

## Village Head Election Contention and Governance Disruption: A Case Study of Benteng, East Luwu

Yusriah Amaliah<sup>1</sup>, Andi M. Ferian Maha Putra Parial<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Departement of Government Studies, Universitas Hasanuddin, Indonesia

<sup>2</sup>Departement of Government Studies, Universitas Pepabri Makassar, Indonesia

Corresponding author: [yusriahamaliah@unhas.ac.id](mailto:yusriahamaliah@unhas.ac.id)

Received: 14 November 2025; Revised: 13 January 2026; Accepted: 14 January 2026

**ABSTRACT** - This article examines how electoral contention in village head elections disrupts day-to-day village governance. Framed around the question of how political competition affects administrative stability at the village level, the study conceptualizes elections as a governance stress test. Using a qualitative single-case study of Benteng Village in East Luwu, Indonesia, the research draws on semi-structured interviews, direct observation, and analysis of village budget documents from 2019-2021. The findings reveal three interconnected mechanisms of governance disruption. First, intense electoral contestation undermined organizational cohesion within the village apparatus through loyalty pressures and staff instability. Second, post-election governance was marked by elite-dominated deliberation, weakening inclusive participation, particularly among women and youth. Third, electoral dynamics reshaped budget priorities and exposed integrity vulnerabilities, contributing to administrative delays and declining public trust. The article contributes theoretically by linking electoral contention to governance performance through a mechanism as based framework, extending debates on clientelism, participatory governance, and collaborative capacity. Practically, it highlights the need for neutral leadership transitions, strengthened deliberative safeguards, and proactive transparency to protect village governance from electoral shocks.

**Keywords:** *Local Politics, Village Governance, Electoral Contention, Elite Capture, Deliberative Participation*

Copyright © 2026 by the Authors. Published by the Pusat Penelitian Ilmu Sosial dan Humaniora Kontemporer, Indonesia. This is an open access article distributed under the terms of the CC BY-SA Licence (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0>).

**How to Cite:** Amaliah, Y., & Parial, A. M. F. M. P. (2026). Village Head Election Contention and Governance Disruption: A Case Study of Benteng, East Luwu. *Journal of Contemporary Local Politics*, 5(1), 1-13. <https://doi.org/10.46507/jclp.v5i1.762>

**Permalink/DOI:** <https://doi.org/10.46507/jclp.v5i1.762>

## Introduction

Village head elections are pivotal arenas of local power in Indonesia, shaping everyday administration, resource allocation, and social cohesion at the lowest tier of government. Under the Village Law, expanding fiscal transfers and mandates transformed villages into sites where electoral competition intersects with routine governance, often producing tensions in planning, budgeting, participation, and integrity mechanism (Antlöv et al., 2016). Internationally, research shows the political competition can both sharpen accountability and under conditions of clientelism and weak safeguards, strain organizational capacity and service delivery (Batley & Mcloughlin, 2015; Beck, 2016).

Recent Indonesian scholarship documents how clientelistic exchanges and patronage pervade local contests, influencing bureaucratic behavior and distributive outcomes (Aspinall & Berenschot, 2019). Studies of village fiscal decentralization highlight elite, mediated deliberation and uneven transparency in the use of the village fund contribution (Lewis, 2017; Sutiyo & Maharjan, 2017). Work on participatory forums emphasizes persistent dominance by local notables and exclusion of women and youth, despite formal rules (Antlöv et al., 2016; Fung, 2015). During crises, targeting and politicization of social assistance further complicate equity and legitimacy (Aspinall & Warburton, 2018). Yet, there remains a gap on the specific mechanisms through which a contentious village election disrupts the politics administration nexus, recast deliberation, and reorders budget priorities at the village level over a short horizon.

Building on this gap, this study shifts attention from electoral outcomes to the mechanism through which electoral contention reshapes routine governance practices at the village level. Elections are approached not merely as democratic procedures but as politically charged moments that may destabilize administrative routines, alter deliberative behaviour, and reconfigure fiscal decision making. In this sense, village head elections are conceptualized as a “governance stress test”, a perspective that aligns with scholarship emphasizing how political competition can expose latent institutional weaknesses and coordination failures in decentralized settings (Ansell & Gash, 2008).

The article asks, how does electoral contention in village head elections disrupt day to day village governance? Given the qualitative single case design, the study does not test causal hypotheses. Instead, it advances a set of analytical propositions that guide empirical analysis through process tracing and pattern matching. First, electoral contention is expected to undermine organizational cohesion within the village apparatus, as political alignment becomes intertwined with bureaucratic roles, increasing coordination costs and staff instability (Grindle, 2017). Second, electoral competition tends to reshape deliberative arenas in ways that privilege politically connected actors, weakening inclusive participation and limiting the voice of women and youth, despite formal participatory arrangements (Cornwall, 2016; Mansbridge et al., 2012). Third, heightened political contestation is likely to generate volatility in budgetary priorities and strain integrity safeguards, particularly in the allocation of social assistance and routine expenditures, where discretion and political incentives intersect (De Waal, 2015; Hickey et al., 2019). Throughout the analysis, causal claims are framed cautiously, using evidence-based language such as suggests and indicates, consistent with qualitative inference standards.

Benteng Village in East Luwu Regency is selected as a theoretically informative case rather than for statistical representativeness. The case approximates a critical case in which intense electoral competition coincided with leadership transition, expanded fiscal authority at the village

level, and crisis governance during the COVID-19 period. Such a configuration offers strong analytical leverage to observe how political contention interacts with administrative capacity, deliberative institutions, and fiscal management within a compressed time frame (Priya, 2021; Ylikoski & Zahle, 2019). While the findings are not intended to yield probabilistic generalization, the Benteng case enables in depth examination of governance disruption mechanisms that are plausibly present in other villages facing competitive elections under conditions of institutional fragility and politized resource allocation.

Accordingly, this article aims to trace these governance disruption mechanisms in Benteng Village and to derive analytically grounded safeguards for post-election leadership transitions, inclusive deliberation, and proactive transparency. By foregrounding mechanisms rather than outcomes, the study contributes to broader debates on decentralization and local democracy, while offering practical insights for practitioners concerned with protecting administrative stability and public trust in post-electoral village governance.

## **Method**

To address how electoral contention disrupts village governance, this study employs a qualitative single case design focused on Benteng Village and is embedded within a problem solving, mechanis-oriented framework. Benteng is selected as a theoretically informative, most likely case rather than for statistical representativeness, as the village experienced intense electoral contestation that coincided with leadership transition, expanded village fiscal authority, and crisis governance during the COVID-19 period. This configuration provides strong analytical leverage to trace how electoral dynamics interact with administrative capacity, deliberative institutions, and fiscal decision making within a short temporal horizon. The research design operationalizes three interrelated governance problems, organizational frictions within the village apparatus, elite-centered decision making and participation deficits, and volatility in budget priorities and integrity safeguards-each linked to analytical propositions guiding empirical inquiry. Electoral contention is proxied through participation breadth in deliberation forums, procedural transparency practices, and changes in budget composition and stability across fiscal years.

Fieldwork was conducted over a six-month period between 2022 and 2023 and relied on multiple data sources to enable triangulation. These include village public finance documents, particularly the Village Fund and Village Fund Allocation for the 2019–2021 fiscal years, covering priority line items, payroll expenditures, and operating outlays, as well as minutes or notes from formal village meetings, transparency boards and public notices, and contemporaneous documentary traces such as grievance messages circulated through informal and digital community channels. Primary qualitative data were collected through semi-structured interviews with 18 informants selected using purposive sampling and refined through limited snowballing to capture diverse perspectives. Informants comprised village government officials, members of the Village Consultative Body, basic service cadres, and village residents, including women and youth. Interviews explored experiences of administrative coordination, deliberation practices, political pressures, targeting rules, and integrity safeguards. All sources were systematically cataloged in an audit trail with timestamps and provenance metadata, and ethical safeguards included informed consent, anonymization, and secure data storage.

Data analysis proceeded in three iterative stages. First, descriptive public finance analysis was used to compute expenditure shares and year-on-year shifts across key categories such as direct cash assistance, health, infrastructure, personnel, and operations, and to compare budget composition between the Village Fund and Village Fund Allocation. Second, thematic coding of interview transcripts and documentary materials identified mechanisms linking electoral contention to administrative organization, deliberation, and integrity, with codes grouped into higher-order categories and examined through process tracing and contribution analysis to assess causal plausibility. Third, pattern matching was applied to evaluate the alignment between observed indicators and the study's analytical propositions, with discrepant evidence used to refine interpretation. Robustness was strengthened through source triangulation, cross-year budget comparisons, negative case searches, and member verification of factual details. While the single-case design and potential reporting bias constitute limitations, these were mitigated through reliance on convergent evidence and transparent documentation of analytic decisions. The researcher's positionality as an academic with prior engagement in governance research informed access and interpretation but was addressed reflexively through systematic cross-checking of interview accounts against documentary evidence and the use of cautious, evidence-based language when drawing analytical inferences.

## **Result and Discussion**

The contest for the Village Head Election in Benteng shows how political competition can interfere with daily governance. The following analysis traces the three main mechanisms of the disruption, namely organizational fragmentation, narrowing of the space for deliberation, and fiscal instability that arises through the interaction between electoral dynamics, administrative capacity, and local power relations. This mechanism-based approach is in line with the process tracing method which emphasizes the interconnectedness between processes in explaining village governance disruptions (George & Bennett, 2005; Gerring, 2007) and shows that the village head election function as a governance stress test in the context of villages.

### **Electoral Contention and Organizational Cohesion**

The village head election in Benteng Village, East Luwu Regency, illustrates how local electoral competition operates as a governance stress test for the organizational cohesion of village government. Within the framework of clientelism, local power relations are often embedded in patronage networks that personalize public office and blur the boundary between politically loyalty and administrative roles. This pattern was evident in the Benteng election, which involved candidates drawn from the same lineage-linking a son and a grandfather of former village heads and reflected the dynastic character of local political competition.

Rather than consolidating democratic legitimacy, this kinship-based contestation generated bureaucratic and social fragmentation in the post-election period. Evidence from village officials and service cadres indicates that the leadership transition was accompanied by explicit expectations of political loyalty within the village apparatus. Administrative personnel were asked to formally signal their allegiance as a condition for maintaining their roles, creating uncertainty and tension among staff. In several cases, officials perceived pressure to withdraw or resign due to their perceived political alignment during the election. These practices indicate a shift in the logic of public service from institutional responsibility toward personalized political loyalty.

From the perspective of organizational behavior theory, such conditions reflect a process of goal displacement, whereby institutional objectives oriented toward service delivery are subordinated to political considerations (Ramos et al., 2026). In Benteng, this shift manifested in declining staff motivation, weakened coordination, and distorted internal communication. Attempts by the newly elected village head to exercise assertive leadership occurred in an already fragile institutional environment, further deepening internal divisions. The findings suggest that even small-scale village administrations can experience a form of bureaucratic shock when political transitions are highly contested and insufficiently buffered by neutral administrative norms.

Cultural factors further complicated post-election governance dynamics. Informants reported symbolic practices aimed at severing associations with previous leadership, including the replacement of office furniture perceived to carry symbolic or spiritual significance linked to the former village head. Such actions were interpreted by some community members as indicators of immature leadership and incomplete reconciliation following the election. This underscores that local political authority in Benteng was not negotiated solely through formal administrative rules but also through symbolic and cultural meanings.

Consistent with insights from political anthropology, these findings illustrate how village-level politics are embedded in symbolic practices, beliefs, and cultural cosmologies, where power is understood not only in rational-administrative terms but also through spiritual and moral interpretations (Ardhana & Wardi, 2026). In this context, electoral contention did not merely alter leadership arrangements but disrupted the normative and symbolic foundations of organizational cohesion within village governance.

### **Electoral Contention, Social Polarization and Elite-Dominated Deliberation**

Socially, the village head election in Benteng intensified patterns of social polarization among villagers. From the perspective of social capital theory, trust and reciprocal norms constitute key foundations of effective local governance (Bordandini et al., 2024). Evidence from community members suggest that electoral competition disrupted these social bonds by reconfiguring everyday social relations around political allegiance. Interpersonal ties that had previously been maintained through kinship, neighborhood cooperation, and mutual assistance became strained as political loyalties increasingly shaped social interactions. As electoral competition penetrated intimate social spaces, political identity began to override long-standing social relationships, weakening the bonding dimension of social capital within the village.

This polarization was further exacerbated by Benteng's ethnic heterogeneity, which includes Bugis, Toraja, Balinese, Lombok, and Javanese communities. Rather than functioning as a basis for pluralistic integration, ethnic affiliations intersected with electoral competition to form relatively exclusive bases of political support. Following the election, village society became informally divided into two dominant social blocs: supporters of the former village head, largely associated with established Bugis aristocratic networks, and supporters of the newly elected village head, who mobilized a reform-oriented narrative. These alignments produced forms of micro-functionalism, small but cohesive social groups with strong internal loyalty, that persisted beyond formal institutions into everyday social life, where boundaries between "insiders" and "outsiders" are continuously constructed and contested (Tria Kerkvliet, 2009).

Beyond its social effects, polarization also reshaped deliberative practices within village governance. Deliberative forums such as Development Planning Consultation and Village Medium-Term Development Plan meetings continued to operate formally, yet participation pattern increasingly reflected political affiliation rather than inclusive representation. Informants across different social groups indicated that deliberation was dominated by actors closely aligned with the incumbent leadership, while those perceived as politically oppositional, particularly women and youth, were less inclined to voice their concern. This pattern is consistent with broader critiques of participatory governance, which emphasize that formal deliberative spaces often reproduce existing power asymmetries unless actively protected from elite domination (Fung, 2015). The effects of social polarization were also evident in the channels through which grievances and complaints were expressed. As trust in formal village forums declined, complaints related to service delivery and social assistance increasingly shifted toward informal and digital channels, including private messaging applications and social media platforms. In some cases, these disputes escalated and involved security actors, indicating a breakdown in local conflict resolution mechanisms and further straining administrative capacity. Similar patterns have been observed in other contexts where political competition intersects with weak deliberative institutions, leading to the externalization of conflict and the erosion of collaborative governance arrangements (Cornwall, 2016). Taken together, these findings suggest that electoral contention in Benteng not only fragmented social cohesion but also transformed deliberation into an elite dominated process, thereby undermining the legitimacy and effectiveness of village-level decision-making.

### **Budget Volatility and Integrity Risks in the Post Election Period**

The dynamics of the Benteng Village budget in the post-village head election period show how political competition plays a role in narrowing the space for deliberation and encouraging an increasingly elite-centered decision-making pattern. In formal forums such as Village Medium-Term Development Plan and Development Planning Consultation, the direction of discussion is determined by individuals who have political closeness to the new village head, showing the tendency of elite dominance as explained in the literature on inequality of participation in local government. When citizen's aspirations are processed through asymmetrical relationships, the quality of deliberation is prone to being distorted by the interests of actors who have greater social and political capital (Bio & Dupras, 2023). Field findings suggest that development decisions are more determined by who is most vocal, a pattern consistent with the phenomenon of "participatory distortion" that often arises in village contexts with hierarchical social structures (Ziorklui et al., 2024).

In such conditions, the village elite has ample space to direct budget allocations, especially when the symbolic capital of the village head reinforces the perception that development priorities must follow the direction of elected leaders. This situation often occurs in the context of villages in Southeast Asia, where the figure of the village head plays a central role in regulating citizens' preferences and influencing the deliberative process (Sidel, 2014). This symbolic dominance results in a pattern of decision-making that marginalizes women and youth, as noted in a study on unequal participation in village planning. Thus, the deliberative space in the Fortress no longer functions as an arena for equal votes, but as an instrument of political legitimacy that strengthens the elite's control over the development agenda (He & Warren, 2011; Leftwich, 2010; Nazneen, 2023).

During elite dominance, the practice of clientelism strengthens in line with the increasing political value of the allocation of physical development. The pattern of providing goods and money during the village head election reflects the relationship of exchange rooted in patronage, a pattern that is widely found in local elections in various developing countries (Stokes et al., 2013). Villagers often view such exchange relationships as commonplace, in line with the findings of studies that voters at the grassroots level adopt a pragmatic view of electoral politics. In some cases, the involvement of local businessmen and district politicians also signals a process of "vertical political intermediation", which is when village elites become intermediaries of top-level political interests (Pierskalla & Sacks, 2020). These practices blur the line between village development and power consolidation strategies.

**Table 1.** Benteng Village Revenue 2019-2021

| No                  | Description                                           | Total revenue |               |               |
|---------------------|-------------------------------------------------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|
|                     |                                                       | 2019 (IDR)    | 2020 (IDR)    | 2021 (IDR)    |
| 1                   | Village original income                               | 0             | 5,100,000     | 15,550,000    |
| 2                   | Village fund                                          | 907,416,000   | 842,966,000   | 909,462,000   |
| 3                   | Revenue sharing of regional taxes and regional levies | 106,644,888   | 133,359,678   | 149,650,953   |
| 4                   | Village fund allocation                               | 539,643,000   | 559,844,000   | 509,000,000   |
| 5                   | Provincial financial aid                              | 0             | 0             | 20,000,000    |
| 6                   | District financial assistance                         | 20,000,000    | 0             | 0             |
| 7                   | Miscellaneous income                                  | 25,345,133    | 3,104,603     | 3,047,881     |
| Total revenue (IDR) |                                                       | 1,599,049,021 | 1,544,374,281 | 1,606,710,834 |

*Data source: Benteng Village Official Budget Documents 2019-2021.*

The political dynamism is reflected in the pattern of budget volatility. The data in Table 1 shows that Benteng Village's income in the 2019–2021 period was dominated by central and district transfers, especially Village Funds and Village Fund Allocation. Fluctuations in village income, amounting to IDR 1.599 billion in 2019, IDR 1.544 billion in 2020, and IDR 1.606 billion in 2021 demonstrate a structural dependence on external fiscal transfers. This dependence increases the space for budget politicization because villages have limited fiscal autonomy, so allocation decisions are more vulnerable to being directed by political interests than technocratic needs. This kind of fiscal dependence is common in local governments that have limited autonomy (Smoke, 2015). When fiscal space is tight, allocation decisions become more political because village leaders must show results that can be seen directly by supportive citizens (Tang & Huhe, 2016). In Benteng, physical infrastructure such as road paving and drainage became the main instruments to demonstrate a quick response to the aspirations of political supporters.

The change in the composition of village expenditure as visualized in Table 2 shows that the priority of using Village Funds follows the national regulatory framework based on the Village Regulation No. 16/2018, No. 11/2019, No. 13/2020, and No. 7/2021. In 2019, spending was concentrated on the development of physical infrastructure such as drainage and road paving. However, in 2020–2021, the COVID-19 pandemic required villages to allocate most of the funds for the Village Fund Unconditional Cash Transfer (46% in 2020 and 44% in 2021), as well as handling the pandemic in accordance with national regulations. The dominant pattern of Unconditional Cash Transfer spending in the two years not only reflects regulatory obligations, but also shows how villages navigate the pressures of emergency needs amid local political

competition. Pandemic policy studies in Indonesian villages show that the implementation of Unconditional Cash Transfer is often influenced by the recipient's social networks and political affiliations. In these conditions, the accuracy of targeting social programs is highly dependent on the administrative capacity of the village, which in Benteng shows signs of weakness, including misinterpretation of the rules for the use of COVID-19 funds. Weak public administration capacity is often a key factor that leads to deviations in policy implementation at the village level (Rao & Sanyal, 2010).

**Table 2.** Details of the Five Priorities for Village Fund Expenditure in 2019-2021

| No.         | Details                                  | Sum             | Percentage (%) |
|-------------|------------------------------------------|-----------------|----------------|
| <b>2019</b> |                                          |                 |                |
| 1.          | Drainage Development                     | IDR 386,110,900 | 43             |
| 2.          | Hardening of Residential Roads           | IDR 181,317,000 | 20             |
| 3.          | BUMDesa Capital Participation            | IDR 87,590,000  | 10             |
| 4.          | Bridge Construction                      | IDR 66,041,200  | 7              |
| 5.          | Environmental Management                 | IDR 36,543,500  | 4              |
| <b>2020</b> |                                          |                 |                |
| 1.          | Unconditional Cash Transfer Village Fund | IDR 389,700,000 | 46             |
| 2.          | Handling COVID-19                        | IDR 60,000,000  | 7              |
| 3.          | Drainage Development                     | IDR 81,844,500  | 10             |
| 4.          | Paving the Road                          | IDR 69,722,500  | 8              |
| 5.          | Library Management                       | IDR 47,850,000  | 6              |
| <b>2021</b> |                                          |                 |                |
| 1.          | Unconditional Cash Transfer Village Fund | IDR 396,600,000 | 44             |
| 2.          | Health Alert Village                     | IDR 122,009,000 | 13             |
| 3.          | Construction of Posyandu Praya           | IDR 120,491,000 | 13             |
| 4.          | Internet Network Management              | IDR 46,763,500  | 5              |
| 5.          | Environmental Management                 | IDR 48,000,000  | 5              |

*Data source: Benteng Village Official Budget Documents 2019-2021.*

Other things that look formal but are still influenced by local politics for example in the category of infrastructure development, villages direct budgets to areas that electorally support new village heads, in line with the theory of political budget cycles which emphasizes that regional leaders selectively allocate resources in return for political support. In contrast, economic and social empowerment programs do not receive a large portion because they do not provide immediate electoral benefits, a phenomenon that has also been found in studies of village budget allocation in other countries.

Empowerment programs, especially those involving women and youth, are often placed as a secondary priority despite having a major impact on improving the quality of governance (Mary et al., 2019). When non-physical programs are marginalized, the capacity of villages to strengthen institutional structures becomes weaker (Li et al., 2019; Mair et al., 2012). Administrative literacy, regulatory understanding, and long-term planning skills are not optimally developed, making villages more vulnerable to administrative irregularities and integrity risks.

Overall, the dynamics of budget spending in Benteng show how the political contestation of the village head gives rise to governance disruption through three main mechanisms: narrowing of deliberative space due to elite dominance, selective budget allocation as a political

strategy to maintain support and decrease in the quality of budget integrity due to weak administrative capacity in understanding and implementing regulations.

These three mechanisms show that the village head election function as a governance stress test: when political competition intensifies, previously latent institutional weaknesses become visible through budget volatility, distorted development priorities, and weakened village accountability mechanisms. This pattern is consistent with recent evidence showing that political competition and electoral participation significantly shape local fiscal performance and the stability of public spending priorities (Ariza Marín et al., 2021), reinforcing the argument that village governance is deeply conditioned by micro-political dynamics that are often overlooked in policy analysis.

### **Eroded Participation and Representation**

Residents' participation in Development Planning Consultation and hamlet deliberations in Benteng shows a decreasing trend after the village head election. The residents who attended the formal forum were mostly local figures and informal elites, while most of the community chose to channel their aspirations through unofficial channels such as WhatsApp conversations, Facebook, or private messages to the hamlet officials. However, this digital channel raises new tensions; For example, criticism related to delays in the distribution of direct cash assistance has developed into personal conflicts to threats of reporting to law enforcement officials. This reflects that the transition from formal to digital participation does not necessarily improve the quality of public engagement, especially when social relations are overwhelmed by political distrust.

In the framework of deliberative democracy, meaningful participation can only occur when citizens can express their views equally without domination. However, public forums in the Fortress still rely on a social hierarchy where the voices of women, youth, and the poor have a lower deliberative weight than influential figures. As a result, there is a *representation gap*—an inequality between who is heard and who is marginalized. Although women are active in social organizations such as the PKK, WHDI, and the taklim assembly, they are still rarely involved in decision-making forums. Structural barriers such as multiple workloads, time constraints, and the perception that their voices are less important narrow the space for substantive participation. From the perspective of gender and governance, this condition illustrates that women's inclusion at the village level is still symbolic and has not touched the core of the deliberative process.

In the perspective of collaborative governance, the success of village governance is greatly influenced by the level of trust, shared commitment, and cross-stakeholder involvement (Ojha et al., 2025; Ukeje et al., 2026). However, the findings of the study in Benteng show a decline in the quality of collaborative relationships between village governments, customary institutions, religious organizations, and community groups after the elections. Collaborative forums such as youth organizations, cross-hamlet PKK, and farmer groups have become increasingly passive, and some cadres have even chosen to resign due to political differences. This phenomenon indicates a *trust deficit*, which is a reduction in the social foundations that support collaborative work. As the shared vision weakens and trust in village government declines, inter-agency communication becomes sporadic, and collaboration remains only administrative coordination without substantive commitment.

These findings are consistent with research on village governance after the Village Law, which shows that many village governments face *institutional overload* due to increased administrative burdens without being followed by strengthening bureaucratic capacity. The situation of the Fortress shows a similar pattern, where political conflicts worsen coordination and disrupt the stability of the program. Other research also underlines that the allocation of Village Funds is often mediated by local elites who take advantage of social closeness to influence budget decisions, a pattern that is evident in the dominance of kinship-based elites in Benteng. The distribution of social assistance in times of crisis is often a sensitive point of legitimacy, especially when targeting mechanisms are perceived to be politically neutral. In the context of Benteng, post-village head election political pressure clouded the distribution of Unconditional Cash Transfer Village Funds, triggering public complaints and escalating conflicts through digital media.

Furthermore, research on rural politics in Indonesia shows that local dynamics are often influenced by access to new resources, especially when agribusiness or industrial investment enters the village area (Mersha & van Laerhoven, 2018). In the case of Benteng, the planned construction of an oil palm mill became a source of friction between hamlets and influenced a constellation of political support, showing how the struggle for economic opportunity can disrupt social cohesion and citizen representation. Thus, the dynamics of the Fortress reflect a general pattern in Indonesia's local democratization: the space for participation is indeed open, but when institutional capacity is still limited, political contestation can quickly transform into a source of governance disruption.

## **Conclusion**

The findings of this study show that the Village Head Election contest in Benteng functions as a governance stress test that reveals latent vulnerabilities in village governance. Political rivalry triggers administrative instability through weakening organizational cohesion; Affiliation-based apparatus rotation and demands for political loyalty disrupt work coordination, reduce motivation, and blur the line between public service and political interests. This condition shows how the dynamics of local power can reduce the capacity of village governments to maintain routine performance during the post-election transition period.

Electoral contestation also has an impact on the quality of village deliberations. The strengthening of elite dominance in Development Planning Consultation and hamlet forums, followed by the weakening of the participation of women, youth, and vulnerable groups, causes the decision-making process to lose a broad representation base. Formally, the mechanism of participation remains, but substantively the discursive space is distorted by social hierarchies and political affiliations. This pattern is reinforced by the practice of clientelism that places short-term transactions above long-term development commitments, in line with the literature on local patronage and inequality of representation.

Budget volatility further deepens governance disruption. The drastic shift in spending priorities, both to fulfill campaign promises and to respond to pandemic pressures, shows how local political dynamics affect the direction of village resource allocation. Challenges in understanding budget regulations and weak administrative capacity show the vulnerability of accountability and integrity mechanisms at the village level. The combination of these three mechanisms, weakening of organizational cohesion, narrowing of deliberative participation, and

budget instability confirm that village governance is heavily influenced by micro-political dynamics that were previously often overlooked in policy analysis.

In terms of policy, Benteng's case emphasizes the need to strengthen post-election transition protocols, enforce the principle of merit in the management of the apparatus, and expand more inclusive and protected deliberative spaces, especially for women, youth, and minority groups. In addition, improving village financial governance literacy and regulatory compliance is key to reducing the risk of misallocation, priority distortion, and integrity violations. This reform is important to build the resilience of village institutions to the political pressure that arises in each election cycle.

This research has limitations that need to be noted. As a single case study, the generalization of the findings is limited and the mechanisms identified may not fully represent the dynamics of other villages with different socio-political configurations. The reliance on informant narratives also opens the possibility of reporting bias, especially amid post-election political sensitivity. Therefore, further research needs to be directed towards comparative studies between villages, longitudinal analysis of the Village Head Election cross-cycle, as well as exploration of how institutional designs, such as accountability forums, apparatus recruitment standards, and digital transparency systems can reduce the destabilizing impact of electoral contests on village governance.

## References

- Ansell, C., & Gash, A. (2008). Collaborative Governance in Theory and Practice. *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory*, 18(4), 543–571.  
<https://doi.org/10.1093/jopart/mum032>
- Antlöv, H., Wetterberg, A., & Dharmawan, L. (2016). Village Governance, Community Life, and the 2014 Village Law in Indonesia. *Bulletin of Indonesian Economic Studies*, 52(2), 161–183.  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/00074918.2015.1129047>
- Ardhana, I. K., & Wardi, I. N. (2026). Adat, People Power and Religious Values: Sources of Social Resilience from the Early to Middle 19th Century in Bali. *Jurnal Kajian Bali (Journal of Bali Studies)*, 12(1), 223–242. <https://doi.org/10.24843/JKB.2022.v12.i01.p11>
- Ariza Marín, D., Goda, T., & Tabares Pozos, G. (2021). Political competition, electoral participation and local fiscal performance. *Development Studies Research*, 8(1), 24–35.  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/21665095.2021.1872394>
- Aspinall, E., & Berenschot, W. (2019). Democracy for Sale. In Cornell University Press. Cornell University Press. <https://doi.org/10.7591/9781501732997>
- Aspinall, E., & Warburton, E. (2018). Indonesia: The Dangers of Democratic Regression. *Proceedings of the Third International Conference on Social and Political Sciences (ICSPS 2017)*. <https://doi.org/10.2991/icsp-17.2018.1>
- Batley, R., & Mcloughlin, C. (2015). The Politics of Public Services: A Service Characteristics Approach. *World Development*, 74, 275–285. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.worlddev.2015.05.018>
- Beck, E. (2016). Repopulating Development: An Agent-Based Approach to Studying Development Interventions. *World Development*, 80, 19–32. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.worlddev.2015.11.019>
- Bio, R. K., & Dupras, J. (2023). Analysis of the Institutional Framework for the Management of Community Areas Through the Prism of Institutional Bricolage: The Case of Benin's Bouche du Roy. *International Journal of the Commons*, 17(1), 331–346.  
<https://doi.org/10.5334/ijc.1251>
- Bordandini, P., Maltagliati, M., Bellanca, N., & Cartocci, R. (2024). Disgruntled Italians – social capital and civic culture in Italy. *Journal of Modern Italian Studies*, 29(2), 206–231.  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/1354571X.2023.2288430>

- Cornwall, A. (2016). Women's Empowerment: What Works? *Journal of International Development*, 28(3), 342–359. <https://doi.org/10.1002/jid.3210>
- De Waal, A. (2015). *The real politics of the Horn of Africa: Money, war and the business of power*. John Wiley & Sons.
- Fung, A. (2015). Putting the Public Back into Governance: The Challenges of Citizen Participation and Its Future. *Public Administration Review*, 75(4), 513–522. <https://doi.org/10.1111/puar.12361>
- Grindle, M. S. (2017). Good Governance, R.I.P.: A Critique and an Alternative. *Governance*, 30(1), 17–22. <https://doi.org/10.1111/gove.12223>
- He, B., & Warren, M. E. (2011). Authoritarian Deliberation: The Deliberative Turn in Chinese Political Development. *Perspectives on Politics*, 9(2), 269–289. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1537592711000892>
- Hickey, S., Lavers, T., Niño-Zarazúa, M., & Seekings, J. (2019). *The Politics of Social Protection in Eastern and Southern Africa* (S. Hickey, T. Lavers, M. Niño-Zarazúa, & J. Seekings (eds.)). Oxford University Press/Oxford. <https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780198850342.001.0001>
- Leftwich, A. (2010). Beyond Institutions: Rethinking the Role of Leaders, Elites and Coalitions in the Institutional Formation of Developmental States and Strategies. *Forum for Development Studies*, 37(1), 93–111. <https://doi.org/10.1080/08039410903558327>
- Lewis, B. D. (2017). Does local government proliferation improve public service delivery? Evidence from Indonesia. *Journal of Urban Affairs*, 39(8), 1047–1065. <https://doi.org/10.1080/07352166.2017.1323544>
- Li, Y., Fan, P., & Liu, Y. (2019). What makes better village development in traditional agricultural areas of China? Evidence from long-term observation of typical villages. *Habitat International*, 83, 111–124. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.habitatint.2018.11.006>
- Mair, J., Martí, I., & Ventresca, M. J. (2012). Building Inclusive Markets in Rural Bangladesh: How Intermediaries Work Institutional Voids. *Academy of Management Journal*, 55(4), 819–850. <https://doi.org/10.5465/amj.2010.0627>
- Mansbridge, J., Bohman, J., Chambers, S., Christiano, T., Fung, A., Parkinson, J., Thompson, D. F., & Warren, M. E. (2012). A systemic approach to deliberative democracy. In *Deliberative Systems* (pp. 1–26). Cambridge University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9781139178914.002>
- Mary, S., Shaw, K., & Paloma, S. G. y. (2019). Does the sectoral composition of growth affect child stunting reductions? *Development Policy Review*, 37(2), 225–244. <https://doi.org/10.1111/dpr.12349>
- Mersha, A. A., & van Laerhoven, F. (2018). The interplay between planned and autonomous adaptation in response to climate change: Insights from rural Ethiopia. *World Development*, 107, 87–97. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.worlddev.2018.03.001>
- Nazneen, S. (2023). Women's political agency in difficult settings: Analysis of evidence from Egypt, Nigeria, Mozambique, and Pakistan. *Development Policy Review*, 41(S1). <https://doi.org/10.1111/dpr.12685>
- Ojha, H., Maheshwari, B., Camkin, J., Bhattarai, B., Banjade, P., Gurung, P., Delfau, K., Narain, V., Allen, W., Ransom, S., Singh, V., Rathod, R., Dahal, N., Neto, S., Giri, M., Rai, S. P., & Adeline, I. (2025). From Dialogue to Policy Learning: Water Policy Labs for Transformative Water Governance. *World Water Policy*, 11(4), 969–983. <https://doi.org/10.1002/wwp2.70041>
- Pierskalla, J. H., & Sacks, A. (2020). Personnel Politics: Elections, Clientelistic Competition and Teacher Hiring in Indonesia. *British Journal of Political Science*, 50(4), 1283–1305. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0007123418000601>
- Priya, A. (2021). Case Study Methodology of Qualitative Research: Key Attributes and Navigating the Conundrums in Its Application. *Sociological Bulletin*, 70(1), 94–110. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0038022920970318>

- Ramos, F., Tavares, A. F., & da Cruz, N. F. (2026). Between promise and practice: a scoping review of the democratic outcomes of youth participation in local governance. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 181, 108738. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.childyouth.2025.108738>
- Rao, V., & Sanyal, P. (2010). Dignity through Discourse: Poverty and the Culture of Deliberation in Indian Village Democracies. *The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 629(1), 146–172. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0002716209357402>
- Sidel, J. T. (2014). Economic foundations of subnational authoritarianism: insights and evidence from qualitative and quantitative research. *Democratization*, 21(1), 161–184. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13510347.2012.725725>
- Stokes, S. C., Dunning, T., Nazareno, M., & Brusco, V. (2013). *Brokers, Voters, and Clientelism*. Cambridge University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9781107324909>
- Sutiyo, & Maharjan, K. L. (2017). *Decentralization and Rural Development in Indonesia*. Springer Singapore. <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-10-3208-0>
- Tang, M., & Huhe, N. (2016). The Variant Effect of Decentralization on Trust in National and Local Governments in Asia. *Political Studies*, 64(1), 216–234. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-9248.12177>
- Tria Kerkvliet, B. J. (2009). Everyday politics in peasant societies (and ours). *The Journal of Peasant Studies*, 36(1), 227–243. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03066150902820487>
- Ukeje, I. O., Suzana, O. R., Ejem, E. N., Akor, I. C., Aloh, J. N., Arinze, A. I., & Nwangbo, S. O. (2026). Stakeholder Engagement and Policy Legitimacy in Agricultural Development: A Dynamic Stakeholder Governance Innovation Perspective from Nigeria. *International Journal of Public Administration*, 1–17. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01900692.2026.2641816>
- Ylikoski, P., & Zahle, J. (2019). Case study research in the social sciences. *Studies in History and Philosophy of Science Part A*, 78, 1–4. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.shpsa.2019.10.003>
- Ziorklui, B. E. A., Okyere, S. A., Abunyewah, M., Mensah, S. L., & Frimpong, L. K. (2024). Social capital and community-driven development: A multi-group analysis of migrant and indigenous informal settlements in Greater Accra, Ghana. *Habitat International*, 145, 103016. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.habitatint.2024.103016>