



VILLAGE GOVERNANCE, POLITICS, AND PARTICIPATION IN INDONESIA



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Village Governance, Politics, and Participation in Indonesia

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Executive Summary

This report analyzes variation in patterns of village governance across Indonesia, offers explanations for these patterns, and discusses their consequences for implementation of the country’s consequential 2014 Village Law, and for efforts to strengthen village governance. Since its enactment, the Village Law has been a key instrument for the delivery of Indonesia’s public services. The law aims to strengthen village democracy and participatory processes while also providing greater economic resources to villages. Yet the promise of the Village Law has yet to be fully realized as the quality of village governance across Indonesia’s 75,000 villages has been uneven.

The study on which the report is based analyzed the extent, nature, and causes of variation in village government, and how these patterns relate to the quality of participation and achievement of village-level development goals. In early 2022, the World Bank collaborated with researchers from the Australian National University, the Royal Netherlands Institute of Southeast Asian and Caribbean Studies, and Universitas Gadjah Mada to organize a qualitative study of 18 villages in nine Indonesian districts (*kabupaten*). Twenty-four local researchers conducted two months of fieldwork focused on the nature of village government, participation, and budgetary allocations. Working to standardized templates, but with the authority and encouragement to adapt to local circumstances, the researchers interviewed a cross section of village officials, community leaders, and ordinary residents. They observed village meetings (*musyawarah*) and shadowed village heads as they went about their daily business of managing village affairs. The researchers prepared several hundred interview summaries, observational reports, and fieldwork reports.

To describe the variation in village governance, this report uses the term “village governance regime” (VGR). The term refers to the character of village governance both in the capacity and willingness of villagers to participate and hold their leaders to account (the “demand” dimension) and the extent to which village officials function in a responsive, non-factionalized, or preferential manner (the “supply” dimension). In analyzing both supply and demand, we pay attention not simply to formal dimensions of politics—the extent to which formally constituted actors such as the village head, village officials, and *Badan Permusyawarahan Desa* (BPD, village consultative body) members are acting as envisaged by the Village Law and other regulations—but also to informal dimensions, the web of local norms, relationships, group affiliations, and the like, that shape who holds authority at the community level, and how that authority is exercised.

By applying this framework to study the character of village governance, the report reaches five main conclusions.

First, the patterns of village governance are extremely varied. Despite the relative uniformity of formal institutions laid out by the Village Law, even in our relatively small sample we observed a wide spectrum in the depth and breadth of participation in village affairs as well as in the openness and turnover of village elites. In some villages, patterns of governance were highly exclusionary, with a very dominant village head who had succeeded in placing his relatives and other supporters in key positions within the village government. In these locations, village consultative meetings were highly constrained affairs,

with participants limited to a narrow range of village elites who are often linked by family or other ties to the village head, and often with limited recordkeeping or other forms of transparency. In such villages, we found that these village elites are more successful at capturing resources, whether by skimming from village budgets or monopolizing economic activities. In such cases, too, only a limited number of villagers can communicate their preferences to village elites through informal channels.

In contrast, the team also encountered villages with much more inclusionary patterns of governance and relatively open participatory processes. In such villages, we documented occasions in which villagers were individually or collectively able to express their preferences in ways that subsequently affected village budgetary allocations, decision-making, and selection processes for new positions in the village apparatus. In several villages, the BPD had an active role, which also involved criticizing the village head or the village apparatus in a way that seemed to have impact. Such active BPDs contrast with the passive and co-opted or, in other cases, factionalized and conflictual BPDs we encountered elsewhere. In this report we analyze this variation by assessing VGRs on 20 comparative dimensions (see section B for more detail).

Second, an active and responsive village government does not necessarily go hand in hand with active participation by villagers. We did not find many examples where villagers were very active and engaged in village affairs while village officials were nonresponsive and domineering. In contrast, we did find several villages where more responsive and open village leadership was accompanied by active villager participation. Yet our findings suggest that this relationship between participation and inclusive governance is not straightforward. In a subset of five villages, the village head and other officials functioned in a more inclusive and responsive manner while the village population was relatively passive, suggesting that high levels of participation are not a necessary condition of responsive village government. In such situations, the role of the village head appears to be key: a reform-oriented village head can exercise considerable agency in ensuring a well-run village even without high levels of citizen demand. Generally, we found that participation of villagers through formal processes, such as the village consultative meetings and the BPD, was limited and constrained. We discuss barriers to participation in section E.

The presence of intense political competition also cannot be taken as an indicator or guarantee of responsive village governance. Even in some villages that were run on a more exclusionary pattern, village politics were sometimes marked by intense political competition and close margins of victory in village head elections. In case study villages in South Sulawesi and South Sumatra, where power was tightly concentrated in the hands of the village head and his allies (including relatives), researchers found both considerable discontent among villagers and stories of village heads facing strong opposition during elections. This finding can partly be attributed to the negative impact that village head elections can have on the character of village governance.

Village head elections do generate a form of accountability, but this accountability is mitigated by the influence of money and social networks on shaping their outcomes. Vote buying, in the form of minor contributions of cash or goods, was common but not universal across our cases. Village head elections are costly, resulting in barriers to participation by non-elite candidates, and giving winners incentives for corruption. In addition to vote buying, candidates also must pay for drinks and snacks during events, as well as organizational costs for their *tim sukses* (success teams, i.e., campaign organizations). These

expenses add up to considerable amounts: while we could not get reliable estimates from all the villages, serious candidates can spend 300 million rupiah (about US\$20 thousand) on their campaigns. This situation generates strong incentives for some village heads to engage in various forms of corruption to recover these expenses. It is also an explanation for why most village heads in our study come from elite backgrounds.

Third, in most study villages, participation in village consultative meetings is limited to village elites, while most villagers tend to prefer informal means of participation. We observed that direct participation in formal consultative meetings, such as *musyawarah desa*, largely involves a circumscribed range of village officeholders and informal community leaders.

Our research suggests that the limited participation of ordinary villagers in formal meetings is not only due to a lack of interest and self-confidence, but also due to the character of the meetings. First, many villagers see the meetings as the domain of the village officials and, consequently, perceive their own attendance as an expression of support for the village government. When there is widespread but diffuse discontent with village officials, ordinary villagers feel *disinclined* to attend such meetings as they do not want to be seen as supporting them. Second, the nature of local livelihoods affects the capacity and willingness to participate in the meetings. While there were exceptions, our material suggests that where villagers' livelihoods involve activities that do not require day-long work, villagers can more easily attend.

Almost all researchers also reported heavy male bias in these formal participatory processes, though with some variation. Typically, very few women who were not representatives of the PKK (Family Welfare Empowerment movement) or female village officials took part. In most villages, therefore, formal participatory processes are almost exclusively a male space. While the obstacles to active participation are already substantial for ordinary male villagers, such obstacles are even more difficult to overcome for women.

In light of their frequent avoidance of formal village meetings, we found that villagers often use informal means to participate, voice their preferences, and access public services. Our research team collected a great deal of information about informal modes of participation and informal channels through which villagers convey their preferences or seek services. Subsidiary officials and respected villagers can act as intermediaries or brokers in conveying citizen preferences to village heads. Such informal interactions can impose a form of accountability on village leaders. We found indications in some locations, particularly in Bali and East Java, that the dense social networks operating in village life generate a form of social accountability, with village leaders reluctant to take actions that would create widespread social disapproval. However, the effectiveness of these informal channels of participation depends on the openness and posture of the village head, the character of local social hierarchies, and the nature of relations among the village head, low-level village officials, and residents. Informal networks among villagers, especially in villages with steep social hierarchies, can generate feelings of *sungkan* and *ewuh pakewuh* (roughly: a feeling of hesitance to approach or disturb someone of a superior social status), which also undermine accountability.

Fourth, the general picture that emerges from this study is that village governance is shaped by the interplay between formal and informal institutions. While formal institutions, such as laws, formal

procedures, and supervisory mechanisms, shape the nature of village governance, village officials also need to deal with the pressures and expectations arising from informal institutions, such as informal authority structures, but also informal connections, family relations, and the norms of reciprocity that give rise to clientelistic exchanges. In a similar vein, village heads are often torn between what formal procedures and rules prescribe, and the informal norms of social and political obligation generated by their pathway into office. Formal procedures set out rule-guided and impersonal ways of, for example, allocating subsidies, appointing village officials, and awarding contracts; at the same time, social norms can pressure village heads to direct these benefits to supporters regardless of the formal rules. For this reason, elections create mixed incentives for village heads. They provide a mechanism of accountability that enables villagers to reward or punish village heads for their performance. Yet the high costs and informal debts generated by elections also create incentives for corruption and factionalized patterns of governance.

At the same time, informal relationships, connections, and norms not only affect power relations and governance *inside* the village, they also shape connections beyond the village, especially to higher levels of government. Despite the introduction of new village funding mechanisms under the Village Law, our researchers found that informal connections between village heads (and other village officials) and higher-level politicians and officeholders, such as district heads (*bupati*) and legislators, are still critical in shaping villages' access to discretionary government resources in the form of grants and special programs. Critically, such relationships are often based upon the willingness of village officials to support higher-level officials in their election campaigns, resulting in relationships of mutual benefit based on exchange of political support for access to government resources.

Fifth, it appears there is a relationship between the quality of village governance and political economy and sociocultural factors. While our sample is too small to draw definitive lessons about the causes of the patterns of variation we identify, our case studies do hint at potential mechanisms that could be tested with larger-scale studies. In terms of political economy, it is striking that more economically diverse villages generally appear to give rise to multiple and competing sources of authority, and hence facilitate more open and participatory forms of politics; elite capture tends to occur in villages with relatively homogeneous agrarian economies. In terms of sociocultural factors, while the persistence of strong informal sources of traditional authority based on *adat* or religion were one obvious impediment to high-quality governance in several villages, other factors—notably ethnic division within a village—also had similar effects.

Building on the centrality of informal politics identified through this research, a key policy recommendation is that reform initiatives that aim to strengthen village governance should consider the incentives that arise from informal institutions and practices, noting that informality can both support and undermine accountability. As village governance is a product of the interaction between formal and informal institutions, efforts to strengthen village governance should not stop at proposing formal procedures and regulations, but should also engage more directly with the incentives that arise from informal institutions and practices, such as informal networks, norms of reciprocity, and the exchanges of favors arising out of village head elections. Often initiatives aimed at strengthening village governance focus on improving regulations and strengthening the capacities of village officials, while ignoring how informal institutions create incentives that motivate officials to undermine and ignore such regulations. Efforts to strengthen village governance also need to engage directly with informality. This

report is written with this aim in mind: we hope the analysis provides readers with an understanding of how informality shapes village governance.

An “informality-sensitive” approach entails paying close attention to the incentive structures generated by informal institutions and practices, with a focus on identifying elements of these incentive structures that could be addressed or at least influenced by outside interventions. This means not only that reform initiatives should be grounded in an understanding of informal structures and incentives, but also that such interventions and their impact should be analyzed and evaluated for their potential effects. The recommendations in this report express this approach. First, we recommend to enhance meritocratic appointments to positions in the village government and democratic elections of BPD members. This recommendation is based on our observations that personalized appointment practices often result in relatives of the village head attaining office in village governments, giving rise to obligations and dependencies that can prevent actors from performing their formal roles. Second, we recommend increased efforts to curtail vote buying and to reduce the costs of election campaigns, building on our observation that such campaign costs create incentives for poor governance. Third, we recommend taking measures to reduce the scope for political discretion in district-level funding allocations, in order to reduce the perpetuation of clientelistic exchanges. Fourth, we recommend greater autonomy for village governments to prioritize the utilization of village funds, to tackle the downsides of political control over village budgets determined by the central government. Fifth, we recommend strengthening female participation in village affairs, including by introducing measures to ensure higher female representation across village governance institutions. These flow from the general proposition that improving village governance requires reform initiatives that respond to the incentives generated by informal institutions and practices. In that light, we emphasize that such recommendations are not an exhaustive list of potential reforms, as we limit ourselves to issues that are most salient to our research findings.

A. Introduction

In 2014, the government of Indonesia passed an ambitious Village Law (*Undang-Undang No. 6/ 014 tentang Desa*) that significantly increased the autonomy of some 75,000 village governments. The law embodied an expansive commitment to village empowerment, deepening of village democracy, and participatory processes, while also providing villages more economic resources and autonomy regarding the use of those resources. Government spokespeople and other supporters of the law explained that by increasing villagers' control over decisions about resource allocation, the law would produce improved development outcomes at the community level and, therefore, for the nation.

The Village Law has since become a key instrument for the delivery of Indonesia's public services. The law establishes a legal and financial foundation for villages to contribute to Indonesia's rural development. Between 2015 and 2019, the law enabled fiscal transfers, called Village Funds (*Dana Desa*), of over IDR 547 trillion (US\$38 billion) to Indonesia's villages, where 70 percent of the poor and half of the population live. The Village Funds contributed to large-scale construction of rural infrastructure (including about 30 million meters of drainage; over one million of clean water projects and water and sanitation facilities; 190,000 kilometers of rural roads; and 59,000 village irrigation installations) and basic services (including 51,000 early childhood education centers and 25,000 village health posts). The Indonesian National Medium-Term Development Plan (RPJMN) 2020–2024 continued to identify the Village Law as key for the delivery and accessibility of basic infrastructure and services, and for national economic growth (World Bank 2021).

The Village Law drew upon national traditions and experiences of village-level government over two decades of community-driven development (CDD). It marked a dramatic increase in the authority of villages and a significant deepening of the democratization and decentralization processes that had been under way in Indonesia since the end of the authoritarian New Order government in 1998. It also built on previous experiences with CDD in Indonesia. National policy had formally recognized bottom-up development planning starting in the early 1980s, but under the New Order government, these processes were elite controlled and were “neither transparent nor accountable to people” (Takeshi 2006, 152). A significant shift came when, at the height of the Asian Financial Crisis in 1998, the Indonesian government, with funding support of US\$700 million from the World Bank in 1998–2006, introduced the *Kecamatan* Development Program (KDP) (Wong 2003, 1), which provided block grants for small-scale development projects to subdistricts (*kecamatan*) and villages. By 2002, the program had expanded to cover almost 70,000 villages in over 4,000 subdistricts (Wong 2003, 3). This program evolved into the Indonesian government's own National Program for Community Empowerment (*Program Nasional Pemberdayaan Masyarakat*, or PNPM), under which village communities were provided with special funds and invited to collectively discuss, plan, execute, and report on development activities. In 2014, the year the Village Law was passed, outgoing President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono explained in his national day speech that PNPM programs had benefited about 60 million citizens, or about one-quarter of Indonesia's total population.¹ Both the KDP and PNPM programs had been based on CDD principles: they provided grants to communities, facilitated participatory meetings in those communities to discuss what projects to prioritize, and required transparency in how these budgets were used.

¹ Pidato Kenegaraan Presiden Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono, 14 August 2014. At: <https://kabar24.bisnis.com/read/20140815/248/250200/pidato-kenegaraan-berikut-isi-lengkap-pidato-38-halaman>.

The Village Law institutionalized the CDD principles of locally-led development, participation, transparency, and accountability. Initially, much of the public attention focused on the fiscal transfers to the villages under the new law. But equally important were provisions strengthening participatory and accountability mechanisms. These included strengthening the authority of the elected village consultative councils (*Badan Permusyawarahan Desa*, or BPD) and a general emphasis on consultative meetings (*musyawarah*) as a means of participation by ordinary citizens in the management of village affairs (the word *musyawarah* appears 55 times in the law; for more details on the law, see Antlöv, Wetterberg, and Dharmawan 2016, 174–178). Subsequent regulations strengthened the role of *musyawarah*, in particular requiring village heads to run consultations on strategic issues (e.g., *Peraturan Menteri Desa, Pembangunan Daerah Tertinggal, dan Transmigrasi Republik Indonesia No. 16/ 2019*) or on the use of village funds (e.g., article 7 in *Peraturan Menteri Desa, Pembangunan Daerah Tertinggal, dan Transmigrasi Republik Indonesia No. 7/ 2021*).

However, the promise of the Village Law has not been fully realized due to capacity and coordination challenges. A study conducted in 112 villages three years after the implementation of the law found that investments and spending had not become more strategic or long-term, due to lack of knowledge, capacities, and technical skills at the village level. Moreover, community participation, transparency, and accountability in identifying village development priorities, implementation, and expenditure had been hindered by lack of understanding in roles and responsibilities of the village apparatus, village consultative councils, and community members at various stages of the Village Law implementation (World Bank 2020). Finally, the implementation of the Village Law has resulted in a plethora of new regulations at the national, provincial, and district levels. These regulations change frequently, are not always coherent or consistent, and create confusion at the village level (World Bank 2020 and 2021).

The success or failure of CDD and community empowerment programs can be greatly shaped by existing power configurations at the community level. Experience in Indonesia and in other countries shows that CDD programs can be subject to elite capture, which happens when community leaders and other elites take effective control of the planning and decision-making process, even if sometimes maintaining a façade of community participation, and make decisions and allocate resources in ways that accord with their own interests (see, e.g., Labonne and Chase 2009 and 2011; Olken 2007 and 2010 on KDP; Alatas, et al. 2012 on direct cash transfers). Consultative forums, likewise, can readily become arenas in which dominant groups in a community express their preferences, marginalizing the views of less powerful groups such as poor citizens, ethnic or religious minorities, and women (see, e.g., Parthasarathy, et al. 2019; Sanyal and Rao 2018).

In Indonesia, the study of village-level politics and power relations has revealed a history of significant variation in governance patterns spanning from authoritarian and exclusionary to democratic and participatory. This tradition of scholarship dates back several decades (e.g., Koentjaraningrat 1967). Historically, a significant focus of this literature, especially during the authoritarian New Order period (1966–98), was explaining the sources of authority and patterns of operation of village elites; a series of accounts depicted exclusionary patterns of village government during the authoritarian era (see especially Antlöv 1995). Some analyses of village-level politics in the post-New Order period have emphasized continuities with authoritarian-era patterns, proposing that entrenched elites have continued to dominate village government in many locations, providing relatively limited space for

citizen participation (see, e.g., Takeshi 2011). Other studies, however, have painted a complex picture, pointing to the disruptive changes associated with the democratic transition (Kammen 2003) and the transformative potential of political reforms, including the Village Law (Antlöv 2005 and 2019). Such studies note that, at least in some locations, elite turnover has been significant at the village level, including the replacement of village heads from long-dominant dynasties with newcomers who propose opening and reforming village governance (see, e.g., Aspinall and Rohman 2017; Berenschot, et al. 2021).

Our study builds on a series of analyses of village governance conducted by the World Bank as the Local Level Institution (LLI) studies rounds 1, 2, and 3, to identify key areas of continuity and change.

These studies, carried out in 1996 (48 villages), 2000–2001 (40 villages), and 2012 (20 villages) are a rich resource that provide useful benchmarks for our research because they capture the nature of village government at different moments in Indonesia’s recent political history. The LLI 1 study was conducted in the final years of the New Order government, and therefore documents the centralized political arrangements that characterized village government at that time. The LLI 2 study was conducted during the turbulent period of political change that followed the collapse of the New Order, when entrenched elites were often being challenged at the village level, and formal village institutions were being revamped to introduce a greater degree of accountability to citizens. The LLI 3 study occurred during a period of stabilization, before enactment of the new Village Law. While, overall, village government is significantly more responsive and accountable to citizens than during the New Order period, there are also significant threads of continuity in the limited effectiveness of formal participatory processes, or in the importance of political networking at the district level for village heads and other village elites.

Studies in Indonesia and elsewhere also point toward the role of informal institutions in shaping patterns of village governance. Those studies have provided evidence of the enduring influence of informal political institutions in village governance. For example, the LLI series repeatedly noted the significance of *adat* (customary) institutions in a cross section of the villages covered by them. Informal institutions may be understood as “socially shared rules, usually unwritten, that are created, communicated, and enforced outside of officially sanctioned channels” (Helmke and Levitsky 2004, 727). Such informal institutions are present, and operate in highly varied ways, in all societies. At the village level in Indonesia, such informal institutions include phenomena such as patron-client relations, family and clan politics, the continuing influence of customary (*adat*) figures and bodies, and informal brokerage and mediation mechanisms. Such institutions have the capacity to undermine, challenge, or in some cases, reinforce formal political institutions (for one relatively early account of such issues in the Indonesian context, see Bebbington, et al. 2004).

This study analyzes the extent, nature, and causes of variation in village government, and the extent to which these patterns relate to the quality of participation and shape achievement of development goals at the village level. Existing studies suggest a wide range of political arrangements at the village level, despite the overall pattern of uniformity imposed by the national legal framework (the Village Law in fact allows for significant variation in terms of recognition of local customary institutions). But so far, there has been relatively little systematic analysis of the larger picture of variation in village government, including variation in the degree of openness to citizen participation, and likewise few attempts to seek causal explanations for the patterns of variation identified (but see World Bank 2017

and 2020). We recognize that the limited number of villages included in our study means we must be tentative on this score, offering observations in the spirit of plausible hypotheses that could be tested through subsequent larger-scale studies.

This report identifies and analyzes variation in patterns of village governance across Indonesia, offers tentative explanations for these patterns, and discusses their consequences for Village Law implementation. In early 2022, the World Bank collaborated with researchers from the Australian National University, the Royal Netherlands Institute of Southeast Asian and Caribbean Studies, and Universitas Gadjah Mada to organize a qualitative study of 18 villages selected from nine Indonesian districts (*kabupaten*). Twenty-four local researchers conducted two months of qualitative fieldwork focusing on the nature of village government, participation, and budgetary allocations. Working to standardized templates, but with the scope and encouragement to adapt to local circumstances, the researchers interviewed a cross section of village officials, community leaders, and ordinary residents. They observed village meetings (*musyawarah*) and “shadowed” village heads as they went about their daily business of managing village affairs. The researchers prepared several hundred interview summaries, observational reports, and fieldwork reports. Collectively, their research findings present a rich and varied picture of the nature of village government in Indonesia.

As a heuristic device, we consider village government using a “supply and demand” model. By *supply*, we refer to the nature of village governance itself: the backgrounds, interests, performance, and behaviors of the key village governance institutions and the officials who populate them. By *demand*, we refer to the expression of preferences by ordinary citizens with regard to village affairs, especially the allocation of village funds and other budgetary expenditure. We examine the opportunities village residents have to express their preferences, in both formal and informal settings, the extent to which they take advantage of those opportunities, and the extent to which they are successful in holding village leaders to account.

As a method to describe the variation in village governance we capture, we use the term “village governance regime” (VGR). This term refers to the character of village governance both with regard to the capacity and willingness of villagers to participate and hold their leaders to account (the demand dimension) and the extent to which village officials function in a responsive, non-factionalized, or preferential manner (the supply dimension). In analyzing both supply and demand, we pay attention not simply to formal dimensions of politics—the extent to which formally constituted actors such as the village head, village officials, and BPD members act as envisaged by the Village Law and other regulations—but also to informal dimensions, i.e., the web of local norms, relationships, group affiliations, and the like, that shape who holds authority at the community level and how that authority is exercised.

This report pays special attention to the complex interaction between formal and informal institutions. While formal institutions, such as laws, formal procedures, and supervisory mechanisms shape the nature of village governance, village officials also have to deal with the pressures and expectations arising from informal institutions, such as informal authority structures, informal connections, family relations and the norms of reciprocity that give rise to clientelistic exchanges. An important policy recommendation arising from this report concerns the importance of understanding the pressures arising from these informal institutions. Quite commonly, when village officials ignore or contravene formal laws and procedures,

observers perceive their motivations for doing so as arising only from corruption or, more charitably, a lack of skills and knowledge. While such assessments may be accurate, this report suggests an additional interpretation is needed. The challenge of improving village governance requires recognition of, and active engagement with, the interaction between formal and informal institutions, and with the incentives arising from both. This report is written with this aim in mind: we hope that the analysis provides readers with an understanding of the ways in which informality shapes village governance.

Finally, since the data collection was during the COVID-19 pandemic, some findings may be specific to that context. The government used the Village Law institutional and implementation arrangement to alleviate some of the pandemic's impact on the poor. A village cash transfer program (BLT Desa) was quickly rolled out, which by the end of 2020, supported an estimated eight million families who were not registered through the national social protection system and the newly poor (World Bank 2021). In 2021, a Presidential Decree mandated villages to allocate 40 percent of village funds for the BLT Desa. The pandemic social distancing measures and the decree, our findings suggest, reduced the role of formal participatory processes in decision-making and changed village fund expenditures away from patterns likely to be encountered in "normal" times.

The report is organized as follows. Section B describes the sample selection and methodology. Section C broadly describes the patterns of variation in village governance encountered during the study. Section D zeroes in on the supply side by focusing on two village institutions: the village head and the village apparatus. Section E focuses on the demand side, discussing issues of vertical and horizontal accountability and participation, noting both formal and informal mechanisms by which villagers express their preferences with regard to village decision-making, especially with regard to budgetary allocations, and with special attention to the extent of and avenues for participation by women. Section F briefly addresses patterns in allocations of village budgets in the age of COVID-19, and how these are shaped by the patterns of village governance discussed in earlier parts of the paper. Section G presents potential explanations for the patterns of variation we encountered. Finally, section H concludes and offers policy recommendations.

B. Methodology

The nine districts and 18 villages included in this study were purposively selected from a nationally representative sample linked to a broader program of research. This study is part of the World Bank's support to the government of Indonesia through the Village Development Programmatic Advisory Services and Analytics (PASA, P174562). The study's nine districts were selected based on a combination of districts where another World Bank study is happening and feasibility and geographic location, such that several of Indonesia's major islands were represented. Within each district, two villages within the same subdistrict were randomly selected after taking into account proximity to the district capital (within 25 percent of the district mean) as well as accessibility (<12 hours to the district capital). Because the study was conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic, the research team decided to select two nearby villages for safety and security reasons, and deployed field researchers in pairs. Annex Table A.1 presents a summary of village characteristics for the 18 sample villages (based on PODES 2018 data).

The field researchers conducted ethnographic fieldwork for two periods totaling an average of seven weeks in early 2022. The field researchers (listed by name in the acknowledgments) were mostly academics employed at various Indonesian universities, especially in the provinces from which the case study villages were selected, although some were graduate students or members of private research and advocacy bodies.

The field researchers documented village governance, village elections, and village planning meetings. During the two periods of immersion in village life, the researchers did the following:

- 1. General familiarization.** Using interviews and informal conversations, the field researchers mapped the village's economy, government, elite, and social networks, and developed a general history of the village's development performance, political history, and the major formal and informal groups and alignments affecting village politics.
- 2. Village governance.** To the extent possible, the field researchers documented the following aspects of village governance: allocation and targeting of village spending; attitudes and discourse regarding duties of village officials; and village-district interaction. Researching village spending partly involved collecting documents, such as financial reports; overall, however, this research mainly relied on interviews with villagers, village officials, and where possible, (sub-) district officials.
- 3. Village elections.** The field researchers were unable to observe such elections directly because none of the villages held elections during the study period. Instead, they used interviews to understand the character and outcome of the most recent village head election, documenting who competed, the resources and networks they mobilized, and the nature of the promises, material benefits, or sources of social authority they used to persuade voters. The researchers mapped membership in campaign teams and how these overlapped with gender, class, ethnic, and other networks of social connection in the village. In this way, they analyzed not only which

groups participated in these contests for village power, but also which groups were excluded from them.

- 4. Village planning meetings (*musyawarah desa*).** To assess the nature and degree of participation, the field researchers either observed meetings directly or interviewed participants in and studied documents from recently organized village planning meetings. In villages where such meetings took place during the fieldwork period, the researchers documented them by recording the discussion and by documenting attendance, nature of issues raised, and backgrounds of speakers. Building on a methodology developed to study village meetings in India (see especially Sanyal and Rao 2018; Parthasarathy, et al. 2019), researchers then transcribed and coded the recordings of these meetings. In villages where no village meetings could be observed, the researchers collected minutes of these meetings and interviewed participants about the character of participation and its impact on decision-making.
- 5. Shadowing of village heads.** As part of their ethnographic research, researchers were asked to shadow the village head for five days each through the duration of their research, with a goal of observing and recording how village heads spent their time, not only on their official duties at the village office, but also outside of the village (for instance, lobbying for projects at the district capital) and in village meetings, consultations, problem solving, and informal interactions around the village.

This report summarizes the findings from the field researchers. Before going to the field, the researchers attended a two-day training workshop that set out project goals and methods. They took with them to the field an 80-page project handbook, which included reporting templates, interview guides, and other instructions. During the research, they submitted interim fieldwork reports, interview summaries, observational reports of village meetings, and reports of their shadowing of village heads. Upon completion of the fieldwork, they submitted lengthy fieldwork reports addressing key research questions, namely the social structure and economic conditions of the village, supply and demand factors, and the nature of village spending decisions. Note that in this report, we refer to the study villages not by their actual names but with a simple code, specifically by the Indonesian acronyms for the provinces in which they are located (Bali for Bali province, Banten for Banten province, Jatim for East Java, Kalsel for South Kalimantan, Kaltim for East Kalimantan, NTB for East Nusa Tenggara, Sulsel for South Sulawesi, Sumsel for South Sumatra, and Sumut for North Sumatra).

To allow the distillation of a large amount of research material into a concise report, we asked the field researchers to assess their villages on 20 aspects of village governance. These indicators (Table 1) correspond to and operationalize the broad demand and supply dimensions outlined in section A. For the demand side, 12 questions assess the chief electoral mechanism through which villagers can express their aspirations (village elections) and the extent of and avenues for direct participation by villagers in village affairs. For the supply side, an additional 8 questions focus on the responsiveness of village officials and the degree to which the village government provides villagers with equal access to resources and benefits. We then developed both a demand index and a supply index by calculating the average scores for the indicators in the respective dimensions. The scores range from 1 (worst score) to 5 (best score). Readers should bear in mind that these scores are an imperfect means to describe a

complex reality, and that these assessments are unavoidably subjective. The benefit of this methodology is that it allows systematic comparison of a large number of villages, involving a wide range of topics. In future applications, the reliability of this scoring could be increased by having multiple coders assessing each village—something budget constraints did not allow this time.

Table 1: Village Governance Indicators

Demand	The ability of village residents to express their preferences to the village government
Elections	1. Candidates from varied backgrounds have a chance to win, including people from lower-income and non-elite families
	2. Vote buying and other clientelistic practices are absent during village head elections
	3. Family networks play no role in village head elections
	4. During the village head election, the incumbent did not use village or government resources
Participation	5. Village meetings, including at the village level, are well attended by villagers from varied backgrounds
	6. Ordinary villagers regularly speak their mind during these meetings
	7. Women participate just as much as men in these meetings
	8. There is a of history of (participation in) protests in the village
	9. Villagers regularly approach village officials and the village head with ideas and proposals
	10. The BPD is active and takes initiatives to strengthen village governance
	11. BPD members and ordinary villagers feel free to express criticism of village leadership
	12. There is an open and free selection of BPD members
Supply	Responsiveness and fairness of the village government in responding to citizen preferences
Responsive village governance	13. Decisions on budget use and development priorities are taken during village meeting, openly
	14. Input from villagers during village meetings has an impact on decisions and use of the budget
	15. The village head is easily approachable for ordinary villagers
	16. When villagers present their problems and requests to village leaders, they quickly respond and address these issues
Favoritism and factionalism in village governance	17. Village officials work on average at least 8 hours per day
	18. There is open recruitment of village officials
	19. Villagers benefit equally from (projects financed by) village budgets
	20. There is no polarized voting. The village head received votes from all sections and groups within the village

C. Village Governance Regimes: Variation Across Indonesia

The strongest finding of our fieldwork concerns the extreme variation we encountered, ranging from exclusionary to inclusionary patterns of village governance. While we expected to find some variation in the degree of openness of governance arrangements and elite capture (variation was also observed in previous LLI studies, see e.g., Evers 2000, 4), the range we encountered exceeded expectations. In some locations, such as Kalsel 1, Banten 2, and Sumsel 2, patterns of village governance were highly exclusionary, with a very dominant village head who had succeeded in placing his relatives and other supporters in key positions within the village government. In these villages, consultative meetings were highly constrained affairs, with participants limited to a narrow range of village elites (often linked by family or other ties to the village head), and often with limited recordkeeping or other forms of transparency. There were also indications that the elites in these villages were more successful at capturing resources, whether by skimming from village budgets or by monopolizing economic activities. In such cases, too, only a limited number of villagers were able to communicate their preferences to village elites through informal channels.

In villages with more inclusionary governance regimes, villagers could affect budgetary allocations, decision-making, and selection of the village apparatus. Our team also encountered villages such as NTB 1 and Kaltim 1 with much more inclusionary patterns of village governance and relatively open participatory processes. In such villages, researchers documented occasions when villagers were individually or collectively able to express their preferences in ways that subsequently affected village budgetary allocations, decision-making, and selection processes for new positions in the village apparatus. We found several villages where the BPD played an active role, which also involved criticizing the village head or the village apparatus in a way that seemed to have impact. Such active BPDs contrasted with the passive and co-opted or, in other cases, factionalized and conflictual BPDs observed elsewhere.

Figure 1 illustrates two key findings of our fieldwork. First, VGRs vary widely across Indonesia. With Banten 2 on one end of the spectrum and Kaltim 1 and NTB 1 on the other end, the range in the assessments by field researchers is very high. According to our researchers' assessments, six (one-third) of the study villages fall clearly into the category of what we termed "captured VGR"—that is, villages where participation and competition is highly constrained and village government is run in a generally exclusionary manner. Three (one-sixth) of the study villages, Kaltim 1, NTB 1, and Kaltim 2, display patterns we label "inclusive VGR"—that is, villages with high levels of participation, open and competitive village elections, and active and responsive village officials. Most of the villages studied fall somewhere between these poles; about a third were judged to have relatively responsive village governments but constrained participation (called "passive VGR"). No village falls clearly within the category of "exclusive VGR,"—that is, with a high level of participation but unresponsive government.

village population was relatively passive. Hence, the “passive VGR” quadrant in the figure suggests that high levels of participation are not a necessary condition of responsive village government. In such situations, the role of the village head appears to be key: a responsive and reform-oriented village head can exercise considerable agency in ensuring a well-run village even without high levels of citizen demand. Generally, we found participation of villagers through formal processes, such as the village consultative meetings and the BPD, limited and constrained. We identify both structural and procedural barriers to participation in section E of this report.

Furthermore, the presence of intense political competition cannot be taken as an indicator or guarantee of responsive and inclusive village governance. Even in some villages that were run on a more exclusionary pattern, village politics were sometimes marked by intense political competition and close margins of victory in village head elections. In case study villages in both South Sulawesi and South Sumatra, where power was tightly concentrated in the hands of the village head and his allies (including relatives), researchers encountered both considerable discontent among villagers and stories of these village heads facing strong opposition during elections. Yet in these cases the intense competition involved factionalism among village elites and did not translate into high levels of participation of ordinary villagers. In such cases, village politics is highly factionalized, as losing candidates for village head retain considerable support or BPDs harbor members who actively oppose the sitting village head. Furthermore, the high levels of campaign spending associated with tense competition tend to generate corruption, as candidates need to recover these costs. Such cases resemble, above all, strong competition among rival factions to control village government and the resources it provides.

These conclusions, illustrated by the general assessments of the researchers, provide an overview of the varied character of village governance encountered. In the following sections, we develop these conclusions by examining aspects of village governance in more detail. We start by discussing how four key institutions shaping village governance—the village heads, the village head elections, the village bureaucracy, and the village consultative council (BPD)—were functioning in our 18 villages.

D. Supply: Functioning of Village Heads and Village Officials

The 2014 Village Law places responsibility for everyday village governance in the hands of an elected village head and a group of village officials, including both hamlet heads (*kepala dusun*) as well as village apparatus (*perangkat desa*). These components constitute what we refer to as the supply side of village governance. While the functioning of village heads and village officials could each be a topic for a lengthy report, we limit ourselves to a brief synthesis of key observations about these important actors in village governance.

D.1. Village Heads

The position of village head is an old and powerful one, which—under various names and titles—goes back to long before colonial times. When Indonesia democratized in 1998, village life was marked by relatively strong social hierarchies. Studies from the late 1960s to the early 1990s describe how village head elections often led to victories by individuals from high-status and well-off families, including families that had held the village head post as a more or less hereditary sinecure (Schulte Nordholt 1982; Maurer 1994, 98; Latief 2000). More than 50 years ago, after surveying 13 villages across Indonesia, Koentjaraningrat (2007[1967], 400 and 402) concluded that “[p]atterns of social stratification in Indonesia are closely related to systems of village administration” as “membership in a village elite [is] still an important determining factor for candidacy as village head.” During Suharto’s authoritarian regime (1966–1998), village heads typically were described as being removed from ordinary villagers and unresponsive to them, as they were preoccupied with currying favor with outside authorities and implementing state directives (Antlöv 1995). Since then, Indonesia’s villages have experienced extensive political and administrative reform. As noted in section A, local political activity is no longer tightly regulated, and measures to strengthen the accountability of village heads have been introduced.

An examination of the background of village heads provides an occasion to assess the effectiveness of the reforms of the 2014 Village Law. If the measures in this law to boost participation and accountability are effective, they could be expected to affect established village hierarchies. Our fieldwork thus offered an opportunity to observe whether and to what extent post-Suharto reforms have affected the character and functioning of village heads. An earlier study that focused only on villages around Yogyakarta addressed this question (Berenschot, Capri, and Devy 2021; see also Aspinall and Rohman 2017), finding that the power of old established families is eroding as village heads now often come from non-elite families. The material collected for this report extends this research and explores whether this erosion of the power of elite families is observable across Indonesia, as an indication of the extent to which reforms have empowered ordinary villagers.

We found considerable variation in the extent to which village heads have elite backgrounds. Annex Table A.2 provides an overview of the backgrounds of the village heads in the 18 villages studied. A high proportion, 8 out of 18, had a father, grandfather, or uncle who was also village head. One of the villages studied in NTB province, NTB 1, had for generations been governed by members of a

single aristocratic family, though this family was recently deposed by the current incumbent, who had a background in Islamic politics. In many cases, family status and respect for the previous village head help candidates with such elite backgrounds to win elections. Furthermore, in some villages with a local tradition of inherited traditional authority, such as in North Sumatra, such families have long dominated village politics.

The presence of village heads with elite backgrounds corresponds with less inclusive and less participatory patterns of village governance. While our set of case studies is too small to explore the correlation in sufficient detail, most villages whose heads have family connections to previous village heads (Banten 2, Sulsel 1, and Sulsel 2) are also villages at the exclusionary end of our spectrum. Yet, this relationship is far from perfect. For example, Jatim 2 and Kaltim 1, both villages with more inclusive forms of governance, elected individuals partly because they were descended from families of previous village heads.

High turnover in village heads suggests a considerable element of electoral accountability. Eight out of 14 incumbent village heads who contested recent elections lost. Moreover, our researchers assessed all but one of these eight villages as having relatively open and inclusive patterns of village leadership (either inclusive or passive VGRs), suggesting that incumbent turnover might have led to the opening up of village government in at least some of these locations (certainly, this conclusion matches the narratives provided by many of the informants in these villages). By contrast, in most of the villages with “captured” VGRs, the incumbent had managed to win reelection by mobilizing traditional sources of authority and clientelistic ties. The exception to this was Sulsel 2, where the newly elected village head was from a family that had traditionally held the office.

In most study villages, the village head belongs to the better-off section of the village. Annex Table A.2 also shows that the village heads are either well-to-do farmers, fairly successful businesspersons, or they belong to a family with considerable capital, as in Bali 2. In several cases, the village heads had become more prosperous, and gained wider experience that helped them stand for office, by working for long periods beyond the village, either elsewhere in Indonesia or, in one case, in Malaysia. Only in Jatim 1 and Kaltim 2 did village heads have modest backgrounds. In other words, despite more than two decades of rural democratization since the end of the New Order regime, village politics is still an elite affair. This is partly due to the high costs of village head elections (discussed in section E.1), which discourage villagers with more modest backgrounds from participating. But family status and, in some cases, caste or aristocratic status can curtail electoral competition, generating a pattern where the position of village head is contested by a relatively small group of village elites.

Male domination of the position of village head raises obvious concerns about women’s representation in village governance. In all of our 18 cases, the village head was a male, matching patterns that have been observed in previous LLI studies (Wetterberg, Jellema, and Dharmawan 2013, 11) and that obtain widely through Indonesia—according to Central Bureau of Statistics data, only 4.9 percent of village heads and *lurah* (heads of urban precincts) were women in 2018.² This absence of female village heads reflects—in all but one study village, which we return to in section E.4—a dearth of women’s representation in other parts of village government, including the village apparatus, the BPDs, and the

2 <https://databoks.katadata.co.id/datapublish/2022/06/21/peran-perempuan-sebagai-kepala-desalurah-makin-meningkat-sejak-2011>

hamlet heads. The absence of a pipeline of women with experience in the formal aspects of village government both reduces the number of women who feel sufficiently confident in their capabilities to run for the position of village head, and habituates residents, male and female alike, to the notion that formal village government is essentially a male domain (see Diprose, et al. 2020) with consequences for participation and delivery of services we explore in section E.4.

While family background remains important, the fieldwork suggests that village heads are often quite active and approachable. To study their day-to-day functioning, the researchers followed village heads on their daily routine for several days’ duration during their fieldwork. To illustrate such working days, Table 2 documents two working days from two villages that are, in our view, fairly representative, though the working days of village heads are highly varied. From this shadowing of the daily routine of village heads in our 18 villages we can derive a number of general observations.

Table 2: Sample Working Days of Village Heads

Bali 2	Bali 2	Kaltim 2	Katim 2
28 March	31 March	2 February	16 February
8:00–9:30 Weekly meeting with village officials and staff to discuss village problems.	9:00–11:00 Attends a meeting where a governmental (phone) survey on capacity building for village officials is explained.	8:00–10:00 Meets with hamlet heads to prepare monthly report and takes joint photo for poster.	7:30–8:00 Visits a villager to discuss his request to pave a village road.
10:00–12:00 Mediates a marriage dispute together with an <i>adat</i> leader.	13:00–14:00 Mediates a conflict between villagers about a road accident.	10:00–11:30 PMD (Village Empowerment Department) officials of subdistrict visit and discuss the village’s financial reports.	8:00–9:30 Visits the <i>posyandu</i> activities and walks around village, meeting villagers.
14:00–17:00 Attends an inauguration and purification ritual (<i>nyeruak</i>) of the new house of a villager (and campaign supporter).	14:00–16:00 Works on administrative tasks, signs paperwork.	11:30–12:00 and 13:00–15:00 Accompanies the PMD officials to inspect two bridges and to meet villagers who received surgery assistance; talks to villagers about other matters.	10:00–11:00 Meets with hamlet heads to discuss selection of sites for road paving.
		15:00–16:00 Says goodbye to the PMD officials, and, after a short spell of paperwork, goes home.	14:00–17:00 After a rest due to a headache, goes to village office to get report on the <i>posyandu</i> activities and prepare for internal meeting with village officials.

A first observation is that village heads are, on the whole, no longer as aloof and distant as they were during the New Order. The LLI 1 study, conducted in the dying years of the New Order, found that “Village heads are not accountable to the community, only to the district head” (Evers 2000, 12). While some of the village heads in our sample made it difficult for residents to approach them and avoided

interaction (as in Banten 1 and Kalsel 2), the general pattern is that village heads are very approachable and some work relatively long days addressing requests and attending to village affairs, though they may have been “showcasing” best practice while being observed by our researchers. Village heads regularly tour their village and often meet villagers—frequently on the sidelines of inspections or events. They are approached by villagers from morning to evening and they typically attend many functions, such as funerals, weddings, and religious gatherings. In addition, village heads mediate disputes, solve problems, deal with emergencies, officiate at events, meet with village officials and contractors, and survey progress of village projects. They also spend time on standby at village offices, discuss village affairs with officials, and sign off on reports and letters. This level of activity of village heads, varying considerably in intensity, is not only due to the large number of tasks and government programs that village governments are expected to execute, but also due to the high expectations that villagers, at least in many locations, have of their village heads. Villagers tend to expect, or at least hope, that their village head will be approachable and accessible, able to interact easily with them and to help them when accessing government services and confronting problems, as well as (or even more than) being able to discharge their official duties. To convey their requests, moreover, villagers often come to the house of the village head, including in the evenings and weekends. In this sense, some village heads are always at work, or at least are always ready to turn their attention to village affairs should the need arise. As we discuss in section E.5, this regular interaction, often facilitated through informal social networks, constitutes an important reason informal mechanisms of accountability are relatively important and effective. At the same time, village heads who fail to meet such expectations can experience major legitimacy problems and face the threat of being voted out of office at the next election. Again, this finding stands in contrast with the authoritarian-era LLI 1 study, which found that even when village heads engaged in egregious corruption and other abuses, villagers had nowhere to turn (Evers 2000, 17).

A second and related observation is that the position of village head is not merely an office job.

While we found village heads do spend more than half of the observed time periods inside their office, they also regularly move around both inside and outside their village. Active village heads like those in Jatim 1 and NTB 1 are constantly on the move, touring their villages and making efforts to remain in contact with villagers. This mobility also includes visits outside the village: our researcher in Kaltim 1, for example, observed how the village head spent one full day traveling to a government office in the provincial capital Samarinda to meet members of the provincial legislature and Golkar Party to lobby on a project proposal he had submitted. As we note elsewhere in this report, as access to district and provincial funds depends partially on personal connections, some village heads spend considerable time cultivating links with more senior officials.

Third, the daily activities of village heads show how deeply imbricated village governance is with broader bureaucratic structures and activities of the Indonesian state.

A considerable proportion of the activities of village heads consists of interactions with other levels of Indonesia’s bureaucracy. Since the New Order period (see Antlöv 1995 for a classic account), the Indonesian government has relied heavily on village officials to implement programs in fields such as health, agriculture, family planning, and welfare—with the latest example the important role that village officials played in managing the COVID-19 pandemic. For village heads, this means that they must spend considerable time in meetings to receive instructions about programs from government officials and, subsequently, organizing their implementation. Table 2 also reveals an activity that has expanded since the adoption of the 2014

Village Law: the guidance and monitoring of village officials by (sub)district officials. Village heads regularly receive visits from officials from the *Dinas Pemberdayaan Masyarakat dan Desa* (Department of Community and Village Empowerment, PMD) and from the *pendamping desa* (village facilitators) provided by the Ministry of Villages and Development of Disadvantaged Regions to help village officials implement the Village Law. As illustrated by Kaltim 2 in Table 2, the financial accounts of village governments are regularly checked by the PMD and, if irregularities are observed, the dreaded *inspektorat* of district governments. This is likely the reason why the village head of Kaltim 2 made sure to check the *Surat pertanggungjawaban* (letter of responsibility) with his staff before the PMD officials arrived, as every village head wants to avoid an audit of the village budget. As discussed further in section E.2., this monitoring is an important reason corrupt practices require collaboration among village officials if they are to avoid detection.

D.2. The Village Apparatus

The village head is supported by five to seven village officials (*perangkat desa*).³ These may include a village secretary (*sekretaris desa*), treasurer (*bendahara*), business head (*kepala urusan*), and section head (*kepala seks*), as well as what can be a large number of hamlet heads (*kepala dusun*) and, below that, neighborhood heads (*ketua RT*). As most village-level government programs are implemented by these officials, their selection and functioning matter greatly for the quality and character of village governance.

We found that the recruitment process for village officials varies considerably. Since the introduction of the 2014 Village Law, a series of government regulations have mandated that the selection process for village officials follows an open, test- and competency-based procedure overseen by the village head but also involving approval from the subdistrict. Each district has its own version of the procedure, based on its own set of regulations, which vary greatly in the extent to which they require transparent and merit-based procedures.⁴ While in some villages these regulations are being implemented faithfully, our fieldwork found that in many villages these procedures are either not yet implemented or they are manipulated by the officials responsible for implementing them. In some of the more open and participatory villages we observed, village officials take the open recruitment and competency-based selection process very seriously, resulting in the recruitment of more young and female officials than would otherwise be likely. In other villages, the village head tightly controls the recruitment and appointment of village officials. Sometimes village heads simply appoint their own candidates. In one South Sulawesi village, respondents recalled being invited to a village meeting where the village head told them they were being appointed to various positions as hamlet heads and BPD members, without having been previously informed of what the meeting was about, let alone having the opportunity to discuss these appointments.

In several villages, the outward appearance of an open, merit-based selection system was maintained, but the selection process was manipulated behind the scenes. This could be done, for example,

³ These numbers are governed by Government Regulation No. 43 of 2015 and Interior Minister Regulation No. 84 of 2016.

⁴ The foundation is provided by Peraturan Menteri Dalam Negeri Republik Indonesia Nomor 83 Tahun 2015 Tentang Pengangkatan dan Pemberhentian Perangkat Desa and Peraturan Menteri Dalam Negeri Republik Indonesia Nomor 67 Tahun 2017 Tentang Perubahan atas Peraturan Menteri Dalam Negeri Nomor 83 Tahun 2015 Tentang Pengangkatan dan Pemberhentian Perangkat Desa.

when village officials clandestinely influenced who was listed as a candidate, or when applicants bribed officials in the subdistrict or district office to manipulate the test scores. As the adoption of such tests is still relatively new, we found that most older village officials were still hand-picked by the village head. To understand how this test-based selection process could be manipulated, it is worth quoting at length a high school teacher from Jatim 2 who was regularly involved in the preparation of the examinations used to recruit village officials:

Every year I saw how a transactional process takes place. The questions [in the test] are sold. I was involved in the process of making [this test]. After I went home, the phone would ring and every person who called would offer a price [for the test questions] and the exam was given to the person offering the highest price. This year I made it more difficult for the subdistrict office to do this. I insisted on making the process [between] formulating these questions [and the exam] as short as possible. So that there would be no time for copying the questions and answers and stealing them. I monitored this myself, I brought the questions. I controlled the laptop so that the [people at the] subdistrict could not make a soft copy and so the subdistrict head could not do any transactions. So the selection process [that took place last week] went smoothly (Interview 21 March 2022).

Thanks to the relatively clean selection process, a young woman from a modest background (her father sold fried snacks in the market) was selected as hamlet head in Jatim 2, a pattern we also found elsewhere, where test-based selection sometimes facilitated the appointment of women or otherwise disadvantaged villagers. In this case, however, the subdistrict head had his revenge: as he could not pocket a fee by selling the exam questions, he charged a large fee for attending the inauguration ceremony and threatened not to sign the required recommendation letter if this money was not paid. According to informants, the woman's father had to borrow 35 million rupiah (about US\$2,400) to cover these costs.

This manipulation of formal procedures also extends to the dismissal of village officials. Village heads are officially not allowed to fire village officials or hamlet heads they do not like as dismissals need to be based on evidence of wrongdoing. But in some villages (e.g., Banten 2) village heads could readily replace hamlet heads with their own favorites, while in other villages (e.g., Bali 2) the village head was perceived to be actively looking for mistakes of hamlet heads who had supported his opponent in the last election, so that he could replace them with his own supporters. However, this situation is far from uniform; in some villages, governance was quite divided, with the village officials split between supporters and opponents of the village head.

Unfortunately, nepotism is still prevalent in village governance. As a result of considerable, albeit narrowing, discretionary powers of the village head, we found that the village bureaucracy is often made up of friends and, particularly, family members of the village head. In 8 of our 18 villages at least some (or, in the extreme case of Sumsel 2, all) village officials were related to the village head. Not surprisingly, the villages where officials were family members of the village head (Banten 2, Sulsel 1, Sulsel 2, and Kalsel 1) are also the villages with more unresponsive and factionalized village governments. The research report on Banten 2 captures the relationship between the role played by personal and family connections and the quality of governance:

The village head has full power to place controllable people in strategic stakeholder positions in the village. In addition to the village apparatus, RT/RW [neighborhood and precinct] heads, youth leaders, and PKK [Family Welfare Empowerment] heads, the village head also places relatives and [supporters] in the BPD, LPM [community empowerment bureau], and posyandu [health centers]. This situation gives the village head extensive control over the implementation of village development programs. [...] The implementation of village policies will practically not be criticized or protested. Even if there is [discontent], it will not be influential due to the massive influence of the village head. The kinship relations among elements of village government make it difficult for checks and balances to be realized (field note from Banten 2).

The capacity of village heads to provide their family members with official positions is both an indicator and a cause of lower quality governance. In villages with strong family ties connecting the village head to members of the village apparatus, horizontal accountability is weak as the family members tend to support each other. Since these relations stymie effective monitoring, close family relations within the village administration facilitate corruption and undermine incentives for village officials to perform well.

E. Demand: Mechanisms for the Expression of Community Preferences and Accountability

A key theme emerging from our research findings concerns the interplay between informal and formal institutions in the provision of channels for participation and accountability. We are now in position to begin our consideration of the demand side of village governance, namely the various mechanisms through which citizens can express their preferences over how the village is managed, including its policies and spending priorities, and the ways in which they can hold leaders to account. The 2014 Village Law envisioned three formal community-level accountability mechanisms: village head elections, the village consultative council (BPD), and village consultative meetings (*musyawarah desa*). This section discusses these mechanisms and gives particular attention to the participation of women in village affairs. It also delves into the informal accountability mechanisms observed during fieldwork. Most of the study villages have strong social networks (family, religious, self-help, professional, organizational) imbued with social norms and “rules of the game.” These informal rules shape the working of formal institutions, like elections, the BPD, and official participatory procedures, which are designed as avenues village residents can use to express their preferences and criticisms. As with the supply side, the demand side of village governance is very much shaped by the interaction between formal and informal rules.

E.1. Electoral Accountability

Village head elections tend to be highly competitive, and that intense competition sometimes carries over into everyday village affairs. In 8 of the 14 studied villages where the incumbent stood for reelection, the incumbent lost (see Annex Table A.2). Though our research team were not able to observe these elections directly, they did document the most recent village head elections through interviews. The general picture that emerges from this material is that these elections are characterized by an interaction (and, in some cases, tension) between formal and informal dimensions of accountability: on the one hand, villagers often base their vote on an evaluation of the functioning of a sitting village head or the ideas and proposals of a challenger candidate. There is, in other words, an element of performance-based or even programmatic competition at the village level. On the other hand, candidates also employ the norms and expectations embedded in family, kinship, and other informal solidary groups to obtain electoral support, and they regularly rely on vote buying and other clientelistic inducements that have been observed in other Indonesian elections (Aspinall and Berenschot 2019; Muhtadi 2019).

Village head elections do generate a form of accountability, but this accountability is mitigated by the influence of money and social networks on their outcomes. Vote buying—the gifting of minor contributions of cash or goods—was common, but not universal, across cases. As summarized in Table 3, vote buying tended to be more decisive in villages in which exclusionary patterns of village governance developed. For example, in one village in South Sumatra vote buying was seen as a key to the election of the incumbent village head, a person who is observed by villagers as being closed in his governance style. This was not exclusively the case, however: vote buying also featured in some village elections in which relatively open and participatory governance patterns prevail. For example, in East Java villages,

vote buying appears to be an expected feature of elections, yet these were also some of the more open and inclusive governance regimes encountered in the research. At the same time, we should stress that, consistent with other research on clientelistic politics in Indonesia (especially Hicken, et al. 2022), there is much ambiguity surrounding the role of vote buying and similar practices in Indonesia: rather than suggesting a contractual and binding exchange, as the term “vote buying” suggests, gifts of money and goods are often distributed by candidates in Indonesian elections with hope rather than certainty that the recipient will reciprocate with a vote. Rather, such gifts are often signals of the seriousness and credibility of the candidate: they frequently act as a condition, rather than guarantee, of electoral victory.

Village head elections are costly, resulting in barriers to the participation of non-elite candidates, and giving winners incentives for corruption. In addition to vote buying, candidates also must pay for drinks and snacks during events, as well as organizational costs for their *tim sukses* (success teams, i.e., campaign organizations). These expenses add up to considerable amounts: while we could not get reliable estimates from all the villages, it seems that serious candidates can spend 300 million rupiah (about US\$20 thousand) on their campaigns. In a context where average monthly salaries rarely exceed US\$300, these are considerable amounts. These expenditures generate strong incentives to engage in corruption. They are also one explanation for why village heads tend to come from elite backgrounds: such villagers are among the few who have the resources necessary to compete.

Table 3: Vote Buying in Village Head Elections

Village	Vote buying: amount per individual (*000s of rupiah)	How common?
Bali 1	100–150, foodstuffs	2 out of 5 candidates
Bali 2	100	all candidates
Banten 1	50–200	all
Banten 2	50–300	all
Jatim 1	40–100	1 out of 3 candidates
Jatim 2	50–60	all
Kalsel 1	50–100	all
Kalsel 2	No vote buying	
Kaltim 1	No vote buying	
Kaltim 2	No vote buying	
NTB 1	50	1 out of 4 candidates
NTB 2	50 & foodstuffs	all
Sulsel 1	200–300, sand, stones, chairs (club goods)	2 out of 5 candidates
Sulsel 2	100–1 million, foodstuff	1 out of 2 candidates
Sumsel 1	50–100	all
Sumsel 2	50–200, foodstuffs (equivalent to 50), cigarettes	all
Sumut 1	1–2 kg sugar (about Rp 35,000 in value), open house (providing food)	1 candidate (sole candidate)
Sumut 2	up to 1 million	1 candidate (sole candidate)

Another striking yet highly varied aspect of village head elections concerns the degree to which voters' choices are guided by family and identity-based networks. While a large kinship network is a campaign asset for a candidate in every village, our interviews suggest that both the importance and loyalty of networks varied considerably, in keeping with the varied role of kinship structures in social life across different parts of Indonesia. We observed, for example, how extended families solidly supported “their” candidate in South Kalimantan, Banten, and South Sulawesi, not only in voting but also in providing campaign support. In contrast, in East Java, the role of family was limited, as researchers reported families splitting their votes among candidates. In villages where family networks were important during elections, we also often saw that village heads appointed family members as village officials or BPD members (as in Kalsel 1, Banten 2, and Sulse 1), contributing to a factionalized, exclusive pattern of village governance. When combined with clientelistic patterns, reliance on such networks undermines the ability of elections to provide a means of exercising accountability. The field note from Banten 2 noted that “Village head elections are not an effective alternative channel for expressing preferences [of villagers] because they are tainted by the practice of money politics, which is expected by the residents. In addition, villagers choose candidates because of family ties, not because of considerations of an [election] program. This situation has contributed to the increasingly elitist character of the village government.” As a rule, we can say that the more candidates rely on family networks as a means of electoral mobilization, the more likely the resulting village government is to be run along exclusionary lines.

In some villages, other identity-based divisions shaped voting behavior. In Sumsel 1, the researcher observed tensions between migrants (*pendatang*) and original inhabitants (*penghuni asli*). In other villages with migrants (Sulse 1 and Sumut 1), migrants tended to have a lower chance of being elected or attaining official positions compared to original inhabitants. In Bali 2, we learned how, during the previous village head election in 2015, the presence of candidates with high and low caste backgrounds led to tensions and polarized voting behavior. It is likely not a coincidence that in cases where identity-based divisions generated tensions, these divisions tended to overlap with settlement patterns. Where different communities live in different parts of the village, the likelihood of social tensions is greater because different hamlets compete with each other for budgets and basic amenities.

Generally, the patterns of organization used in campaigns for village heads affect the shape of subsequent village governance. The support that people lend to candidates during elections often generates a sense of indebtedness (*hutang budi*) that village heads, once elected, find difficult to ignore. We encountered many examples of the effect of elections on everyday governance. Particularly in villages displaying more exclusive patterns of governance, such as Sulse 1 and Kalsel 1, village heads engaged in efforts to direct resources to supporters, such as direct cash transfers, contracts, or positions. In Jatim 2, the village head selected a person who had an important role in his *tim sukses* as his village secretary. Conversely, the support of the *perangkat desa* for an opposing, losing candidate also affects everyday governance: interviews regularly yielded stories of how hamlet heads or village officials feared being pushed out of their positions by the village head because they had supported another candidate, and because village heads wanted to reward their own people. As village heads cannot easily remove village officials from office without proof of violations, such maneuvering can end up creating a divided village administration, in which some village officials are identified as being opposed to the sitting village head and others are seen as loyalists.

The picture that emerges is of village heads being torn between what formal procedures and rules prescribe and the informal norms of social and political obligation generated by their pathway into office. Formal procedures set out rule-guided and impersonal ways of, for example, allocating subsidies, appointing village officials and awarding contracts; social norms can put pressure on village heads to direct these benefits to supporters regardless of the formal rules. For this reason, elections generate mixed incentives for village heads. The elections do act as a mechanism of accountability that enables villagers to reward or punish village heads for their functioning. Yet the high costs, as well as the informal indebtedness generated by these elections, generate incentives for corruption and factionalized patterns of governance.

E.2. Village Consultative Councils (*Badan Permusyawaratan Desa*, BPDs)

While Indonesia has had a long history of legislative or consultative councils at the village level, which can supplement or even balance the authority exercised by the village head, the authority of those councils has waxed and waned over the years. Immediately after the New Order government ended, legislative change saw the introduction of BPDs (then called *Badan Perwakilan Desa*, or Village Representative Bodies) as powerful, democratically elected bodies at the village level. These bodies had the authority to hold village heads to account and even to dismiss them, with the result that BPDs “broke up the power monopoly of village heads and increased villagers’ participation in community governance” (Antlöv, Wetterberg, and Dharmawan 2016, 167). The result was that conflict often occurred between village heads and BPDs. Five years later, another legal change, largely “as a result of lobbying by the association of village heads,” resulted in the “disempowerment of BPDs” and their shift to a more consultative role (ibid., 167). The LLI 3 study, conducted in 2012, noted that the reduced powers of the BPD were, in many cases, reducing the accountability of the village head and depriving villagers of a means of expressing discontent with their village governments (Wetterberg, Jellema, and Dharmawan 2013, 83–88). Even so, research indicated considerable variation in the extent to which BPDs had become subordinate to, or were willing to work independently of, the village head (Antlöv, Wetterberg, and Dharmawan 2016, 83, 167). With the 2014 Village Law, BPDs were partially reempowered, with the law specifying that their members be democratically elected (article 57.g) and that their roles are discussing and approving village regulations (alongside the village head), channeling community aspirations, and conducting oversight of the village head (article 55). Along with consultative meetings, the BPDs are the primary institutions at the village level designed to function as a horizontal accountability mechanism.

We found variation in the strength and composition of BPDs. In some of the sample villages, the BPDs exceeded our expectations, with relatively young members adopting a critical and very engaged attitude toward the *perangkat desa*, and strengthening village governance (e.g., by overseeing *perangkat desa* selection), indicating that the reempowerment of the BPD is improving accountability in at least some villages. In others, the BPD is dominated by close family members and other allies of the village head and does not play a significant control function (previous LLI studies found similar variation: Wetterberg, Jellema, and Dharmawan 2013, 83). Annex Table A.3 provides an overview of the varied character of BPDs across our 18 villages. Column 4 draws attention to the considerable variation in the way that the members of these councils are appointed, despite the provision of the Village Law requiring the

democratic election of BPD members. While a move toward open elections is clearly under way, in some villages the village head simply appoints members; in others, members are chosen at village consultations (*musyawarah*) attended by a narrow range of officials and notables, with such processes subject to behind-the-scenes influence by the village head.

BPDs also vary greatly in effectiveness and activity, as well as in their roles. During interviews, most BPD members present themselves as a friend or partner of the village government while downplaying their role as supervisor. In contrast, in some villages (particularly Kalsel 2 and Bali 2) the BPD actively opposes the sitting village head, and regularly voices grievances about the village government. Generally, however, BPD members felt uncomfortable about openly criticizing the village government. These village councils also varied considerably in their level of activity and involvement. While in some villages (Jatim 1, Kaltim 1, Sumut 1, and NTB 1) the BPDs regularly organized meetings and actively participated in village affairs, in several others (Sumsel 2, Sumsel 1, Kalsel 1, and Banten 2) the role of the BPD was limited to chairing the yearly village consultative meetings. For example, the field report from Kalsel 2 notes:

The BPD is unable to become a healthy partner in the dynamics of village government. Most BPD members are people who have been “approved” by the village head. Even the internal structure of the BPD is unilaterally determined by the village head without any room for democratic discussion. The consequence of this village government structure is the centralization of power in the hands of the village head. The BPD only acts as a rubber stamp for the various interests of the village head.

These less-effective BPDs were also the councils where members were related to the village head, which is hardly coincidental: these family relationships generate reluctance on the part of BPD members to engage actively and critically in village affairs, because doing so might draw members into conflict with the senior family member to whom they owe their positions.

The more active village councils, however, could sometimes be effective at influencing village governance. We observed, for example, how in Jatim 2 the relatively young members of the BPD were very active in monitoring the selection process for two new village officials, a new village treasurer and a hamlet head. The BPD intervened when the sitting village head proposed a niece as candidate for one of these positions. The BPD felt that family members should not be allowed to participate in the selection process. As a local high school teacher in charge of village-owned enterprises observed:

When [a few months earlier] the village head promoted the village treasurer to become village secretary, the BPD protested strongly. The BPD felt that the village secretary was not sufficiently competent [and that] he was selected because he had a close relationship with the village head. That was the reason that [the village head’s niece] could not become a candidate [for village official]. [The BPD feared that] if a person so close to the village head would join, he would plan to get her selected. But because of the pressure from the BPD, she did not join the selection process (interview 21 March 2022).

E.3. Village Consultative Meetings

In general, we found a pattern of what might be called elite participation in formally mandated participatory processes. Regarding the village *musyawarah*, we found less variation than in some other spheres of village governance. In this pattern, and in congruence with other reports,⁵ we found that direct participation largely involves a circumscribed range of village officeholders and informal community leaders. Although there is often more space for direct participation at the hamlet and RT and *dusun* (hamlet) levels, typical participants in *musyawarah* at the village level are the village head and other village officials (*perangkat desa*), the RT and hamlet heads, PKK and *posyandu* leaders (representatives of women's organizations), leaders of other official bodies such as the BPD, *Karang Taruna* (youth organization), and a looser category of other community leaders (*tokoh masyarakat*, or informal leaders), who might be religious or *adat* leaders, community brokers, local businesspeople, organization leaders, or others. As Annex Table A.4 shows, in all our villages the village elites dominate consultative processes. Researchers observed active participation of ordinary villagers in only a few villages. In some villages, officials went as far as instructing villagers beforehand on what to say. Our researcher in Bali 2 described such rehearsed participation as follows:

The village government gave out a list of proposals beforehand, and the secretary of the village conveyed them in a pre-musdus [a preparatory meeting]. I witnessed the cohesiveness and solidity of the hamlet residents when they spoke. One by one, they tried to submit their proposals even though the proposals had actually been decided upon [beforehand]. They conveyed their ideas as if they were authentic and unique. Even though they were not. In the end, they managed to show themselves as villagers with a democratic persuasion (field note from Bali 2).

While this instance of stage-managed participation is somewhat extreme, a recurring observation in the village reports is that ordinary villagers were given very little opportunity to convey their own ideas and proposals for village development.

In short, the key protagonists in most formal participatory processes are that layer of people who might be considered the “village notables,” those who are the key decision-makers and influence wielders, in both formal and informal settings, rather than members of the community at large. In some villages, this relatively narrow space for formal participation appears to have resulted from, or is at least attributed to, the effects of COVID-19 and the imperative to avoid social gatherings to prevent transmission of the virus; in other villages, narrow participation was a long-standing feature of village political life.

Within this general pattern our team found considerable variation. In some cases, *musyawarah* were especially narrowly constituted, if at all. This pattern is notable in exclusionary village settings, which feature a high degree of capture of official bodies by relatives and allies of the village head. In some such locations, there was virtually zero participation by non-elite villagers in participatory meetings, even at the hamlet level. Thus, for example, in Kalsel 2, none of the hamlet heads organized *musyawarah* at all, an outcome the researcher attributes to the fact that hamlet heads, being appointed village officials rather than elected representatives, “feel they have no political interest in [listening to] community

5 See World Bank 2020.

aspirations” (field note from Kalsel 2). The village development planning meeting (*musrenbangdes*) was attended only by “the village head, village officials, hamlet heads, BPD members, representatives of the PKK and *Karang Taruna*, plus a few community leaders” (field note from Kalsel 2). The researcher concludes the element of inclusion was entirely absent in this village’s governance, in part because the village head did not like dealing with public argument. In a similar vein, the field report on Banten 2 observes that “those invited are also people close to the village head. This means that most of the participants present are part of the scope of power of the village head.”

Our research suggests that the limited participation of ordinary villagers in these formal village meetings is not only due to a lack of interest and self-confidence, but also due to the character of these meetings. On the one hand, it does seem that a considerable group of villagers refrains from either coming to or speaking at the venues because they feel they lack the capacity to speak properly or to understand village affairs; certainly, many villagers explained to our researchers that they had little interest in attending such events. On the other hand, our researchers noted three other obstacles to participation more related to the character and organization of these formal meetings, as well as to underlying socioeconomic factors.

First, many villagers see these meetings as the domain of village officials and, perceive their own attendance as an expression of support for the village government. When there is widespread, even diffuse discontent with and distrust of village government, ordinary villagers actually feel *disinclined* to attend such meetings as they do not want to be seen as supporting officials whom they distrust. The implication points to a feedback mechanism: when the village government is not functioning well, village consultative meetings are *less* effective because people are more likely to avoid these meetings, further reducing the possibilities for citizen input and vertical accountability. Put simply, consultative meetings are not a magic bullet that can improve the functioning of a village government without responsive and open village leadership.

Second, the nature of local livelihoods affects the capacity and willingness of citizens to participate in these meetings. While the correlation is far from perfect, our material suggests that in areas where villagers’ livelihoods involve activities that do not require all-day work, such as palm oil production, rubber or animal rearing (as in Kaltim 1 and 2 and, partly, Bali 2), villagers, especially men, can more easily attend meetings if they are held in the daytime. When livelihoods depend on rice cultivation, fishing (particularly in South Sulawesi and South Kalimantan villages) or petty trade, villagers tend to spend longer hours away from home, making it more difficult to participate.

Third and relatedly, the researchers reported that the efforts of some village heads to promote participation of villagers also made a difference, even when the nature of local livelihoods is not conducive. In some of the villages with more active participation (such as NTB 1), village heads made extensive efforts to invite a wide range of people, to organize these meeting at times designed to maximize participation (such as in the evenings), and to rely more on the BPD in the organization and the chairing of the meetings to create a more open and welcoming atmosphere. Timing of meetings is a particularly complex issue: holding meetings in the daytime can discourage men from participating where their livelihoods prevent this; women, however, are less likely to attend at night due to their childcare and household duties and social taboos about women leaving the home or neighborhood at night; some of the most responsive village leaders (as in NTB 1) organized special meetings for women

during the day alongside more general, and more male-dominated, meetings at night to accommodate farmers who worked in the fields all day. Such adaptations contrast sharply with villages where village leaders send invitations only to village elites, and where the meetings are run in ways that discourage participation. Of note here is that there seems to be no standard practice concerning the invitations to these meetings: while in some villages the consultative meetings were announced publicly through posters and other types of public announcements, in other villages only the small group receiving an invitation letter (or WhatsApp message) would be aware of the meeting.

Even in these more participatory villages, however, the typical pattern was for broader participation to occur only or mostly at the lower level of the system, typically at the RT or hamlet level. This was also noted by other reports on village meetings.⁶ For example, in Kaltim 1, a highly organized pattern of participatory meetings was the standard practice (at least before COVID). Regular *musyawarah* were held at the RT (neighborhood) level, attended by all male residents of that RT, which would discuss planning ideas, proposals, requests, and the like, to be conveyed at the hamlet *musyawarah*. These hamlet *musyawarah* would then be organized by the BPD and attended by village officials, including the village head. All residents of the hamlet, male and female, would be invited to attend, though many (especially women) would not do so. During the pandemic, participation was narrowed: RT heads were instructed to bring along only five residents of their RT as representatives to each hamlet meeting. The hamlet meeting would discuss and formulate a list of spending priorities, which would then be taken to a village meeting where there occurred a “deliberative process in determining priorities from among the aspirations of the residents of the three hamlets in the village” (field note from Kaltim 1). In short, this village evinced what might be thought of as approaching an ideal participatory process, in which ordinary villagers’ aspirations were expressed and aggregated through a series of meetings from neighborhood to village level and then formulated as a priority list at the village level, with this list used to guide the village budget. There was one major qualification to this assessment, however: there was minimal participation by women in the lower-level meetings of this process, though women had an alternative mechanism for expressing their priorities, a point we examine further in the next section.

E.4. Women’s Participation

The interplay between informal and formal institutions may be clearest in women’s participation in village governance. In none of our cases was there a female village head, and in most cases a large majority of village officials were men (the sole exception was a village in East Kalimantan where women were approximately 70 percent of village officials). Participation in formal village *musyawarah*, especially at the village rather than *dusun* level, is also typically heavily male-dominated, often because those invited to attend are village officials, organization leaders, and recognized community leaders (*tokoh masyarakat*) most of whom are men. Very often there are very few women participants at these meetings except for representatives of the PKK, and female village officials (when they exist). In most villages, therefore, these formal participatory processes are almost exclusively a male space. In the villages where women not only attended but also spoke during these meetings (Sulsel 2, Sumsel 1, and Sumut 1) those women were generally community leaders, such as PKK cadres or the wife of the village head.

⁶ See World Bank 2020, 40.

All the villages had functioning women’s networks that provided opportunities to build and showcase women’s leadership. In all cases, various women’s networks (typically, the PKK, *posyandu*, religious groups, and sometimes female farmers’ groups) functioned as active and visible means of social networking among women, and in at least some cases became forums for the expression and organization of women’s collective interests. The extent to which women’s preferences are expressed through village governance mechanisms, and acted upon, are to a large degree dependent upon the functionality of these networks, and on support and recognition provided by village officials.

Women’s participation through informal channels could be formalized through the support of female leaders and officials. Perhaps the most remarkable example of these two factors operating in tandem is the village in East Kalimantan (Kaltim 1) where few women were invited to the formal *musyawarah* process from the hamlet level up. Instead, they were engaged through a “stunting forum,” a forum established to pursue a national government program to reduce childhood stunting, a status which imparted considerable legitimacy to this forum. While women’s participation was generally low in the RT-level and hamlet-level *musyawarah*, in this village, the stunting forum—attended by women involved in PKK, midwives, female healthcare workers, BPD members, village officials as well as the village head and all RT heads—became a place where women were effectively able to express their aspirations on a whole range of budgetary items. These were then taken to the formal village-level *musyawarah* where they were shepherded through by the wife of the village head and by the large number of female village officials present in this village.

Our study found that some districts are already experimenting with methods to improve women’s representation in village government. In the districts we studied in East and South Kalimantan, governments have introduced measures to mandate women’s representation in the BPD. For example, the district of Kutai Kertanegara provides for one BPD position chosen exclusively by women, with women alongside men also able to vote for the other BPD positions. While such efforts are modest, the regulations arguably play a role in breaking down the commonly held opinion that public positions at the village level are properly the domain of men.

These dynamics point to the importance of women’s representation in formal spaces in village government. The case in East Kalimantan is the most dramatic example of a phenomenon witnessed across several cases, whereby effective expression of women’s preferences depends on synergy between effective grassroots organization through organs such as the PKK and advocacy by elite women—sometimes the wife of the village head or head of PKK, sometimes a particular female village officeholder. One remarkable feature of the East Kalimantan village was that it had an unusually large number of female officials in the village apparatus, who were able to effectively advocate on behalf of the members of the stunting forum. While we should not underestimate the extent of gender inequality in village governance indicated by our findings, and while in most of our study sites women’s formal participation was constrained, these informal networks and modes of achieving influence for women can be significant, and the ubiquity of networks such as PKK across rural Indonesia represents a powerful potential force for expanding women’s role in grassroots governance.

E.5. Informal Participatory Processes

Villagers often adopt informal means to participate, voice their preferences, and access public services, even though the effectiveness of those means depends on the village government's responsiveness. Our field researchers collected a great deal of information about informal modes of participation and informal channels through which villagers are able to convey their preferences or seek services. Researchers thus found that even in some locations where formal participatory processes are not functional, citizens still have a range of informal mechanisms for expressing their preferences, and these are sometimes considered by village officials when they make political and spending decisions. Villagers can also draw on informal connections to access government services and programs. However, again, there was much variation in the effectiveness of these networks and their accessibility to ordinary villagers. Much here depends on the posture of the village head, the character of local social hierarchies, and the nature of relations among the village head, low-level village officials, and residents.

One critical factor is the accessibility of the village head himself and the degree to which the village head is open to informal interactions with ordinary villagers. Across most of our sample we found villagers holding fairly consistent views about a preferred leadership style in which the village head is open to everyday exchanges in casual settings, such as when visiting food stalls, markets and other public places through the mode known in Indonesia by the Javanese term *blusukan*. In some villages, residents harshly judge village heads who fail to live up to this ideal. In a few of the more exclusionary villages, however, where the village head was inaccessible except to a small group of officials and other favorites, the village head could still maintain legitimacy if he could rely upon a strong traditional basis of authority such as that derived from religion or *adat*. In other cases, however, inaccessibility of the village head to ordinary villagers led to relatively open expressions of discontent by residents to members of our research team.

Subsidiary officials and village leaders can also be intermediaries in conveying citizen preferences upward. For example, in one of the villages with particularly narrow engagement by residents in formal participatory processes, our research team concluded that “ordinary people do not have a formal door through which to express their support or voice with regard to village development and village government” (field note from Banten 1). In this village, ordinary villagers were not invited to, and were often not even aware of, the formal *musyawarah*. However, the researchers still found that villagers could, and often did, express their views on development and expenditure to RT (neighborhood) heads, who were then effectively able to represent these views in hamlet and village meetings. In this context, the RT heads became the “central figures” in communicating ordinary citizens’ perspectives and complaints within formal contexts. In another village with similarly minimal formal participatory processes (field note from Kalsel 2), researchers also encountered a rich web of connections between citizens and village officials, such as RT heads and BPD members, to whom citizens could make complaints and express their views on the use of the village budget.

The nature of the VGR, however, significantly affects ordinary villagers’ ability to work through even such mediated forms of access. While women generally depend on the functionality of female-centered networks, such as those built around the PKK, men often have more opportunities to interact with the (male) village head and (male-dominated) village officials. In more exclusionary settings, villagers

sometimes have to reach beyond the formal village government to secure access to the services they need. Thus, in one of the villages in Banten, with a largely unresponsive village head who personally dominates the formal village government apparatus, villagers tend to access government services (especially but not exclusively those related to healthcare) by seeking the help of a group of well-connected female brokers, many of whom have backgrounds as *kader posyandu*, extension workers in maternal health. The researcher described the wide range of activities of these *posyandu* brokers as follows: “People usually ask for the help of service brokers to assist with administrative matters when accessing health services, [in particular with] the administrative requirement for accessing health services, the *surat keterangan tidak mampu* (certificate indicating poverty). Although these cadres actually have a position as Posyandu/KB cadres, which means they work more in the health sector, in reality many people also ask for their help outside the health sector, such as helping to make ID cards and family cards, helping with moving letters, helping with administrative arrangements, marriage, divorce, to helping to find sound system cables” (field note from Banten 1).

Researchers also observed a fee-for-service form of mediation. As the Banten 2 field report describes, the payment of such fees is a regularized and accepted practice:

There is compensation that must be paid by residents when they have used the services of a broker. This monetary reward is interpreted by cadres and residents as “compensation for the effort” (*upah lelah*) and “compensation for gasoline” [since this mediation involves] going back and forth to various service agencies. The amount of money varies. [...] Karlita [a pseudonym], a *posyandu* cadre, sets the tariff for [arranging] the KTP [residential ID card] and Family Card at 50,000 rupiah each, while the service for producing a birth certificate is priced at 300,000. [...] The material compensation received by the cadres is not only for themselves but needs to be distributed to service officers at the subdistrict office [as informal fees].

In short, in these settings, villagers could still creatively draw upon local brokers, but they did so to bypass the village government rather than to make use of it, or hold it accountable, and they did so in a way that involved a financial impost.

Informal interactions, to some extent, can be a form of accountability on the part of village leaders.

We found indications in some locations that the dense set of social networks operating in village life generates (particularly in Bali and East Java) a particular form of social accountability, with village leaders reluctant to take actions that would create widespread social disapproval. In these locations, villagers’ friendly but critical off-the-cuff remarks about their leaders, readily expressed requests and (clientelistic) expectations appear to affect and even constrain village officials’ behavior, though the highly contextual character of these interactions makes them difficult to document systematically. Part of what drives village heads’ responsiveness to such informal cues is undoubtedly the imperative of electoral accountability, but we should recognize, too, that village officials are themselves social beings embedded in, and constrained by, local social expectations of proper behavior.

The mutual support groups (*suka duka*) in Bali, or the farmer groups in East Java, are examples of associational activities that strengthen accountability precisely because they emphasize horizontal collaboration and support. When the village head is a member of such a group, they are bound by horizontal ties to their fellow villagers, not only by vertical hierarchy. At the same time, we also found

less inclusive, identity-based informal networks such as family networks, which are marked by a higher degree of internal hierarchy and status differentiation, and which generate incentives for village officials to privilege such subgroups, thereby creating more factionalized patterns of governance.

However, social accountability can also be detrimental. We should be careful not to idealize these quiet forms of social accountability. Previous studies of village governance in Indonesia have tended to valorize the role of informal networks, especially those based on *adat*, as an important means of ensuring social accountability and participation, including when formal institutions are lacking or weak (e.g., Evers 2000, 65). However, informal networks among villagers, especially in villages with steep social hierarchies can make people reluctant to approach or disturb someone of a superior social status, which also undermines accountability. Even villagers who are willing to express their discontent with village leaders often do so only through a substratum of “*warung* [food stall] gossip,” as one of our researchers in South Sumatra expressed it. Such gossip can be a means of expressing villagers’ discontent with their leaders, but often without significantly affecting the latter’s behavior. In one village in South Kalimantan, our researcher observed, this disjuncture between a substratum of persistent gossip and rumor about maladministration on the part of village officials and those officials’ apparent indifference to such disapproval gave rise to feelings of “hopelessness” (*putus asa*) and “indifference” about village governance on the part of villagers.

On rare occasions, such feelings of disaffection can have direct impacts on village government. The same village in South Kalimantan, our researchers noted, was also characterized by a political culture of *amuk* (sudden violent protest). In this village, the village government expanded allocation of UMKM (Micro and Medium Business Enterprise) assistance packages to fishers and farmers after a much-talked-about incident in which a fisher caused an angry and violent scene at the village office, demanding support in accessing this program. The village government acceded to this demand, prepared the relevant paperwork, and forwarded it to the district government for everybody who asked for it. As a result, this village had the largest UMKM assistance allocation in the district. In this case, though, it should also be noted that the man who protested had his own connections, mediated by a wealthy local businessman, with the district head (*bupati*), which might have encouraged the village head to agree to his demand.

In sum: village leaders are embedded in sometimes dense social networks and expectations that can both constrain and empower them. Efforts to strengthen village governance and accountability need to pay attention to the impact of such informal networks and associated social norms and expectations. While our research did not allow a full exploration of this topic, the material gathered suggests that informal networks and interactions can under certain circumstances—notably when village leaders are embedded in relatively horizontal and solidary forms of association—strengthen accountability, particularly when they generate interactions and dependencies that facilitate pressure on village heads and officials. While we recognize our findings on this score are tentative, this is a promising area for future, more systematic research.

F. Outcomes: Policy Delivery and Expenditure of Village Budgets in the Age of COVID-19

A major goal of this research was to examine the extent to which VGRs shape how citizen preferences map onto the formal policies adopted by village governments, and onto their patterns of budgetary spending. This section addresses this question by focusing on three aspects of governance outcomes: professed satisfaction of villagers with villager governance, budget spending and corruption, and the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.

F.1. Satisfaction

Villagers tend to be more satisfied with village development projects and budgetary spending in villages that exhibit inclusive patterns of governance. While our study did not involve surveys and our findings are, hence, possibly anecdotal, our interviews about pre-pandemic experiences provided strong hints that, as expected, villages with more open and inclusionary forms of governance were better able to deliver projects and benefits that met citizen expectations than the villages where more exclusionary patterns prevailed.

In particular, the villages where researchers encountered higher levels of citizen satisfaction with the openness of development planning as conducted through the village’s *musyawarah* processes, were also those where citizens were most satisfied with budgetary spending patterns. In these villages, citizen preferences overwhelmingly focused on three areas: infrastructure, social assistance, and grants to community organizations and services. Thus, for example, in Kaltim 1, the village where community consultations were arguably most systematic—including a separate forum for women—our fieldworker reported a general sense of satisfaction that “decision making and allocations of the village development budget were based on the collective decisions reached in a deliberative manner through the village *musyawarah*.” The researcher also found no evidence of clientelistic allocations of projects or other resources to reward supporters of the village head. At the same time, even in this most ideal of villages, there was little evidence that villagers paid much attention to the details of expenditure, or scrutinized the budget figures that were posted on a large billboard outside the village hall: “For them, what was important was whether their preferences as communicated in the hamlet and village *musyawarah* had been delivered on or not” (field note from Kaltim 1).

In contrast, in villages where more exclusionary patterns of governance prevailed, researchers often encountered social discontent with, or ignorance about, what the village was spending its money on and why. For example, in Susel 1 (classified as a “captured VGR” in Figure 1), our researcher heard complaints that the village had spent money on projects to build new drainage, wells, and other infrastructure located conveniently near to the homes of the village head and several hamlet heads, and to their obvious personal benefit, despite the fact that these projects had allegedly never been included as priorities in the village’s development planning documents. Likewise, in more factionalized villages, budgetary allocations tended to be shaped by local political alignments—e.g., with greater spending flowing to religious activities in those villages where religious networks and authority figures are a

major source of support for the village head. Not surprisingly, in these villages more closed patterns of governance prevailed—e.g., the village head was linked by family and other ties to other village officials and BPD members—and both transparency and scrutiny of the budget was least developed. In some such villages, it was difficult for our researchers to gain access to basic budget documents.

F.2. Budget Spending and Misconduct

The nature of the connections between the three formal institutions of government—village head, village apparatus, and BPD—is key to the extent of misconduct in village governance. While a difficult topic to adequately assess, our fieldwork suggests that village officials regularly engage in corrupt practices to augment their incomes. Such practices do not appear to be uniformly common across the study villages, however, as fieldwork observations provide some indications that rent-seeking and the marking up of contracts is more common in villages with more exclusive and less participatory governance patterns. Moreover, overall, fieldwork observations suggest that the introduction of greater within-village accountability, notably through more open elections, has reduced the seriousness of corruption (or at least has resulted in it being much better hidden): certainly, our researchers found far less of the very open and egregious forms of corruption observed during the 1996 LLI study (Evers 2000, 6, 46).

As noted in section A, it is important to see corruption not as simply arising from the greed or selfishness of officials, but rather as an outcome of compromising between formal procedures and informal institutions, such as norms of reciprocity. The following observation captures how the practice of paying village officials small fees (*pungli*) for their services arises out of social norms:

Pungutan liar (illegal levies) often occur in public services. This is [given] to simplify the bureaucratic process [and] to get special treatment from officials while at the same time maintaining and building a harmonious relationship between citizens and officials. The practice of illegal levies in [Banten 2] is complicated to define because it intersects with the local culture. There is a long-standing habit that citizens need to give rewards as an expression of gratitude to officials for having received services. This habit gradually becomes an informal collective consensus that is believed and practiced in the community. Residents feel bad when they come to the service office empty-handed. Likewise, service providers expect to receive gifts even if they are not explicitly disclosed (Banten 2 field note).

When our interviews touched upon corruption, informants often mentioned practices that involved coordination and collaboration among village officials. The following observations from a village official who had tried to resist such corruption (and who had been ostracized as a result) illustrates this collaborative or *berjemaah* (congregational) pattern of village corruption:

When we provided the quarantine hotel [for COVID-infected villagers] we wrote down the hotel for ten days, while in reality [people stayed] eight days. They took the money of the two days.

Is this not checked?

Yes, the subdistrict officials checked at the hotel. But the hotel manager was also given money, so we passed [*olos*] that check.

What would happen if you were to report this?

That would be fatal. Because all of them [in the village office] are in on this. If I were honest, they would ruin me. ... Already they regularly harass me.

Can't the BPD not do something?

The BPD does suspect things. But they cannot find proof. They [village officials] have already arranged (*disetting*) all the paperwork before there is a check" (Interview, 16 March 2022).

Such comments suggest that both the skimming of village (or government) budgets, as well as the subsequent hiding of these practices, requires a certain level of collaboration and coordination among different village officials. We found another example of the importance of such collaboration in two very similar fishing villages in South Kalimantan. One of these villages (Kalsel 1) had a very dominant village head who succeeded in siphoning off considerable resources (including village land) as both the BPD and the *perangkat desa* were partially made up of supportive family members, who likely benefited indirectly from these practices. Ordinary villagers reported that they felt they would face repercussions if they expressed criticism. The other fishing village, however, had a village head who had only recently returned to the village after a long period working elsewhere in Indonesia and who was elected largely because of the popularity of his father, a former village head. This new village head lacked strong connections with the *perangkat desa* and BPD members. These members were highly vocal in their criticism of the village head, and monitored his behavior, engaging in quite effective supervision. Informants from this village recounted how such tensions complicated the efforts of the village head to skim from village budgets. It did not, however, prevent such practices: the village head demanded that he alone arrange all village expenditures which, it was rumored, enabled him to pocket a small mark-up from minor expenditure on office equipment and other small items. This was minor compared to the resources that the village head from nearby Kalsel 1 siphoned off. The lack of cooperation by village officials in Kalsel 2 prevented their village head from going beyond petty corruption.

Greater prevention of misconduct and improvement of quality of governance at village level will likely occur when family members of the village head do not dominate the village apparatus or BPD.

Corrupt practices are much easier to perpetrate, and more difficult to monitor, when the village head succeeds in getting family members (and, sometimes, friends) appointed as *perangkat desa* or BPD members. When the village leadership is united and mutually supportive, corrupt practices are more easily engaged in and criticism from ordinary villages is more easily deflected. For this reason, a policy implication of our findings is that efforts should be taken to improve merit-based appointments at the village level, and to reduce the discretion of the village head in making such appointments.

F.3. Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic

Our researchers found that the COVID-19 pandemic greatly constrained the autonomy of village leaders to control their own budgets. This became a major obstacle for our researchers in studying budgeting and misconduct more systematically. One result is that we had a much less dynamic picture to observe regarding debates and controversy over allocation of village funds than initially anticipated. It was difficult to determine the degree to which budgetary allocations mapped onto citizen preferences, precisely because village leaders themselves had little leeway in how to spend their budgets at the time the research was conducted.

This situation resulted from various emergency measures taken by the national government in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. In particular, Presidential Regulation no. 104 of 2021 determined that each village had to make set allocations of village funds to designated COVID relief measures, namely 40 percent for direct cash assistance (*bantuan langsung tunai*, BLT) for poor families economically affected by the pandemic, 20 percent for food security programs, and 8 percent for direct COVID response (article 5(4)). In at least some cases, district governments (*kabupaten*) had been equally prescriptive in designating allowable usage of district-allocated village funds. Across the 18 villages, researchers found village leaders complaining that these arrangements had effectively ended village autonomy, at least temporarily. At the same time, while the pandemic was the proximate cause of this major loss of control, it built on trends that had been observed even before the health emergency, with a report on the World Bank’s Sentinel Villages project observing in 2017 that the “open menu” approach envisaged by the Village Law was already under pressure, given that “Central and district level agencies increasingly issue their own priority lists to guide the use of D[ana] D[esa], with these priority lists being frequently revised and subject to change” (World Bank 2017, 50).

We did observe some local innovation in how villages adapted to these national mandates, building on the interaction between formal and informal procedures discussed in the preceding sections.

Usually, the national government implements its own processes to select recipients of its social welfare programs, but it relied on the village apparatus to identify recipients of village BLT recipients during COVID. Our researchers attempted to document this selection process, finding yet another illustration of the interplay between formal and informal processes. Formally, Indonesia’s provincial governments asked the village apparatus to select recipients based on 14 indicators of poverty. In practice, however, social networks and norms of reciprocity disrupted these formal procedures, as village heads and other village officials in some villages tried to direct cash transfers to supporters, often using various tricks to do so without appearing to violate the formal procedures (such as redistributing the cash of those recipients who had not come to collect it). To cite just one example, the field report from Kalsel 2 notes that “Welfare distribution through budget allocations is often targeted at the groups of supporters of the village head (in the village head election). They incidentally are also from the close family circle of the village head. Therefore, the welfare distribution process is mostly aimed at building political legitimacy within the immediate family circle.” Such factionalized distribution of benefits was by no means universal, however.

Informal processes also led to more inclusive patterns in determining BLT recipients. Our researchers found that villagers were often critical of the selection process—both about the formal procedures as well about (suspected) interventions by the village head and other village officials. In fact, in some places, village officials faced significant demands from residents for allocations of these programs—regardless of whether they were formally entitled to them—and were very aware of the reality of, or potential for, perceptions of unfairness in distribution. An alternative approach, therefore, involved village officials adopting consultative and participatory mechanisms to determine who should receive these benefits, which in some cases included devising ways to share the payments across a larger number of recipients than were formally entitled to them. The most extreme example occurred in one village in NTB, where village officials first allocated the payments among the village’s 21 hamlets and then organized hamlet-level *musyawarah* to determine who would receive the direct cash payments. While there was a consensus that priority recipients would be the elderly, widows, and disabled persons, researchers found that hamlets devised six mechanisms for allocating (and, often, sharing) these payments: some

distributed only to those who were on the government's formal list, others shared them among a larger group of recipients. In short, there was a both a high level of adaptation of this national program, plus considerable local buy-in into how it was distributed.

Finally, when it comes to access to budgetary resources, a noteworthy finding concerns the importance of village leaders' cultivating ties with district (*kabupaten*) politicians. The considerable *Dana Desa* funds that villages have accessed since 2015 could have loosened the dependence of villages on the district government. Yet in virtually all the villages studied, village leaders still attempt to cultivate close ties with the district head or members of the district legislature (DPRD) and, in a few cases, local political party leaders, to obtain government funds for infrastructure or public service provision. Lobbying local officials for such resources was already a common practice before the COVID-19 pandemic, but seems to have intensified after villages were forced to allocate most of their *Dana Desa* to measures to address COVID-19. Village leaders vary greatly in their capacity to forge such links: some village heads (as in Kaltim 1) are very skilled in such lobbying while others lack the necessary contacts. In interviews, village leaders generally stressed the importance of having the support of someone in the district government, generally a DPRD member, who could escort (*mengawal*) a village project proposal through the selection procedures of the district government. Such support tends to take a clientelistic form, as village leaders are expected to reciprocate such support by helping the DPRD member to get elected. In sum, while our findings are necessarily preliminary, they point to the ways in which local politics shape not only how village funds are allocated at the micro level, but also how village leaders can access additional resources to supplement their regular allocations of *Dana Desa*.

G. Explaining Variation in Village Governance Regimes

This report has provided a preliminary discussion of how patterns of everyday governance encountered in the 18 villages in our study vary considerably. In some villages, the village heads are domineering figures supported by family networks and meek and passive village councils. In others, our researchers found proactive, approachable village heads who worked long days trying to meet the considerable expectations of vocal residents. In our discussion of different elements of village governance—from village elections and formal participatory structures to the responsiveness of village officials, and distribution patterns of village resources—we also observed considerable variation. In Figure 1 we provided a visual overview of this variation. In this section, we explore some explanations for these patterns. With a limited number of cases, these conclusions are necessarily tentative. Nonetheless, our findings are suggestive, and present a starting point for further analysis.

G.1. Socioeconomic Structure

In general, levels of economic development and diversity of income sources appear to have a significant impact on the nature of village governance, as expected. Almost all the highly exclusionary patterns of village governance uncovered by our researchers occurred in villages with agrarian economies, in which most villagers were poor farmers. In such places, researchers often struggled to engage ordinary villagers in discussions about village government and spending, with those approached often responding that they had no knowledge or interest in such affairs, instead devoting their energies to working long days in the fields, and to their family and religious obligations. The opposite situation tended to obtain in villages with more diverse and dynamic economies. For example, in one East Java village, the researcher described the residents of one particular hamlet as having a “metropolitan” lifestyle (more or less urbanized, many with middle-class employment) and also as having a reputation for high levels of civic engagement, including actively protesting against village and district government decisions that negatively affected them. In villages where researchers heard critical voices actively taking village leaders to task—such as Jatim 2 in East Java but also Kalsel 2 in South Kalimantan and, to lesser extent, Kaltim 1—these voices tended to come from, or be supported by, middle-class actors with stable sources of income.

In this light, it is instructive to explore the puzzling contrast between our two South Kalimantan villages. At first glance, little seems to separate these two fishing villages, which had similar economies and were located very close to one another. Yet Kalsel 1 had a domineering village head and passive population while Kalsel 2 had a very active village council, a history of protest, and a village head who attracted active and strong citizen criticism. On closer inspection, it seems that economic differences do help to explain this contrast. Though both villages are on the coast, in Kalsel 1 there are few boat owners and fishing is done with small boats, while Kalsel 2 is the home of a number of *bos kapal*, owners of big fishing boats, who employ a large number of fishers and have large incomes. These bosses are more wealthy and powerful than the village head, and their support for, and protection of, alternative voices might explain why a tradition of protest and criticism could develop.

Another reason prosperity and economic diversification might correlate with more responsive governance and active participation is that such economic development lessens villagers' dependence on state and village resources. It seems hardly a coincidence that Kaltim 1 not only has remarkably constructive and engaged villagers but that this is also the most prosperous village in this study. The recent palm oil boom, and the success of many villagers in developing their own palm oil smallholdings, generated significant incomes for villagers. The availability of stable livelihoods seems to have softened the intensity of political conflicts within the village. In regions where the villages we studied were less prosperous (Banten and South Sulawesi), village politics tend to take on a winner-takes-all dynamic, with competition for the position of village head becoming quite heated because of the importance of the access it provides to much-coveted jobs and village budgets it provides. In more prosperous Kaltim 1, by contrast, the intensity of village political competition seems to have cooled because the resources controlled by the village head no longer overshadow the incomes that villagers derive from their own plantation.

It should be stressed, however, that this relationship between economic structure and governance was by no means determinative. Some of the villages studied do not display this relationship. NTB 1, a poor, agrarian village, has a new reforming village head. On the other end of the economic spectrum, one village in North Sumatra is the capital of its subdistrict and has, at least in part, a relatively urban and middle-class population. Yet this village is governed by leaders who wield traditional *adat* authority, directing most budgetary resources toward traditional agricultural needs. In short, this impact of economic structures on village governance deserves further exploration with a wider range of cases.

G.2. Ethnicity

Ethnic minorities may experience discrimination in village fund allocations, and they may exclude themselves from participating in formal village affairs. Another explanation for the varied character of village governance is the ethnic composition of the village. Some of the villages studied (Bali 2, Sulse 1, Sulse 2, and Sumsel 1) have highly ethnically and, to a lesser extent, religiously pluralist societies. While this appears not to be a sufficient condition for the emergence of exclusionary regimes, it does appear to be an important contributing factor in some cases. Especially where ethnic or religious pluralism emerged as a result of migration and where there is a history of violent ethnic conflict, we observed two patterns. First, there is discrimination against ethnic minorities, including in the allocation of village funds. In one village in South Kalimantan, village leaders described the hamlet inhabited by the Javanese minority as deserving only *dana sisa* (remnant funds) once more “important” hamlets had been prioritized. The hamlet’s residents also experienced exclusion from village political office and formal participation. Second, there is relative passivity or withdrawal of members of these communities from village affairs. One researcher summarized the attitude of ethnic minorities in one village in South Sulawesi as *mencari aman* (seeking safety): cognizant of their insecurity or vulnerability, they effectively abstained from consultative meetings and other forms of participation, enabling a relatively exclusionary village government dominated by members of the area’s indigenous ethnic group. This was a village where residents related stories of village funds being expended on narrowly self-serving purposes, such as building drainage to serve the private homes of village officials and their relatives. We observed such patterns of ethnically based exclusion in at least four villages (in South Sulawesi, South Kalimantan, South Sumatra, and North Sumatra). Again, however, this is not the whole story because in other ethnically plural villages we observed relatively open village governments. In Kaltim

1, for example, ethnic tensions were ameliorated by a high degree of intermarriage between members of local groups and the primarily Javanese migrants, and by their shared participation in traditionalist Islamic ritual practices.

Ethnic competition can also give rise to internal tension over competition for resources, and to patterns of divided government. In villages where ethnic divisions coincided with settlement patterns, ethnic tensions can become more aggravated when competition over infrastructure allocations from the village budget among hamlets acquires an ethnic flavor. In Bali 2, people from different castes live in different parts of the village. In 2015, this dynamic stimulated residents to vote largely along ethnic lines, and the village head elections turned into a competition between ethnic groups. This tension was avoided in the subsequent election because the higher caste candidate did not field a candidate.

G.3. Informal Institutions and Traditional Authority Structures

One of the strongest findings concerned the correlation between strength of informal “traditional” authority structures based on *adat*, religion, and ethnicity, and more exclusionary patterns of village governance. Previous LLI studies tended to emphasize the role of *adat* institutions in strengthening accountability of village government, especially by providing checks on the authority of the village head and village officials in periods when the BPDs or equivalent institutions lacked power to hold village government to account (see e.g., Evers 2000, 65; Wetterberg, Jellema, and Dharmawan 2013, 81). While there surely are many villages in Indonesia where *adat* bodies provide a means for expression of a wide range of citizen preferences, our fieldwork findings also point toward their exclusionary potential and their role in reproducing social hierarchies. This was particularly evident in North Sumatra villages where the elites were dominated by *raja huta* (*adat* chiefs whose source of authority derived from their status within the village’s founding clan and their resulting control over land), and in two villages where the village head relied largely on religious authority (i.e., coming from a family of religious leaders) for support. In some cases, religious authority (notably in South Kalimantan and Banten) was also important in bolstering the authority of unresponsive village heads in charge of exclusionary patterns of governance (in these two cases the village head was the son of a revered local religious leader). But this too was not uniform. In two other villages (in NTB and East Java), reforming village heads had links to Islamic political parties and organizations and used these links to build political support within the village (in the NTB case, overthrowing the former pattern of aristocratic dominance). The overall logic, however, is clear. When village heads and other village leaders have access to traditional sources of authority and hierarchy, they can use them to bolster their positions, reducing their need to rely on performance legitimacy and democratic accountability to remain in power. As a result, such leaders can run their villages on a largely exclusionary basis.

These three explanations for variation in the character of village governance could be read as hypotheses developed from the fieldwork in the 18 villages. A larger study involving more villages would be needed to explore their validity.

H. Conclusion and Recommendations

This report has surveyed patterns of village governance in 18 Indonesian villages, analyzing and providing tentative explanations for the variation encountered. We identified some commonalities in all these villages, such as the limited inclusiveness and effectiveness of the village consultative meetings. Even so, we conclude that village governance varies greatly across Indonesia, both in the nature and quality of participation by ordinary villagers, as well as in the character of village governance. While some villages displayed relatively high levels of participation and quite responsive village governments with leaders committed to inclusive and open styles of governing, in other villages residents were largely apathetic and disempowered, and village heads dominated public affairs without meaningful supervision by the public or by other bodies. Our analysis of key village institutions—the village head, the village apparatus, and the village consultative council (BPD)—suggests that these patterns tend to cohere within particular villages: in some villages active and responsive village heads were being critically supervised by participatory BPDs, while in others collusion by the village with members of the village apparatus and the BPD (often aided by family relationships) facilitated corruption and stifled opposition. While our findings suggest there has been considerable progress in improving the quality of village governance since the end of the New Order period, the persistent variation points to the stubbornness of certain impediments to better governance (Box 1).

Box 1. Continuity and Change in Village Government

Our study offers insights into long-term patterns of continuity and change in village governance when read in light of earlier, similar studies sponsored by the World Bank, notably the LLI (Local Level Institutions) 1, 2, and 3 studies, which fielded teams in 1996, 2000–01, and 2012 respectively. While we did not replicate the methodology of these earlier studies, our research addressed many of the same issues and studied a comparable number of villages. In the context of these earlier studies, our findings confirm a long-term trend toward stronger and more accountable village government, at least when compared to the New Order period. The LLI 1 study describes a pattern of authoritarian-era village government where village heads tended to feel they were accountable to district leaders rather than village residents, residents had few avenues to express their preferences, consultative bodies were largely subservient to village heads, village accounts were generally in a parlous state, project procedures were routinely ignored, egregious corruption scandals went unresolved, and district governments were critical in selecting village-level projects (Evers 2000).

While traces of this era remain, subsequent LLI rounds pointed to, first, a period of decline in the role of village government and then a divergence, with village government strengthening in some regions but stagnating or declining in quality in others (Wetterberg, Jellema, and Dharmawan 2013, iii, 58). Resonating with our own study, LLI3 showed that reformist village leadership can be critical to improving village governance, while “Autocratic and unresponsive village heads...thrive [where] there is no effective formal mechanism of control in the village” (ibid., 12). Other significant continuities include the prevalence of nepotistic appointment and succession patterns in worse-governed villages (Evers 2000, 66–67), the highly varied but generally low levels of participation by citizens in development planning and village affairs (Wetterberg, Jellema, and Dharmawan 2013, vi, 11), and low participation by women in village government (ibid., 71). The persistence of such problems over more than two decades of village governance reform suggests a need both for more focused study of the sources of these problems and for more experimentation with methods to reduce them.

This varied quality of village governance has three potential sources: degree of economic diversification, ethnic diversity, and strength of informal and traditional institutions. This conclusion needs to be read in the light of the limitations of this study. With its focus on just 18 villages, the study

does not fully examine these explanatory sources, and points toward the need for larger-scale and more systematic research. It is also important to note that this study was conducted 18 months into the COVID-19 pandemic, which greatly affected village governance and, hence, our observations.

Another key implication of our research is that normal procedures and regulations that aim to strengthen village governance should consider the incentives that arise from informal institutions and practices. Village governance is a product of the interaction between formal and informal institutions. Consequently, efforts to strengthen village governance should not stop at proposing formal procedures and regulations and should engage more directly with the incentives that arise from informal institutions and practices, such as informal networks, norms of reciprocity, and the exchanges of favors arising out of village head elections. Often initiatives at strengthening village governance focus on improving regulations and strengthening the capacities of village officials, while ignoring how incentives generated by informal institutions can encourage officials to undermine and ignore such regulations. Given the considerable impact that informal institutions and practices have on village governance, efforts to strengthen village governance need to engage directly with this informality. We wrote this report partially with this aim in mind, and hope that the analysis provides readers with an entry point for understanding how informality shapes village governance.

This “informality-sensitive” approach entails paying close attention to the incentive structures generated by informal institutions and practices, with a particular focus on identifying elements of these incentive structures that could be ameliorated or at least influenced by outside interventions.

This means not only that reform initiatives should be grounded in an understanding of these incentive structures, but also that such interventions and their impacts should be analyzed and evaluated for their potential effects. Our recommendations reflect concrete examples of such an approach. For example, our proposal to strengthen meritocratic appointment to village government positions flows from our observation that, in many villages, such positions are dominated by relatives of the village head, appointed through nontransparent processes, with deleterious consequences for the quality of village government. Similarly, our recommendation that the government should engage in greater efforts to curtail vote buying and reduce the costs of election campaigns is related to our observation that such campaign costs create incentives that can encourage corruption in village heads and otherwise undermine the quality of governance. In that light, we emphasize that our proposals are not exhaustive, as we limit ourselves to issues that were most salient in our research findings. We also stress that, to be actionable, such proposals would need processes of engagement and dialogue with and within relevant government authorities and, where feasible, experimentation with potential institutional improvements.

Our informality-sensitive approach to strengthening village governance leads to six recommendations:

- 1. Strengthen meritocratic appointment for village officials and take steps to ensure democratic elections of BPD members.** The presence of persons with family ties to the village head in the BPD and village government undermines supervisory mechanisms and horizontal accountability and facilitates the collaborative forms of corruption that so regularly weaken village governance. Village heads undermine oversight mechanisms by putting their family members in important positions and are helped by regulatory inconsistencies concerning appointment processes and lack of transparency in how such appointments are made. An outright ban on relatives of the

village head holding public positions in the same village would likely run afoul of Indonesian constitutional law (a ban on dynastic nominations for regional head elections was overturned by the Constitutional Court in 2015). Still, efforts could be taken to more consistently ensure that appointments of BPD members are fully democratic (selected through open elections rather than through village *musyawarah*) and that those of *perangkat desa* involve open and transparent processes, in coordination with higher levels of government at the subdistrict and district level, and, where possible, involve external experts such as university academics. A first step would involve systematic identification and study of best practices that have already been put in place in provinces and districts across Indonesia for possible replication elsewhere.

- 2. Include more effective monitoring in efforts to strengthen village governance, which could help to make village head elections cheaper, prevent vote buying, and encourage collective organization of campaign events.** Given the interplay between formal and informal institutions, efforts to strengthen village governance need to engage closely with the nature of village head elections. Election campaigns often involve extensive exchanges of favors, which affect the character of village governance. In exchange for the support they received when winning their election, village heads in many locations subsequently manipulate allocation of village resources, such as the selection of welfare recipients, allocation of contracts and projects, and selection of village officials. The quality of village governance is also undermined by the large sums of money candidates spend during their campaigns, especially on vote buying, as successful candidates need to recover such investments, mostly through corrupt practices. In that light, we conclude that the kind of electoral accountability provided by village head elections is mixed: while elections do stimulate and reward good performance, in many locations they require candidates to incur personal and monetary debts that undermine their future performance. Any serious attempt to strengthen village governance needs to involve efforts to reduce the burden of such debts. While such a pathway will not be easy, given that vote buying and other forms of patronage are so established in village elections, the fact that they occur now in the virtual absence of monitoring and enforcement by external bodies does provide opportunities for reform.

- 3. Take additional measures to reduce discretion exercised by political actors in providing villages with access to district-level funds.** We found that, despite the availability of *Dana Desa* provided by the central government, village officials often rely on, and lobby for, additional funding from district governments for investments in infrastructure and other purposes. This dependence on such inputs was presumably exacerbated during our research by the diversion of *Dana Desa* to emergency COVID-19 measures. Accessing such funds involves both formal procedures (village heads need to submit elaborate proposals) and informal exchanges of favors, since the success of such proposals generally depends on the support of an influential sponsor within the district government or legislature. Such exchanges of favors are often clientelistic in nature, as with instances we found of legislators using such budgets to cultivate electoral support. The effect of such practices is that well-connected villages—more precisely, villages with well-connected village heads—have the potential to corner most funds at the expense of villages lacking influential contacts, continuing a pattern that has been observed since earlier in the post-New Order period (see e.g., Wetterberg, Jellema, and Dharmawan 2013, 84).

- 4. Our findings caution against a continued use of village funds for implementing central government policies.** During the COVID-19 pandemic, the emergency use of village funds was justified. But our researchers observed that many of the original aims of the Village Law's granting of budgets to autonomous villages fell by the wayside, including stimulating participation, encouraging creativity and adaptation to local circumstances, strengthening village infrastructure, and reducing dependence on district governments. After the experience of the pandemic, the central government might be tempted to require village governments to spend their budgets on other government goals. This temptation should be resisted.

- 5. Make more effort to address barriers for villagers, particularly for women, to participate in consultative village meetings.** We found the formal participation activities mandated by the Village Law (such as the *musrenbang desa*) are dominated by village notables with little attendance let alone participation by ordinary villagers. Women were notably absent and silent during most such meetings. Improving this situation should include efforts to address misconceptions, such as the common idea that these meetings are only for officials and prominent community members. In addition, such meetings should be publicly announced (instead of sending invitations to selected villagers) and the settings of these meetings should be more open and inviting for people (particularly women) to speak.

- 6. Increase and enforce measures to ensure a higher ratio of female village heads, BPD members, and other village officials.** We found village governance a highly male-dominated sphere: village heads are almost exclusively men, village meetings are male-dominated, and most village officials and BPD members are male. When women have a prominent role in formal spaces of village government, they are often in gender-defined positions (e.g., with the PKK and *posyandu*) rather than in general roles. At the same time, our research team encountered very capable informal female leaders who play important yet often behind-the-scenes roles in connecting citizens to services and other aspects of informal village governance. More active efforts to ensure the selection of female village heads and other village officials could not only strengthen governance but also provide models of female community leadership and, over the long term, address gender inequality. Experience elsewhere, especially in India, suggests that gender quotas and reservations at the village level can have a positive impact on directing allocations toward items directly relevant to women (Chattopadhyay and Duflo 2004). Indonesia has considerable experience in this area. The KDP and PNPM programs both included measures to ensure that women's voices were heard in the development planning process. Gender quotas have been successfully introduced in Indonesia's legislatures. Our researchers also found that some districts have already introduced measures to ensure women's representation in BPDs. Similar quotas or reserved seats could be piloted in selected districts at the village level, building on practices already pioneered in some districts, as could adoption of gender quotas for village head positions.

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Annex

Table A.1: Village Characteristics

	Sumut		Sumsel		Banten	
	1	2	1	2	1	2
Geographic Characteristics						
Topography	Valley	Valley	Plain	Plain	Plain	Plain
Coastal	No	No	No	No	No	No
Distance to the subdistrict office (km)	1	6	1	3	6	7
Distance to the district office (km)	25	35	35	34	27	22
Demographic Characteristics						
Main income source	Agriculture	Agriculture	Agriculture	Agriculture	Agriculture	Agriculture
Multi-ethnic	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Multi-religious	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	No
Social Capital Measures						
Community self-help (<i>gotong royong</i>)	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
No. of community organizations	11	6	10	7	8	4
Women's groups	1	1	4	1	1	1
Youth groups	1	0	1	1	1	1
Customary institutions	0	0	1	1	0	0
Farmers' groups	8	5	4	3	6	2
Community water management	0	0	0	0	0	0
Community groups	1	0	0	1	0	0

	Jatim		Bali		NTB	
	1	2	1	2	1	2
Geographic Characteristics						
Topography	Plain	Plain	Plain	Plain	Plain	Plain
Coastal	No	No	No	Yes	Yes	No
Distance to the subdistrict office (km)	5	8	2	2	1	7
Distance to the district office (km)	17	16	22	23	23	24
Demographic Characteristics						
Main income source	Agriculture	Agriculture	Agriculture	Agriculture	Agriculture	Agriculture
Multi-ethnic	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
Multi-religious	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No
Social Capital Measures						
Community self-help (<i>gotong royong</i>)	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
No. of community organizations	8	8	13	15	75	16
Women's groups	1	1	1	10	1	1
Youth groups	1	1	1	1	1	1
Customary institutions	1	1	2	1	0	1
Farmers' groups	3	3	1	3	32	12
Community water management	2	1	1	0	4	0
Community groups	0	1	7	0	37	1

	Kaltim		Kasel		Susel	
	1	2	1	2	1	2
Geographic Characteristics						
Topography	Plain	Plain	Plain	Plain	Plain	Peak/slope
Coastal	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
Distance to the subdistrict office (km)	16	3	5	17	5	7
Distance to the district office (km)	68	85	28	34	61	60
Demographic Characteristics						
Main income source	Wholesale/ retail and restaurants	Agriculture	Agriculture	Agriculture	Agriculture	Agriculture
Multi-ethnic	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Multi-religious	Yes	No	No	No	Yes	Yes
Social Capital Measures						
Community self-help (<i>gotong royong</i>)	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
No. of community organizations	8	28	29	21	16	29
Women's groups	1	1	23	1	1	1
Youth groups	1	1	0	1	1	1
Customary institutions	1	1	0	0	0	2
Farmers' groups	3	5	6	17	14	23
Community water management	0	0	0	1	0	2
Community groups	2	20	0	1	0	0

Table A.2: Backgrounds of Village Heads

Name of village	Village head family of previous village head?	Incumbent wins/loses in the last election?	Comments
Bali 1	No	Loss	Village head comes from a family of farmers. He worked for a mineral water company and as a seller of salmon fish crackers. Recently returned to the village.
Bali 2	No	Loss	Village head was from a farming family. His father is a fairly well-to-do grape farmer with 5 hectares of arable land, and a religious leader. His mother is a trader.
Banten 1	No	Loss	Village head worked as a trader. He has a plantation products shop in the market in a nearby city. His father is a prominent religious leader and head of an Islamic boarding school who is respected by community members and was able to influence the vote.
Banten 2	Yes	Did not stand	From 2006 to 2010, the village head worked as an employee of three different universities. In 2011–2013 he became a plastic waste entrepreneur. In 2015–2021 he was a member of the village BPD. His brother was village head during 2010–2015 and 2015–2021. Having parents who work as teachers, he became an entrepreneur in a nearby city. His mother-in-law is an RT head.
Jatim 1	No	Loss	Village head is a duck breeder. Neither his parents nor his siblings served as village heads or village officials previously. His election was partly due to residents' dissatisfaction with the old village head.
Jatim 2	Yes	Win	Village head is a moderately wealthy farmer and a descendant of previous village heads. The village's first head was his great-grandfather, and the third was his father. The current head has served three periods: 2001–2007, 2007–2013, and 2019–2025.
Kassel 1	No (through wife)	Win	Village head comes from a respected religious family and married the daughter of one of the village's first heads. His religious knowledge made him very influential. He is in his third term as village head: 1998–2006, 2006–2011, 2017–2023.
Kassel 2	Yes	Did not stand	Village head's father served as village head during the New Order. The current head worked for a timber company in South Kalimantan and West Java. After getting laid off, his extended family called him back to the village to run in the village head election.
Kaltim 1	Yes	Loss	Village head is the son of a respected village leader, a retired civil servant and deputy village head and head of council of the village. He has a large kinship network, with many family members occupying important roles (including head of the BPD) in the village.

Name of village	Village head family of previous village head?	Incumbent wins/loses in the last election?	Comments
Kaltim 2	No	Win	The village head's parents are ordinary farmers, none of whom has served as a village head or been involved in politics. He used to work cleaning ditches in a nearby village and at a factory where he was in charge of a cleaning service and then managed the factory inventory.
NTB 1	No	Did not stand	Village head's parents were carpenters in the village: they discouraged their son from entering village politics. He did receive financial support from his parents-in-law for his campaign. He is a lecturer/party activist.
NTB 2	No	Loss	Village head's parents were traders and builders when he was young. In his old age, the village head is also a spiritual teacher with many followers, especially among the elderly. His family is relatively prosperous: his four siblings include a building entrepreneur, a teacher/public servant, and a Wi-Fi network entrepreneur.
Sulsel 1	No	Win	Village head has a large family in the village; an uncle currently serves as head of a nearby village. He received campaign donations from wealthy family members, including from one who is a manager in the state plantation company, PTPN XIV. This connection also helped him to mobilize electoral support from PTPN XIV employees during his election.
Sulsel 2	Yes	Loss	Village head's father served as the first village head, holding office 1997–2008. His uncle also served as village head in a nearby village, 2003–2009.
Sumsel 1	Yes	Did not stand	Prior to being elected, the village head was a member of the village apparatus and acted in the village head position for a period. He is a traditional farmer and has several rice fields and gardens. He has kinship links with all village officials and numerous leaders of key village institutions.
Sumsel 2	Yes	Loss	The village head's parents are farmers. One sibling is currently serving as the BUMDES (village enterprise) treasurer. His father-in-law stood as a DPRD candidate for the United Development Party (PPP) in 2019 and still serves in a local party office and as Chair of the Indonesian Ulama Council (MUI) in the subdistrict.
Sumut 1	Yes	Win	Village head has a background as a traditional <i>adat</i> figure which greatly strengthens his position, being one of the village's <i>raja huta</i> (a traditional leadership position based on descent from one of the village's founding families).
Sumut 2	Yes	Win	Village head is also a descendant of a founding village family, though another such family dominated the village head position for approximately 30 years. The current head first served as village head in 2008–2013.

Table A.3: Village Consultative Bodies (BPDs)

Village	Score *	Summary of functioning of BPD	Selection process of BPD members
Sumsel 1	1	The BPD operates like a “rubber stamp.” Its role and activity do not extend beyond being a master of ceremonies at village consultative meetings.	BPD members were elected, per hamlet. Those elected included women as well as migrants.
Sumsel 2	1	The BPD is passive and rarely takes any initiative.	The village head manages to put his people in the BPD.
Jatim 1	5	The BPD and particularly its chairperson regularly provide the village government with suggestions and take an active and constructive role during activities.	Most of the BPD members were selected by the village head, but some new members have been elected.
Jatim 2	4	The BPD is quite active and takes initiatives in village affairs.	Hamlet heads are more influential than the village head in appointment of BPD members.
NTB 1	5	The BPD is relatively active in village <i>musyawarah</i> .	The selection process is open to everyone, with the election taking place in village <i>musyawarah</i> attended by community and religious leaders.
NTB 2	3	The BPD is very active in providing inputs into the village government and is involved actively in village programs.	Most of the members of the BPD have a family relationship with the sitting village head.
Bali 1	3	The BPD is not at all active in controlling the village governance.	BPD members are appointed through an open selection process whereby individuals apply to be members.
Bali 2	3	The BPD takes an active and largely oppositional role, regularly clashing with the village head and apparatus. A losing candidate in the last village head election is vice-chairperson.	The BPD election has been arranged in a specific way by the Secretary of Village.
Sulsel 1	1	The BPD is relatively inactive; no village regulations have been produced.	Members are directly elected, per hamlet.
Sulsel 2	5	The BPD plays a very effective role monitoring the functioning of the village head. As the village head is new and relatively inexperienced, BPD members feel their active supervision is required.	In some hamlets, BPD members are chosen through elections, other hamlets use public meetings. All BPD members were part of the village head’s success team (<i>tim sukses</i>) during the village election.
Kalsel 1	2	The BPD is passive and rarely takes any initiative. Most members feel uncomfortable expressing criticism of village officials, let alone the village head.	BPD members are selected through open elections, but some elected members have close relationships with the village head, allowing him to influence their decisions.

Village	Score *	Summary of functioning of BPD	Selection process of BPD members
Kalsel 2	5	The BPD regularly criticizes the village head and takes a largely oppositional role.	The BPD members were selected by the villagers through open elections.
Banten 1	1	The BPD rarely holds meetings and never actively seeks to collect views of community members on village affairs.	Several members were <i>tim sukses</i> members in the village head's election campaign and have close personal relations with him.
Banten 2	1	The BPD is passive and tends to follow the agenda of the village head. During the fieldwork, no BPD activities or meetings took place. Most villagers do not know who the BPD members are.	All members of the BPD are either friends or relatives of the village head. They all have been selected by the village head, without elections taking place.
Sumut 1	4	The BPD is very active in supervising the village government. It has regular meetings but its members also conveys their concerns through regular informal meetings. The BPD is less direct when it comes to criticizing individual officials.	BPD members are now selected through open elections, which has made the BPD more representative than previously.
Sumut 2	1	The BPD tends to be passive and is little known by villagers. Few activities or meetings are organized, as the BPD only plays a role in formal village meetings.	Members of the BPD are elected in the village consultative meeting by a selected group of village leaders who are invited to attend.
Kaltim 1	5	The BPD is active; they work in providing a formal channel for equality-based village aspirations in the development process of the village.	The process of selecting BPD members was competitive and open without using money politics.
Kaltim 2	1	Most villagers do not know who the members of the BPD are. They only know the head of the BPD.	The current BPD is chosen by only 15 RT plus 5 community leaders; officials cited the COVID-19 pandemic as the reason for this circumscribed selection process.

* This score was in response to the statement "The BPD is active and takes initiatives to strengthen village governance," with 5 as the most positive evaluation possible, and 1 as the most negative.

Table A.4: Village Consultative Meetings Held During Fieldwork in the 18 Villages

Village	No. and type of meeting	Average duration	Av. no. participants	Who attended? ^a	Participation by ordinary villagers
Bali 1	1 Musdus	N/A	N/A	N/A	Villagers could express preferences through Google forms.
Bali 2	7 Musdus	2 hours 25 minutes	50	8 village officials; ±19 community officials; ±23 ordinary villagers	Not really. When they spoke (in 2 out of 7 meetings) villagers were briefed beforehand on which topics to discuss.
Banten 1	1 Musdes	N/A	36	28 village officials; 8 community official; no ordinary villagers	No ordinary villagers attended the <i>Musdes</i> .
Banten 2	No meeting during research period				
Jatim 1	1 Musdus and 1 Musdes	1 hour and 7.5 minutes	±22	N/A	Participation was limited to village officials and community leaders.
Jatim 2	Rapat Seleksi Perangkat Desa	1 hour and 40 minutes	13	12 village officials; 1 community official (Karang Taruna)	No ordinary villagers attended the <i>musyawarah</i> .
Kalsel 1	Musdes	1 hour 7 minutes	21	18 village officials; 2 community officials; 1 ordinary villager	None
Kalsel 2	1 Musdes	2 hours 15 min	20	20 village officials	No ordinary villagers attended the <i>Musdes</i> .
Kaltim 1	No meeting during research period				
Kaltim 2	No meeting during research period				
NTB 1	No meeting during research period				
NTB 2	No meeting during research period				
Sulsel 1	4 Musdus	2 hours 17 min	±45	±8 village officials; ±6 community officials; ±33 ordinary villagers	Yes, ordinary villagers were quite active during the session.
Sulsel 2	1 Musdes	3 hours 22 min	27	N/A	Some villagers gave inputs on how the distribution should work.
Sumsel 1	1 Musrenbangdes	2 hours	40	18 village officials; 18 community villagers; ±4 ordinary villagers	Yes, ordinary villagers openly conveyed their proposals and aspirations.

Village	No. and type of meeting	Average duration	Av. no. participants	Who attended? ^a	Participation by ordinary villagers
Sumsel 2	1 Musrenbangdes	2 hours	41	±20 village officials; ±12 community officials; ±8 ordinary villagers	No, the event was limited to informing the community about proposals; a mere formality.
Sumut 1	1 Musrenbang	1 hour and 14 minutes	28	19 village officials; 7 community officials; 2 ordinary villagers	Yes, the two ordinary villagers present provided their inputs and complaints.
Sumut 2	1 Musrenbang	1 hour	22	15 village officials; 7 community officials; no ordinary villager	None; ordinary villagers were not invited to the meeting.

The definition of the three groups is as follows:

Village officials: villagers who work within, and/or for the village government bodies/functions (e.g., BPD members, village/hamlet leaders, RT/RW leaders, etc.).

Community officials: villagers with specific title/professions/role relevant to the community development (e.g., PAUD teachers, midwives, village community facilitators, etc.).

Ordinary villagers: villagers without specific title/professions/role relevant to the community development.



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