionally differentiated but institutionally interconnected. The article's principal contribution is to conceptualise this arrangement as hybrid leadership: a form of governance in which customary and legal-administrative sources of legitimacy are combined within overlapping offices and everyday governing practices.

These findings imply that customary authority should not be treated simply as a remnant of the past or as external to the modern state. In Sade, it remains relevant through its incorporation into village governance, dispute mediation, cultural preservation, and community regulation. However, the study is limited by its single-case design, restricted participant base, incomplete institutional documentation, and reliance on locally transmitted accounts for some historical claims. It therefore cannot determine whether hybrid leadership consistently strengthens accountability, participation, inclusion, or democratic quality. Future research should compare Sade with other customary villages in Lombok and elsewhere in Indonesia, examine how different community groups experience overlapping authority, and assess how tourism, regulatory change, generational transition, digitalisation, and market pressures reshape the relationship among customary institutions, village government, and local democracy.

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