

## DYNAMICS OF TERNATE INDIGENOUS PEOPLES IN THE ELECTION FOR GOVERNOR OF NORTH MALUKU YEAR 2024

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### ARTICLE HISTORY

Received : 27-10-2025

Revised : 15-11-2025

Accepted : 20-12-2025

### KEYWORDS

Ternate,  
politik lokal,  
Pilgub Maluku  
Utara 2024,  
struktur adat, budaya  
politik.

### ABSTRACT

This study examines the dynamics of the indigenous people of Ternate in the process of the 2024 North Maluku Governor Election. The focus of the research is directed at how customary structures, genealogical relationships, cultural values, and the role of indigenous leaders affect political orientation and voting behavior. The research method used is a descriptive qualitative approach with data collection techniques through in-depth interviews, direct observation, and analysis of relevant documents. The results of the study show that the indigenous people of Ternate play a significant role in shaping the map of political contestation through customary mechanisms, kinship solidarity, and the use of local identity symbols. Political support is not only built on rational considerations, but is also related to emotional and historical ties rooted in sultanate traditions, soa structures, and the influence of bobato and informal figures. This study concludes that the political dynamics of the indigenous people of Ternate reflect a blend of traditional values and modern political practices, which as a whole make an important contribution to the local democratic process in North Maluku in the 2024 gubernatorial election.

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### INTRODUCTIONS

The election of Regional Heads (Pilkada) is one of the important mechanisms in the Indonesian democratic system that allows the people to elect leaders directly. In the context of local politics, the Regional Elections not only function as a means to transfer power legally, but also as a mirror of the socio-political dynamics that live in the community (Kambo, 2016). Over time, the implementation of the Regional Elections shows a shift from elite-based elections (elite vote) to direct participation of the people (popular vote), which reflects the growing spirit of democratization in the modern state structure (Hefner (2000); Aspinall (2014)).

According to Joseph Schumpeter, as explained by Gustiana A. Kambo (2016:17), the implementation of free, competitive, and periodic elections is the main requirement for a system that can be called democratic. Therefore, the Regional Elections are part of the public accountability mechanism for the government that is or will lead. In practice, the

Regional Elections are not only a procedural electoral event, but also a space for articulating the political aspirations of local communities, including indigenous communities that have their own values and social structures (Van der Muur et al. (2019). In the context of Indonesia's culturally pluralistic nature, the interaction between the modern political system and indigenous communities is important to analyze.

The city of Ternate is one of the regions rich in traditional cultural structures that are still alive today. As a former center of a large Islamic Sultanate in the past, the indigenous people of Ternate maintain a social structure based on customs and traditional leadership. Traditional figures such as Bobato Dunia, Bobato Akhirat, and the institution of the Sultanate of Ternate still have a strong influence on the social life of the community (Amin et al. (2024). This structure is not only symbolic, but also decisive in collective decision-making, including in local political affairs.

The latest phenomenon shows that Ternate's traditional leaders not only function in a symbolic framework, but also actively form a network of political support ahead of the 2024 gubernatorial election. Informal coalitions involving indigenous leaders, NGO activists, and local entrepreneurs have played an important role in directing the political preferences of indigenous peoples. This strategy shows that indigenous forces in Ternate are not passive, but politically organized to maintain their existence in the local democratic arena (Deni, 2024).

In the face of the reality of modern democracy, the indigenous people of Ternate show complex socio-political dynamics. When an electoral system based on individual votes was introduced, indigenous peoples did not necessarily adopt it in full. There is a tension between the values of customary collectivity and electoral logic that is competitive and individualistic (La Husen Zuada et al., 2021). This is where the study of how indigenous peoples respond to the process of democratization that changes traditional power structures is important.

In the local political reality, gubernatorial elections often show a division of support influenced by ethnic identity. Indigenous peoples in Ternate, Tidore, and Makean tend to select candidates based on genealogical ties or proximity to their cultural figures. This ethnic polarization not only strengthens communal affiliations, but also creates potential exclusivity in local politics that complicates the application of universal democratic principles (Kahar, 2020).

Globalization has also strengthened the process of social and political modernization in various regions, including in indigenous communities. Information technology, access to education, and social media penetration have changed the way people view the political process (Friskawati, 2024). Indigenous youth, for example, are more open to participation in the modern political system because they have access to broader and freer information. But on the other hand, the older generation still tends to maintain traditional values that have been inherited from generation to generation (Aspinall (2014). This has led to differences in attitudes between generations towards electoral democracy, which ultimately creates internal dynamics within the indigenous communities themselves.

As noted by Hefner (2000), indigenous peoples in Indonesia often face challenges in harmonizing the principles of customary governance with a modern political system that prioritizes electoral democracy. The indigenous people of Ternate are no exception; they experience a dilemma between maintaining the structure of traditional values or adjusting to modern political reality (Kurniawan, 2020).

In the context of the 2024 North Maluku gubernatorial election, this dynamic is very obvious. The study of La Husen Zuada et al. (2021) shows that indigenous peoples experience confusion between loyalty to customary values and demands to participate in elections. Some communities choose symbolic participation based on the direction of indigenous leaders, while others refuse to participate at all as a form of resistance. On the other hand, there are also communities that have begun to show selective adaptation by supporting candidates who are considered close to traditional values (Hefner (2000); Vel (2008).

The study of Wahyuni and Busro (2023) categorizes the forms of indigenous peoples' responses to modern politics in three main patterns: boycotts, symbolic participation, and selective adaptation. Boycotts are usually carried out as a form of rejection of systems that are considered not in line with traditional values. Symbolic participation arises when indigenous communities participate in the electoral process but political decisions are still directed by indigenous leaders. While selective adaptation shows that indigenous communities are beginning to accept the modern democratic system but only within boundaries that do not conflict with indigenous values.

One of the main factors of resistance to modern politics is the low trust in formal political institutions such as political parties and election organizers. In the context of Ternate, indigenous peoples tend to think that the modern political process is full of pragmatic interests and manipulation, which is contrary to the principles of customary morality

(Van der Muur et al. (2019)], 2024). In addition, strong patron-client relations at the local level also strengthen resistance to free and independent participation in elections.

However, the reality on the ground shows that not all indigenous communities are completely rejecting the modern political system. Some of these have begun to develop new forms of engagement, by supporting candidates who are perceived to be able to maintain indigenous values or have historical ties to indigenous communities Hefner (2000); Vel (2008). In this case, modern politics is not faced with absolute resistance, but rather reprocessed within the framework of local values.

The role of digital media is important in this dynamic. The indigenous young generation, for example, use social media to convey aspirations, build the image of pro-indigenous candidates, or even conduct campaigns based on local culture. In many cases, social media has also become a new arena for cultural resistance and the spread of traditional values (Friskawati, 2024). On the other hand, the media also has the potential to increase polarization, especially if the information disseminated is unbalanced or politically biased (Huda, 2020).

The Sultanate of Ternate as a symbolic cultural institution still has a significant role in shaping the political orientation of indigenous peoples. Although they do not play a direct role in the structure of government, traditional figures and symbols of the sultanate often serve as a reference for the moral and political direction of the community (Amin et al. (2024). The sultanate's support for certain candidates, for example, can influence the political choices of indigenous peoples, even exceeding the influence of conventional campaigns from political parties.

The dynamics between indigenous power and modern politics reflect that indigenous peoples are not merely objects of political modernization, but actors who are active in negotiating their positions. They not only maintain a cultural identity, but also adapt new systems within the framework they deem appropriate. In this context, the socio-political dynamics of indigenous peoples are not only about resistance, but also about cultural strategies and value transformation (Zuhroh et al., 2022).

The 2024 North Maluku Governor election is an important momentum to observe how these dynamics work. This is a testing ground to what extent traditional values are still a political reference in the midst of democratization currents, and the extent to which the modern political system is able to adapt to the complexity of local cultures. Elections are not only a technical mechanism, but also an arena for identity articulation and value battles (Rumkabu, 2022).

More than that, this study is important as a contribution to the development of contextual theories of local democracy. In Indonesia, democracy is often understood as the adoption of the Western system, but reality shows that democracy also needs to be reinterpreted through the lens of local culture. Therefore, the approach to indigenous peoples must prioritize anthropological and political understanding simultaneously (Ngabalin et al., 2024).

By paying attention to all of the above phenomena, this study aims to comprehensively examine how the indigenous people of Ternate interpret, respond, and formulate their political stance in the 2024 North Maluku Governor Election. The focus is not only on resistance, but also on forms of participation, generational change, adaptation strategies, and the use of media as a tool of cultural-political struggle (Amin et al., 2024). Thus, this study will enrich the discourse on democracy and local culture, as well as expand understanding of the political dynamics of indigenous communities in a contemporary context. Based on the description above, the researcher is interested in raising this topic in a study titled "The Dynamics of the Ternate Indigenous Peoples in the 2024 Governor Election

## METHODOLOGY

This research uses a qualitative approach with an intrinsic case study type, to understand in depth how the indigenous people of Ternate respond to local political dynamics in the 2024 North Maluku Governor Election. The qualitative approach was chosen because this study wanted to explore social meaning, collective attitudes, and customary-based power relations that cannot be explained statistically. The case study is used because the focus of this research is limited to one indigenous community with certain socio-political complexity, namely the indigenous peoples within the scope of the Ternate Sultanate. Research is intrinsic because the object of study (the indigenous people of Ternate) is the main focus to be explored in depth, not for generalization.

The research was conducted in the Ternate City area, especially in the indigenous community that still upholds the role of traditional leaders and the structure of the Sultanate. The main locations of the study include Soa Sio, Soa Jiko, and areas within the scope of Bobato Dunia and Bobato Akhirat.

The research subjects were deliberately based on the criteria of their involvement in customary structures and local political activities. The categories of informants in this study include; (1). Traditional figures (Bobato Dunia, Bobato Akhirat, Jogugu, Heku), (2). Figures of the Sultanate of Ternate, (3). Indigenous youth and local activists, (4). Election organizer (KPU/Bawaslu Ternate), (4). Indigenous people use social and political media. Informants in qualitative research are not determined based on numbers, but on the depth and relevance of information (Sugiyono, 2019, p. 138).

Data was collected through several techniques, namely: (1). In-depth interviews, to explore the perceptions and views of traditional leaders and communities. (2). Observation, especially on the community's customary activities and political activities ahead of the 2024 gubernatorial election. (3). Documentation study, in the form of sultanate documents, election regulations, local government archives, and local media reports.

Data were analyzed using the Miles and Huberman model, which include: (1). Data reduction, selecting and simplifying data according to the focus of the research. (2). Data presentation, compiling data in the form of narratives, tables, or thematic categories. (3). Conclusion drawing is carried out continuously since the data collection process.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Results

#### 1. Study of the Indigenous Peoples of Ternate

The study of the indigenous people of Ternate is important in understanding how traditional values, social systems, and local cultural symbols interact with the electoral democratic political system. Ternate is one of the regions that still actively maintains customary structures through Sultanate institutions and traditional leaders such as Jogugu, Bobato Dunia, and Bobato Akhirat. The existence of the indigenous people of Ternate is not only cultural, but also political in collective decision-making, including in the context of regional head elections.

##### A. Selection of customary values and traditions

Traditional values in Ternate are inherited from generation to generation and become the moral foundation and unwritten laws that govern the social life of the community. The concept of "adat se atorang", or adat as a guideline for life, is not just a cultural slogan, but a normative structure that regulates collective behavior, social relations, and governance of indigenous communities. Key values such as loyalty to the Sultanate, respect for ancestors, communal solidarity, and adherence to deliberation are the main foundations in maintaining the social cohesion of the indigenous people of Ternate (Hasim & Abdullah, 2019).

These values are instilled from an early age through socialization in the family and soa community (indigenous kinship groups), and strengthened through participation in traditional activities such as religious ceremonies, ancestral rituals, and cultural celebrations. For example, the Kololi Kie and Fere Kie ceremonies are not only a cultural event, but also a medium for transmitting values about social responsibility and submission to the customary order. In this context, customary is not only a regulator of living procedures, but also a mechanism for collective character education.

The preservation of tradition is also reflected in the preservation of the Ternate language as the mother tongue of the indigenous community, as well as in the use of traditional symbols such as clothing, music, traditional weapons, and the symbol of the Sultanate. These languages and symbols are not only preserved for aesthetics, but also to reinforce the legitimacy of communal identity in public spaces, including in local political dynamics.

In the face of modernization, the indigenous people of Ternate have shown selective and strategic adaptability. The Sultanate of Ternate, as the highest customary institution, plays an important role in maintaining the continuity of traditional values. This institution not only serves as a historical symbol, but also becomes an active institution in contemporary cultural politics. The revitalization of institutions such as the Bobato Assembly, the Jogugu Council, and other customary forums is a manifestation of the spirit of institutional preservation of traditions, which is also able to answer the challenges of the times (Christommy & Nazarudin, 2021).

Strong traditional values also have direct implications for the political orientation of indigenous peoples. Collective political attitudes, such as the election of leaders or support for specific candidates, are often not based on formal campaigns or electoral rationality, but rather on the extent to which the prospective leader is perceived to respect customs, have genealogical ties to the community, or demonstrate closeness to the Sultanate structure. In this

case, customary values become a collective compass in determining political direction, and the maintenance of tradition has a strategic function as a determinant of political legitimacy in the midst of a modern democratic system.

### B. Definition of Indigenous Peoples

Indigenous peoples are defined as communities that have their own system of values, laws, and governance that are run from generation to generation, and are collectively tied to the customary territories they inhabit. These communities maintain cultural identities, social structures, and living practices that reflect the continuity of history and ancestral heritage. In the Indonesian constitution, formal recognition of the existence of indigenous peoples is contained in Article 18B paragraph (2) of the 1945 Constitution, which states that "The State recognizes and respects special and special local government units as well as the rights of customary law communities as long as they are alive and in accordance with the development of society and the principles of the Unitary State of the Republic of Indonesia." This provision is strengthened by Law No. 6 of 2014 concerning Villages, which recognizes the existence of customary villages as administrative entities that govern themselves based on local values and norms.

Academically, indigenous peoples are understood as social entities that not only have their own territory and leadership structure, but also local knowledge, belief systems, and collective life orientations that distinguish them from the social structure of modern nation-states (Pamungkas, 2020). They practice customary law as a form of internal sovereignty that sometimes runs parallel or even contradicts national law, especially in terms of natural resource management, spatial planning, and ritual practices.

In the context of Ternate, indigenous peoples have their own peculiarities because they are closely connected to the structure of the Ternate Sultanate, one of the oldest traditional political institutions in eastern Indonesia. The sultanate has existed since the 13th century and became the center of Islamic civilization and maritime power in the North Maluku region. The indigenous people of Ternate not only live under ordinary customary structures, but also have a spiritual and genealogical relationship with the royal system, which places the Sultan as a moral leader and a symbol of cultural unity (Hasim, 2018).

The Sultanate of Ternate plays a strategic role in regulating the religious, social, and political life of indigenous peoples. In addition to carrying out religious and customary ceremonies, this institution also serves as an interpreter of social norms and ethics, which implicitly governs the political orientation of the community. Traditional social structures such as Jogugu, Bobato Dunia, Bobato Akhirat, Sangaji, and Gimalah form a layered leadership system that determines the direction of collective decisions, including in political moments such as the election of regional heads.

Thus, the indigenous peoples of Ternate cannot be understood only as isolated cultural groups, but as active socio-political actors and have the historical awareness to maintain their existence in the midst of external challenges, including modernization, economic development, and the penetration of electoral democratic systems. Indigenous identity for them is not only cultural heritage, but also a defense mechanism against the erosion of values and institutional pressures from outside.

The indigenous people of Ternate also show the capacity to adapt to national political dynamics. In many cases, they filter out elements of modernity through traditional values, and adopt only those aspects that do not conflict with the principle of collective living. This means that indigenous peoples are not anti-modernity, but cultural actors who are selective in responding to change, and the Sultanate becomes a mediation space between the old world and the new world in the local political order.

### C. Political participation and democracy

Political participation in the indigenous people of Ternate has a different form and logic than modern society. In the customary structure, political decisions are generally not taken individually, but through customary deliberations led by traditional figures such as Jogugu, Bobato Dunia, and Bobato Akhirat. This process of deliberation becomes a binding collective mechanism, and the results are considered more legitimate than individual political choices. In many cases, the decisions of indigenous leaders are considered to be representations of the will of the community, which indicates that indigenous political authority is collectively representative, not individual electoral (Putra, 2022).

The participation of the indigenous people of Ternate is symbolic, normative, and communal. This means that they participate in the modern democratic process such as elections, but this participation is often carried out due to the direction or blessing of customary institutions. The decision to support a particular candidate is not always based

on a rational analysis of the work program, but rather on factors of cultural legitimacy, such as genealogical proximity to the community, the candidate's willingness to respect customs, or historical ties to the Sultanate. In this case, the customary value system is a determining instrument in determining political support, even stronger than the influence of conventional campaigns (Wibowo & Rahmawan, 2020).

Modern democratic systems essentially emphasize individual freedom, voter rationality, and programmatic competition. However, in the context of indigenous peoples such as in Ternate, these values are not necessarily adopted in their entirety. Indigenous peoples do not reject democracy, but they modify forms of participation according to their logic and social structure. For example, the right to vote is still used, but the direction of choice is determined more collectively in customary forums, rather than the results of public debate or media exposure.

This phenomenon poses methodological and conceptual challenges in understanding local democracy. On the one hand, indigenous peoples' political participation is often considered low or passive because it does not reflect a liberal style of participation. However, when viewed from the perspective of political sociology, their participation is actually very active in the form of structured, directed, and communal value-based participation, which shows that democracy can be carried out in a different logic from the Western model.

In local political practice, the involvement of indigenous leaders can strengthen social cohesion and prevent horizontal conflicts due to competition between candidates. When traditional leaders set political stances, the community tends to follow collectively in order to maintain community harmony. However, on the other hand, it also holds the potential for the dominance of indigenous elites, especially if their decisions do not reflect the aspirations of the younger generation or marginalized groups in the community.

The influence of digitalization and generational transformation has begun to shift some forms of participation. The indigenous youth who are more familiar with technology and formal education are beginning to question the absolute nature of customary authority, and encourage the birth of a hybrid form of participation—that is, participation that still respects indigenous values, but also considers aspects of electoral rationality and public policy discourse. Therefore, a kind of political negotiation between generations emerged, which opened up a space for dialogue between tradition and modernity.

In the context of Ternate, the uniqueness of the political participation of indigenous peoples can actually become a model of democracy based on local wisdom. The electoral political system needs to adapt to the communication and decision-making patterns of indigenous communities, not to impose a single, non-contextual form of participation. Thus, the inclusiveness of democracy can be expanded without sacrificing local cultural identity.

#### **D. Cultural meanings and symbols**

Cultural symbols have a central role in forming, maintaining, and reproducing the identity of the indigenous people of Ternate. Symbols are not only interpreted as cultural artifacts such as traditional clothing, traditional weapons, traditional houses, or special jewelry, but also include social practices such as traditional rituals, title systems, languages, and ceremonial structures. In the context of the indigenous people of Ternate, cultural symbols are a means to affirm collective identity and differentiate themselves from the external value system that enters through modernization and globalization.

One of the most powerful cultural symbols in the indigenous people of Ternate is traditional clothing such as songko, oversized robes, and woven fabrics typical of North Maluku, which are worn in official events, especially by traditional leaders and members of the Sultanate. The use of this symbol not only signifies social status, but also becomes a visual political statement that shows alignment with traditional values. When traditional leaders wear these symbols in the context of elections or political activities, this is read by the community as a collective signal of the direction of political support, which indirectly affects voter behavior at the community level (Friskawati, 2024).

Symbols also operate on a ritualistic and narrative level. Ceremonies such as Kololi Kie (circling the mountain as a form of respect for nature and ancestors) or Fere Kie (traditional rituals before harvest) are not just religious or cultural practices, but also tools for reproducing values, collective memory, and social legitimacy. The historical narratives of the Sultanate, such as the legend of Sultan Babullah and the struggle against colonialism, are used as identity discourses and sources of collective inspiration, especially in local political discourse. In indigenous peoples, cultural memory is political capital.

In electoral practice, cultural symbols often serve as a tool of selection and legitimacy. Regional head candidates who understand, respect, and use local cultural symbols often gain moral and political support from

indigenous communities. In contrast, candidates who are neutral or even alien to customs are often considered unworthy, even if they are administratively qualified. In other words, cultural symbols become a kind of "cultural filter" on who is considered appropriate to lead in the local value order.

Symbols also serve as a tool of resistance to political homogenization. In a liberal democratic climate that emphasizes uniformity of procedure, cultural symbols allow indigenous communities to maintain their local authority. Rejection of certain development projects, collective decision-making in elections, or symbolic actions such as raising the Sultanate flag in campaigns, are all forms of culturally coded political statements.

Semiotically, cultural symbols in the indigenous people of Ternate not only have a denotative meaning (what is seen), but also a connotative meaning (what is intended). For example, pinning a traditional title to a figure from outside the community is a form of political acceptance, while the absence of a title or recognition can mean a tacit rejection of one's political presence. In this case, symbols become a subtle but effective form of political communication, which can only be interpreted appropriately by those who are in the same value system.

Thus, cultural symbols are not only a passive inheritance of the past, but also an active tool for regulating power relations and establishing the political direction of the community. In the context of the North Maluku gubernatorial election, the existence of cultural symbols is very important, because they are not only an identity statement, but also a tool of political navigation in an increasingly competitive arena.

## 2. Previous Studies on Indigenous Peoples in North Maluku

### a. Preservation of Community's Lifestyle Traditions

Previous studies have shown that indigenous peoples in North Maluku, especially Ternate, have a social and cultural system that is firmly rooted in the heritage of the Sultanate. Values such as adat se atorang (adat as a guideline for life), customary deliberation, and respect for ancestors and traditional leaders are the foundation in regulating social life (Hasim & Abdullah, 2019).

Traditional symbols, such as the Ternate language, traditional clothing, the Kololi Kie and Fere Kie ceremonies, as well as the use of traditional titles continue to be maintained as a form of reproduction of identity values. The Sultanate of Ternate plays an active role in the revitalization of customary institutions such as Bobato Dunia, Bobato Akhirat, and Dewan Jogugu, which now not only carry out symbolic functions, but also take a role in the socio-political realm (Christommy & Nazarudin, 2021).

### b. Local Political Response and Democracy

Research by Wahyuni & Busro (2023) identified three main patterns of indigenous peoples' political responses to electoral democratic systems: boycotts, symbolic participation, and selective adaptation. This finding is strengthened by a study by La Husen, Zuada et al. (2021) which noted that indigenous peoples in Ternate are ambivalent towards electoral politics; They support certain candidates based on the proximity of customary and the blessing of traditional leaders, not on formal political programs.

Hasim (2018) noted that the Sultanate of Ternate remains a reference for the moral and political direction of indigenous peoples, especially in the Regional Elections. Indigenous figures such as Jogugu and Heku remain decisive figures for political support in indigenous communities. This shows that the modern democratic system has not completely replaced traditional patterns of legitimacy in local political decision-making.

### c. Indigenous Peoples' Response to New Values

In the face of modernization and globalization, the indigenous people of Ternate have shown a selective response. They filter new values based on their conformity with traditional values. The Friskawati study (2024) shows that cultural resistance in indigenous peoples, such as in Kampung Kuta and Ternate, is carried out through cultural strategies—including the use of digital media to maintain collective identity.

On the other hand, the indigenous youth are beginning to develop hybrid political participation, which is active involvement in modern democracy without relinquishing local values. Saud et al. (2020) and Rahman et al. (2022) noted that social media such as WhatsApp and Facebook are used as a tool for cultural-based political socialization by indigenous youth.

## 3. Political Participation Theory

### a. Contemporary Concept of Political Participation

Political participation is a key foundation in a democratic system that allows citizens to play an active role in the public decision-making process. Classically, political participation is understood as an individual's act of voting in

elections. However, in its development, participation is not only limited to elections, but also includes other forms of political expression such as involvement in public discussions, protests, petitions, and digital activities on social media.

Wibowo and Rahmawan (2020) divide political participation into four main levels:

1. Awareness: awareness of political issues, including knowing about elections, candidate issues, and policy agendas.
2. Political discussion: involvement in conversations or discussions about politics, either formally or informally.
3. Electoral participation: participation in general elections as voters, witnesses, or committees.
4. Political action: participation in demonstrations, campaigns, petitions, and other forms of action aimed at influencing policy-making.

In indigenous peoples, these four levels are present in their own format that is adapted to the order of local values. For example, awareness in indigenous communities is usually conveyed orally through customary forums, not through print or online media. Political discussions are also more carried out in deliberations led by traditional leaders, not in open public debates. Therefore, although they are different in form from urban societies, indigenous peoples still have their own patterns of legitimate political participation in their socio-cultural contexts.

This concept of political participation is important to understand that indigenous peoples are not politically passive entities. They have their own value systems and social forums that allow them to discuss and respond to political agendas, just in a way that is not always seen within the framework of liberal democracies.

#### **b. Forms of Political Participation**

The forms of political participation of the community are very diverse and reflect the motivation, social position, and values of the community. In the context of multicultural Indonesia, political participation is also strongly influenced by the cultural background of the people.

Putra (2022) categorizes forms of political participation into:

- Active: includes actions such as being a member of a political party, volunteering for campaigns, participating in decision-making, and voicing aspirations through the media.
- Passive: in the form of minimal actions such as voting in elections without further involvement in politics.
- Symbolic: actions taken not on the basis of personal choice, but due to cultural pressure, community direction, or loyalty to indigenous leaders.

In the indigenous people of Ternate, the form of symbolic participation is very dominant. The political choices of the people are often influenced by the direction of Bobato Dunia, Jogugu, or other Sultanate figures. The decision to support candidates in the Regional Elections can come from customary agreements that are considered more important than rational considerations or the candidate's work program. On the other hand, forms of passive participation also occur because some members of the community feel that the modern political system does not represent their values and needs.

This situation makes political participation in indigenous communities more collective and normative than individual and rational. This is also a challenge for election organizers and political parties in building political communication that is in accordance with the local cultural framework.

#### **c. Factors influencing the political dynamics of indigenous peoples.**

The political dynamics of indigenous peoples do not occur in a vacuum. It is the result of a complex interaction of various multidimensional factors that influence the mindset, attitude, and political actions of the community. In the context of the indigenous people of Ternate, these dynamics are influenced by six main factors: economic, social, cultural, psychological, political, and social media. Here is a description of each factor:

##### **a. Economic Factors**

Economic inequality is the main trigger for political dynamics in indigenous peoples. When access to economic resources is limited or marginalized, indigenous peoples will be critical of political power that is perceived as impartial. In contrast, economic dependence on elites or the state often gives rise to pragmatic political attitudes, such as support based on material rewards.

As shown by Syahputra (2020) in a study of indigenous peoples in Papua, low access to the formal economy triggers people to use political routes as a survival strategy. The indigenous people of Ternate experience

similar things in the face of mining, infrastructure, and tourism projects that often conflict with local economic interests.

b. Social Factors

Customary social structures based on kinship (soa) and patronage create a strong collective influence in political decision-making. Traditional leaders or soa leaders often act as guardians of values and directors of political choices, which are considered to represent the common interest. Political participation also takes place vertically, taking into account social relations, not voter individualism.

Hidayat (2021) shows that social solidarity in indigenous communities affects the intensity of participation in local elections, as collective preferences are valued more than individual choices.

c. Cultural Factors

Local cultural values such as deliberation, loyalty to customs, and respect for ancestors are the main references in shaping political attitudes. Indigenous peoples judge candidates not solely from the program, but from ethical conformity and respect for tradition. In the indigenous people of Ternate, the Sultanate became the main symbol that determined the cultural-political orientation.

A study by Christommy & Nazarudin (2021) highlights the role of the Sultanate of Ternate as a symbol of neutrality symbolized in customary collective decisions.

d. Psychological Factors

Psychological aspects such as identity, collective emotions, and trust in traditional leaders play an important role. Shame for ancestors, respect for the Sultan, and trust in traditional leaders are part of the system of non-formal social control that directs people's political choices.

Nasrullah (2020) notes that the psychological orientation of indigenous peoples is influenced by spirituality, collective memory, and morality construction, not mere rational calculations.

e. Political Factors

Indigenous peoples' relations with political elites and parties are often strategic and contingent. In many cases, political parties use indigenous figures to build local legitimacy. However, when political elites fail to respect traditional values, communities can withdraw support or even commit collective rejection.

Arifin & Yanuarti (2019) revealed that the relationship between state politics and indigenous peoples is not always harmonious, due to differences in the orientation of power and value authority.

f. Social Media Factors

Social media plays a dual role in the political dynamics of indigenous peoples. On the one hand, digital media allows the indigenous youth to access information and form their own opinions, bypassing traditional customary authorities. On the other hand, social media is also a medium for cultural revitalization, such as the promotion of traditional values and historical narratives of the Sultanate.

Sutisna (2022) emphasizes that social media can strengthen ethnic political identities, but it also has the potential to trigger conflict if it is not culturally controlled.

The development of information and communication technology has opened up new spaces for political participation, including for indigenous communities who previously had limited access to political information. The presence of the internet, social media, and digital applications allows for a faster, wider, and interactive dissemination of political information.

According to Rahman et al. (2022), information technology has increased the capacity of citizens to understand political issues and influence public policy, including in rural areas or indigenous communities. Platforms such as WhatsApp, Facebook, and YouTube are the main means of spreading invitations to vote, socializing candidates, and even culture-based campaigns.

Saud et al. (2020) added that the younger generation is the most responsive group to digital politics. In the traditional environment of Ternate, the young generation is not only a consumer of information, but also a producer of political content, they make support videos, distribute digital posters, and even hold online discussions about elections and customary values.

This transformation allows political participation to be more flexible, cheap, and inclusive. However, on the other hand, technology also brings challenges such as the spread of political hoaxes, disinformation, and polarization.

Therefore, an educational approach based on local wisdom is needed so that digital media is truly a tool for political empowerment of indigenous peoples, not a tool of manipulation.

#### 4. Rationality and Collective Calculation in Indigenous Participation

In the rational choice theory approach, political participation is considered to be the result of a profit-loss calculation carried out consciously by an individual or group. Sastrawati (2019) explained that people choose to get involved in politics if they feel that the participation will result in greater benefits than the costs incurred.

In indigenous communities such as in Ternate, this calculation is often carried out collectively through customary forums or deliberations of indigenous leaders. Political decisions are made not only on the basis of personal rationality, but through consensus that takes into account the interests of the community as a whole. For example, if there is a candidate for governor who is considered to respect customs, has genealogical ties with indigenous elites, or has contributed to the preservation of local culture, then political support can be provided even if it is not based on considerations of a formal work program.

This explains why in many cases, indigenous peoples do not show clear political affiliations, but remain active in voicing support for certain figures. They can also withdraw support if they feel culturally or symbolically betrayed, as in the case of rejection of candidates who are perceived to be undermining customary harmony.

This approach shows that the political logic of indigenous peoples cannot be equated with modern societies that are more individualistic. Therefore, studies of the political participation of indigenous peoples must pay attention to the social structures and collective values that live in their communities.

#### 5. Cultural Resistance Theory

##### a. Contemporary Concepts of Cultural Residency

Cultural resistance can be understood as any form of resistance or resistance carried out by a group of people to defend their values, norms, and social systems from domination or intervention of external forces. In the context of indigenous peoples, cultural resistance is part of a cultural survival strategy and a form of protection against knowledge systems, traditional power structures, and the living order of local communities that are threatened by state policies, modernization, or the global market economy.

According to Muhamad, Zaiful, and Amir (2024), resistance in indigenous peoples is not only interpreted as direct political action, but also as structural rejection that is systemic and measurable, in which indigenous peoples try to live in accordance with local values even though they are under external socio-political pressure. In practice, resistance can be in the form of subtle actions such as refusing to interact with state institutions, refusing to accept government assistance that is contrary to customs, or continuing to implement customary law in parallel with state law.

Friskawati (2024) also underlines that cultural resistance is not only reactionary, but also proactive. In the case of the Kuta Traditional Village in West Java, communities are actively using digital media and cultural symbols to affirm their collective identities in response to the onslaught of outside cultures and the pressures of digitalization. This shows that resistance can also manifest as a strategy to maintain cultural space and expand participation through new channels.

Cultural resistance, in contemporary theory, is also considered part of the dynamics of identity politics. When the state failed to accommodate local structures, indigenous peoples did not stay silent. They construct counter-narratives, preserve local knowledge, and rebuild traditional institutions capable of facing external challenges. Thus, resistance is not a rejection of change, but rather a selective strategy to filter modernity.

##### b. Forms of Cultural Resistance to External Political Systems

Indigenous peoples' resistance to external political systems, including modern electoral democratic systems, can take many forms. These forms are not always uniform, but are highly dependent on the level of threat, social position, and organizational capabilities of indigenous communities. Based on recent studies, forms of resistance can be classified as follows:

###### a. Political and Electoral Boycotts

In many cases, indigenous communities refuse to participate in the electoral process or choose not to exercise their voting rights. This happened not because of apathy, but because of the belief that the electoral system is incapable of representing the customary power structure. Muhamad et al. (2024) found that indigenous peoples

in remote areas choose not to vote if no candidate comes from their community or if the nomination process does not go through the customary blessing.

**b. Cultural and Symbolic Resistance**

Cultural resistance is often manifested in the use of local cultural symbols to express rejection of state projects or policies. Friskawati (2024) explains how the people of Kampung Kuta carry out traditional art performances, ancestral rituals, and the dissemination of cultural narratives through social media as a form of rejection of cultural tourism projects that are considered to commercialize the sacredness of customs.

**c. Legal Advocacy and Administrative Refusal**

Resistance can also be done through legal channels. Indriasari & Darmawan (2025) note that indigenous communities whose land was evicted due to the National Strategic Project in Protected Forest Areas refused to submit land administration documents to the government as a form of administrative resistance. They then filed a lawsuit with the court based on customary law principles.

**d. Intervention of Indigenous Leaders in Electoral Politics**

In areas like Ternate, traditional figures such as Bobato Dunia, Bobato Akhirat, and the Sultan of Ternate play an important role in filtering political information and determining the direction of community participation. When traditional leaders do not give their blessing to a certain candidate, the community will follow the collective attitude as a form of political resistance to the electoral system that is considered contrary to traditional values.

**c. Resistance as an Identity Protection Mechanism**

Cultural resistance within indigenous peoples is essentially an expression of the desire to maintain community autonomy and protect collective identity. In this case, resistance is not only resistance to the government or the modern system, but also a form of social sovereignty. Friskawati (2024) notes that indigenous communities in the midst of technological and commercialization pressures continue to carry out local cultural education as part of the collective knowledge heritage that they do not want to be eliminated by the flow of globalization.

The attitude of the indigenous people of Ternate in responding to modern politics also shows the logic of identity resistance. They do not necessarily reject elections, but screen candidates who fit values, lineage, or customary agreements. This illustrates that a liberal representation system does not necessarily guarantee participatory justice if it does not heed the existing social structures at the local level.

**d. Relevant Case Studies: Ternate and Other Indigenous Territories**

Ternate is one of the regions in Indonesia that shows cultural resistance in a very distinctive way. The existence of the Sultanate of Ternate as a symbolic customary institution gives its own color in local political practices. Traditional figures such as Jogugu, Heku, Bobato Soa, and the Sultan, play a moral role in determining the political attitudes of indigenous peoples.

In the context of the 2024 North Maluku gubernatorial election, the political resistance of the indigenous people of Ternate can be manifested in several forms:

- Ignoring the campaign of candidates who do not respect or respect the Sultanate.
- Symbolic rejection through the wearing of traditional clothing when expressing rejection.
- The use of the Sultanate's historical narrative in the political debate of grassroots communities.

This resistance not only shows the difference in values, but also emphasizes that the modern democratic system must adapt to local wisdom if it is to be accepted substantially. Therefore, political strategies that do not touch customary structures will have the potential to fail to build legitimacy in customary territories such as Ternate.

**6. Traditional Legitimacy Theory and the Role of Indigenous Leaders**

**a. The Concept of Traditional Legitimacy in Local Politics**

Legitimacy is an important foundation in understanding the sustainability of power, especially in indigenous peoples. If in the classical theory of Max Weber (1947) legitimacy is divided into three types of rational-legal, charismatic, and traditional, then in the context of contemporary Indonesia, traditional legitimacy is more than just the inheritance of power. It reflects a social recognition based on cultural norms, lineages, and people's spiritual closeness to traditional symbols.

Fadrullah & Syam (2024) emphasize that the legitimacy of indigenous leaders does not only apply in the social context, but also has a direct impact on local political behavior. Indigenous leaders have moral and cultural authority that is widely recognized and irreplaceable by the formal legal system of the state. Therefore, when

traditional leaders express support or rejection of a particular political candidate, the community often follows these directions without the need to explain it with rational electoral logic.

In the indigenous people of Ternate, this form of legitimacy is manifested in the position of figures such as Jogugu, Heku, Bobato Dunia and Bobato Akhirat who have historically been the holders of collective values and the highest decision-makers in social and political issues. They are not only cultural symbols, but also the bearers of the community's cultural mandate.

**b. The Role of Indigenous Leaders in Determining the Direction of Local Politics**

Traditional leaders are not only guardians of cultural values, but also highly influential informal political actors. In the context of electoral politics, they determine the direction of community participation, especially in areas where communal ties are still strong. Syafiola & Ziqri (2025) noted that post-Pilkada in West Sumatra, traditional and religious leaders played a central role in the realignment of political support, where the community's collective support was determined based on the blessing and consensus of indigenous leaders.

This is also the case in Ternate, where the Sultanate structure continues to act as the glue of identity politics. Although it does not have formal administrative power, the Sultanate of Ternate still has a symbolic and normative capacity in interpreting local political dynamics. Satria & Mony (2019) exemplify how in the coastal areas of Maluku and Papua, the practice of sasi laut continues due to the strong influence of traditional leaders who have traditional legitimacy over the state.

Furthermore, Firmansyah & Ahmad (2025) identified that in the election of village heads or regents, indigenous elites are often used as 'social bridges' that connect the state with indigenous peoples. In this system, indigenous leaders are not seen as part of the state, but as a mediation institution that maintains local stability.

**c. Cultural Legitimacy vs Electoral Legitimacy**

The conflict between traditional legitimacy and the modern electoral system is at the heart of the value conflict in local democracy. On the one hand, the electoral system emphasizes individualism, program rationality, and personal suffrage, while indigenous peoples emphasize more on collective consensus, loyalty to social structures, and deliberation of figures.

According to Rahmat (2020), this conflict appears in the form of symbolic politics, where indigenous peoples reject elections if the procedures do not respect customary values. On the other hand, when a candidate succeeds in embracing traditional leaders or including cultural elements in his campaign, the chances of winning are higher.

Firmansyah & Ahmad (2025) refer to this phenomenon as a symbolic transformation of legitimacy, which is when modern political figures try to gain support through traditional cultural appropriation strategies, such as wearing traditional clothing, attending traditional ceremonies, or making political declarations in traditional houses.

**d. Contextual Studies in Ternate: The Sultanate and the Direction of Political Support**

The Sultanate of Ternate is still the main symbol of the unity of indigenous peoples in North Maluku. Even though he does not hold administrative power, the Sultan of Ternate remains a moral and political reference, especially during electoral moments such as the Governor Election. In practice, the Sultan or Bobato can convey the direction of political choices implicitly, and the community follows it as a form of loyalty to the custom.

In the context of the 2024 gubernatorial election, several field studies have found that candidates who do not go to the Sultanate or ignore customary protocols are less likely to receive support from indigenous communities. In contrast, candidates who embrace customary values and maintain communication with the Sultanate acquire social legitimacy that is crucial in winning votes in customary areas.

Indigenous leaders become the guardians of political morality, ensuring that the elected leaders are those who understand and respect the values of indigenous communities. Therefore, the existence and role of indigenous leaders should not be ignored in the discourse of local democracy.

## CONCLUSION

Based on the results of the research and discussion that have been described in the previous chapters, it can be concluded that the dynamics of the indigenous people of Ternate in the 2024 North Maluku Governor Election show a harmonious interaction between tradition and political modernity, where traditional values, the structure of the Sultanate, and the modern democratic system are intertwined to form a distinctive socio-political unit.

The indigenous people of Ternate interpret political participation as part of their social and spiritual responsibility to maintain customary honor and obedience to the Sultanate. The principle of adat se atorang (sharia customs) is the basis of political ethics in society, so that the election process is not only understood as an electoral activity, but also as a moral action rooted in cultural solidarity.

Indigenous peoples' resistance to money politics, manipulation of customary symbols, and political intervention within the Sultanate show that customary values function as moral fortresses that maintain social integrity. This resistance is not a form of rejection of democracy, but an expression of a collective moral consciousness to maintain the purity of cultural values in politics.

As an institution that has traditional legitimacy, the Sultanate of Ternate plays an important role in maintaining socio-political stability through moral guidance and customary mediation. The Bobato, Jogugu, and traditional leaders at the community level carry out social functions as mediators of political conflicts, maintain social solidarity, and uphold fraternal values (ngofa-ngare).

The integration between traditional values and the modern democratic system produces a pattern of democracy with moral, collective, and symbolic characters. Ternate's local democracy is not only based on the majority vote, but also on the principles of social harmony, shame, and respect for the Sultanate. Values such as marimoi ngone futuru (uniting we are strong) strengthen social cohesion and prevent society from destructive political conflicts.

Modern customs and democracy are not in conflict with each other, but are integrated through moral and symbolic mechanisms maintained by the Sultanate. The indigenous people of Ternate are able to interpret the principles of universal democracy within the framework of cultural locality, making democracy in North Maluku firmly rooted in the traditions and collective personality of its people.

Conceptually, this study proves that sustainable democracy in a pluralistic society like Ternate can only grow if indigenous values are recognized as the moral and social foundations of local political practices. In other words, a civilized democracy must rest on a culture that lives in society.

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