4. Local Politics: Bringing the State to the Village

Sumber Jaya and Way Tenong have been the targets of constant national, regional, and local political manoeuvring to control its population. There are clear indications of deep state penetration into the villages. Local people are increasing their efforts, through their village leaders, to expand state participation in the village as a strategy to tap state resources and put their village in the mainstream of national and regional politics. These processes have led to the emergence of politically powerful village elites whose power is still both limited and circumvented due to villagers’ ability to develop procedures that constrain the emergence of individuals with dominant political power in the village.

Military Campaigns against State Enemies

From the mid 1960s to the late 1980s, villagers in Sumber Jaya and Way Tenong experienced multiple military operations designed to crush rural dissent. A military operation to wipe out the communist movement occurred in the mid 1960s, and another operation against religious rebels happened in the late 1970s. These actions created a dynamic relationship between the villagers in the region and the modern state.

Chasing the Communists

During the military campaign against Indonesia’s communist party, Partai Komunis Indonesia (PKI) and its elements in the mid- 1960s, hundreds of men and women were taken from their homes, loaded into trucks, and jailed at the military post (koramil) in Sumber Jaya for interrogation. Some of them were taken to other military camps in Kotabumi, and some of them never came back. Some spent years in jail and the rest — the majority — returned to the koramil at Sumber Jaya. During the following years these women and men were obliged to report regularly (wajib lapor) to the koramil and were treated as corvée labour (kerja bhakti) repairing roads and cleaning military, police, and public facilities. The sight of hundreds of men and women carrying their children in fear and sitting in the sun in front of the koramil office and enduring various forms of torture and intimidation has filled the memories of many people in the region.

The alleged Communists came from almost all corners of the region, but the largest proportion were said to be from Simpang Sari and Way Petai. However,
it was later revealed that the majority of these Communists had not engaged in any meaningful political action. In the region, the PKI never gained a significant number of votes during the early national elections. In 1965, prior to the commencement of the national military campaign against the PKI, women were recruited to join various Islamic teaching groups (pengajian) and cottage industries (for example, sewing or stitching), and young people were encouraged to join the rebana (tambourine) religious music groups. The only indication of concrete action, it was said, was regarding land reform, and it was rumoured that landless villagers were organised into groups in anticipation of obtaining ownership of farming land. Threatened with becoming the targets of dispossession, village elites and large landowners were more than willing to give full cooperation to the military personnel.

During the campaign there were stories of villagers mistakenly detained (salah tangkap), and villagers with no links whatsoever to the PKI were interrogated and subject to intimidation by the koramil personnel. This was largely the result of fierce opposition between factions competing for power in the village. Both sides gave information on their opponent’s involvement with the PKI. Having a distant relative or friends involved in the PKI movement was enough to bring someone to the notice of the koramil.

Suspicion of involvement in the PKI had long-term deleterious consequences for some. Near the market town of Sumber Jaya there is a small hamlet, many of whose inhabitants were the victims of oppression during the anti-communist campaign. Until recently, the hamlet has been isolated, receiving no government projects that neighbouring hamlets received, such as roads and schools. Most of its poor inhabitants have lived mainly as labourers and sharecroppers, or by tree felling and cutting from the remaining forests nearby.

**Chasing the Islamic Rebels**

While no ‘concrete action’ by the communist movement ever occurred, an Islamic rebellion a decade later had different results. Warman and his gerombolan (group or band of men) were remembered as having a strong anti-state agenda and multiple criminal records. In the second half of the 1970s, Warman and his followers were involved in some armed encounters in various parts of north Lampung. The gerombolan were responsible for burglaries, raids on buses, killing village officials, and attacks on military posts from which the group obtained firearms. The last two activities were said to have been more frequent during the New Order’s 1977 national election, and were widely perceived as an attempt to sabotage that election.

Warman was believed to have been one of the staunchest followers of Kartosuwiryo, the leader of the Darul Islam (DI) and Tentara Islam Indonesia
4. Local Politics: Bringing the State to the Village

(TII) movements that were founded in 1949 in West Java. The ultimate political agenda of DI/TII was an Islamic state. After more than a decade of warfare with the Indonesian army, the DI/TII rebellion was crushed and Kartosuwiryo was executed in West Java in 1962. Warman fled to Way Tuba, a region near the town of Baturaja in the neighbouring province of South Sumatra (Palembang). In 1975–76, he and his family moved to Sukapura in Sumber Jaya. About 50 of Kartosuwiryo’s followers joined the BRN transmigration in the 1950s and lived in Sukapura. Of these, about 15 to 20 later joined Warman. During these years, none of his neighbours knew that the notorious Warman was living next door or that their village was the headquarters of his gerombolan movement. Warman led a pengajian (Qur’an reading group) in his small mushala (praying house). A type of ‘true Islam’ (Islam sejati) was Warman’s main political teaching, and when the group became more and more exclusive and held separate Friday prayers instead of attending the village mosque, the village officials and military began to investigate. Soon the hilly region of Sumber Jaya and Way Tenong became a battleground between the gerombolan and the military troops.

Instead of surrendering to the military troops, the gerombolan, consisting of no more than 60 men, fought back relentlessly. Hiding in the forest during the day, they raided military posts and villages in the night. As in the DI/TII movement in West Java, food supplies were taken from shops and stalls (warung) belonging to villagers. Unlike the DI/TII rebellion, the local gerombolan did not terrorise the whole village, apart from taking food from the warung, and targeted only village officials. In fact, it was military personnel that forced ordinary villagers to take part in the campaign against the gerombolan. However, villagers were not allowed to carry firearms, providing them with an excellent excuse to avoid becoming involved in warfare against the gerombolan. Therefore, casualties were limited to gerombolan members, military personnel, and village security officers (hansip). Although most of his followers were shot dead or captured, Warman himself escaped, first to another location in Lampung and then to Java. The military hunt for Warman continued, and Ketapang, near Kotabumi, was the site of a fierce clash between the gerombolan and military troops resulting in fatalities on both sides. The battle was commemorated with the building of a koramil post.

After Warman fled to Java, he was captured in Magelang but managed to escape and remain at large until 1978 when a team of Kopassus (army special forces) shot him dead in Soreang, near Bandung, West Java. Like the victims of the military action against the PKI, a few surviving members of Warman’s rebellion and the wives and children of those who died or were jailed now live in isolation and poverty. Many moved elsewhere in Sumatra or across to Java.

The relatively long period of the military hunt, the fact that the group of rebels was small, and the absence of casualties among ordinary villagers, all indicate
that villagers in the region carefully positioned themselves in the battle. Ordinary villagers neither harboured the rebels nor fully assisted in the military campaign. Nonetheless, the alleged PKI movement and Warman’s gerombolan rebellion in the region brought further state intervention to villages in the region which I shall now discuss.

**National Politics in the Villages**

Following the successful crack down on communist and religious dissent, a strong military presence continued in the region. The military’s role expanded from hunting down state enemies to ensuring *monoloyalitas* (single or undivided loyalty) of the region’s population towards the state. ‘The state’, until the 1998 *reformasi*, meant Suharto’s New Order and Golkar.¹ At the heart of the New Order were the twin objectives of ‘political stability’ and ‘development’. Both *koramil* officers and the *babinsa* (village military officers) played a key role in the process. To become the head of village (*kepala desa*) or to hold other official positions in the village, a clearance from *koramil* was needed in addition to the ‘blessing’ from the sub-district head (*camat*) and Golkar functionaries. Through a program known as ABRI Masuk Desa (AMD), which literally means ‘the military enters the village’, the villagers were forced to participate in *gotong royong* or *kerja bhakti* (community works) on village projects such as building and maintaining roads, bridges, and schools. Even in the absence of AMD, the constant supervision by village military personnel (*babinsa*) ensured villagers’ participation in routine community works in similar projects, especially on the construction and upkeep of roads.

The triumph of Golkar until the 1999 national election, and the instalment of Golkar cadres in village administration, ensured a state of ‘political stability’ in the region. Undivided loyalty (*monoloyalitas*) toward the state was achieved by appointing village leaders to official positions in village administration, such as village social boards (*lembaga sosial desa*) and village boards for community resilience (*lembaga ketahanan masyarakat desa*), youth associations (*karang taruna*), mosque boards for religious leaders, and organisations devoted to family welfare education for women (*pendidikan kesejahteraan keluarga*).

The creation and incorporation of village leaders into the village administration was directly related to success in the mobilisation of rural populations in centrally planned rural development projects. In this region — as elsewhere in the nation — rural development projects included the construction of physical infrastructure (roads, bridges, schools, village halls, markets), village

---

¹ The name Golkar derives from *golongan karya* (functional groups).
administration (pemerintahan desa), expenditures such as transportation costs for village officials, economic development (for example, agricultural extension and land administration), and social welfare (family planning for example). The New Order agenda of political stability and development was successfully achieved in Way Tenong and Sumber Jaya. Due to the absence of villagers’ political alignment with any group other than Golkar, the villagers in the region devoted themselves to the rural development agenda. It was during this period of political stability and rural development from the late 1970s to the mid-1980s that more administrative villages were created and more people migrated and settled in the region. The mysterious nationwide killings of criminals in the early 1980s (penembak misterius) further ‘stabilised’ the region and enabled the movement of more people into it.

The political texture of Sumber Jaya and Way Tenong is a reflection of the political dynamic at the national level. With Golkar loyalists accounting for the majority of the population during the three decades of Suharto’s New Order regime, the region received a share of the ‘development cake’ that was envied by the neighbouring regions. All villages have paved or gravel roads and there are at least two elementary schools. In every three or four villages there is a health clinic, rotational market, and junior high school (sekolah menengah pertama). After the reformasi of 1998, local people in the region — like many people nationwide — switched their political loyalties to the previously suppressed Partai Demokrasi Indonesia Perjuangan (PDIP), not because of its political agenda, but simply because they had had enough of Suharto’s New Order.

Winning the 1999 election had a very different meaning for the local PDIP functionaries. It was just like night turning into day. Economically and politically marginalised because of their deep devotion to Megawati, the 1999 election provide them with a harvest to reap. Party functionaries from Sumber Jaya played dominant roles in the PDIP’s district branch, the district house of representatives or dewan perwakilan rakyat daerah (DPRD), and the administration of West Lampung. The positions of chairperson of PDIP, chairperson of the DPRD, and vice-regent of the district (wakil bupati) were all given to PDIP politicians from Sumber Jaya. Sumber Jaya and Way Tenong were also home to key figures from ‘Islamic’ parties such as PPP (Partai Persatuan Pembangunan), PAN (Partai Amanat Nasional), PKB (Partai Kebangkitan Bangsa), PBB (Partai Bulan Bintang), as well as the former ruling party, Golkar. People in the region noted that the new members of the DPRD busied themselves with renovating their houses or building new ones and getting cars. This drastic change was most noticeable among many of those who were not previously among the well-to-do people in their villages.

What brought politicians from the region to the top seats of the district-level political arena was the sheer number of their voters. By the end of the 1990s,
the two sub-districts of Sumber Jaya and Way Tenong were home to a quarter of the total population of West Lampung District. In 2002, West Lampung had nearly 400,000 people spread over fourteen sub-districts. Thanks to the high population numbers, Sumber Jaya and Way Tenong have always been seen as two important sub-districts in West Lampung. An important pocket for Golkar during the New Order, the region turned into the centre of PDIP and the ‘middle axis’ parties, including the PPP led by the vice-president Hamzah Haz, the PKB led by former president Gus Dur, the PAN led by Amin Rais, the chairman of the People’s Consultative Assembly, and the PBB led by Yusril Ihza Mahendra, the Minister for Justice during the reformasi era. So in 2002 and 2003, an even newer village strategy was created. As some villagers in the region put it, ‘we have to join the crowd otherwise we will be left behind’.

During 2002 and 2003, there were early signs of an alignment of the region’s population to the established political parties, which were now the ruling party (PDIP) and the ‘middle axis’ camp. The national configuration of politics towards the national election in 2004 was also reflected in the region, as exemplified by the splitting of the PPP into a camp led by the vice-president Hamzah Haz and another camp, the PPP Reformasi, led by the popular Islamic preacher Zainuddin MZ. On one occasion, over a thousand people gathered on the Fajar Bulan soccer field to hear a speech by Zainuddin MZ inaugurating the branch of his PPP Reformasi in West Lampung as though the support from the region’s population was assured. A couple of months later, brand new billboards supporting Hamzah Haz’s PPP were erected in some villages, indicating that the village functionaries were active in getting local people’s support. Similarly, when the PKB split, boards and banners of both factions (for and against Gus Dur) could be found throughout the region. In the market towns of Fajar Bulan and Sumber Jaya, one would see boards and banners of different political parties erected side by side. Only in Golkar did loyal cadres wait until the national election was closer before erecting billboards and banners. Politics in the region continued to reflect national political dynamics.

Sumber Jaya and Way Tenong have also been the location for mass organisations based on ethnicity and regionalism. In 2002, a branch of Paku Banten was inaugurated in Sumber Jaya and in the following months, a Batanghari Sembilan branch opening was celebrated in Way Tenong. The Paku Banten was formally declared to be an umbrella of all camps of pencak silat (martial arts) in Lampung. Paku Banten is known for its involvement in gathering mass support (dukungan massa) for particular candidates in the election of district heads (bupati) in the province. The most favoured candidates were already incumbents who hoped to be re-elected by the DPRD for the next term. The gatherings were organised with a pencak silat performance, dangdut (reggae) music entertainment, and concluded with a speech in favour of the candidates. Paku Banten is open to
people of any ethnic background, but in Sumber Jaya, Paku Banten members and functionaries were Sundanese and Javanese, and many of them hardly practised *pencak silat*. Batanghari Sembilan was also officially formed as a venue for promoting the arts (singing and *pantun* poetry composition) of people originating from the southern part of Sumatra, including Jambi, Palembang and Bengkulu, but excluding indigenous Lampung people. Two national figures, Taufik Kemas (President Megawati’s husband and a key figure in PDIP) and Ali Marwan Hanan (one of the chairpersons of PPP and the Minister of Cooperative and Small Business) were said to be involved in Batanghari Sembilan. In Way Tenong, Batanghari Sembilan functionaries are Semendonese politicians, government officials and businessmen.

In these mass organisations, the candidates for political positions will typically promise to bring ‘progress’ and ‘development’ to the region in exchange for the support of the region’s population. These statements are what the people in the region are eager to hear to ensure that they will not be ‘left behind.’ Many see both Paku Banten and Batanghari Sembilan as a response to these mass organisations of the native Lampung population which, besides promoting Lampung arts and culture, also campaign for the filling of political positions by ‘native children’ (*putra daerah*). While the ‘native children’ have joined Paku Banten, none seem to have joined Batanghari Sembilan. The functionaries and prominent members of the mass organisations were key members and participants of other mass organisations during the New Order, such as Pemuda Pancasila, Angkatan Muda Pembaharuan Indonesia (Youth for the Renewal of Indonesia), Komite National Pemuda Indonesia (National Youth Committee of Indonesia), and the like. Formerly loyal to the state as their central theme, the groups now promote regionalism, but underneath is ultimately the struggle for local, regional, and national power.

**Village Head Elections**

By integrating their villages into the state, the villagers are involved in an effort to tap state resources to bring ‘progress’ to their villages and enable them to maintain their livelihoods and pursue prosperity. At the local level, state attempts to control the rural population and villagers’ efforts to tap state resources are clearly visible. These dynamics repeatedly occurred during the New Order period as well as the period immediately after Suharto’s fall in 1998.

In village head elections during the New Order, one way to position a Golkar functionary as the village head was by blocking the non-Golkar candidate’s eligibility to obtain approval and letters of ‘clearance’ from the sub-district office. To ensure the victory, village head elections were often organised with a
single favoured candidate against an empty box (kotak kosong). Another strategy was to install an ‘ad interim’ or caretaker (pejabat sementara) nominated by the village council with the approval of the district head (camat) as a temporary replacement when the term ended and no one wanted to run for election. In cases where the village had not decided to organise a village head election and no caretaker was suggested, the sub-district office would appoint someone as the interim head. The latter could be a military or police officer or a government employee from the sub-district office. Since they usually continued their current duties and did not live in the villages where they were appointed, these caretakers were rarely present in the village. This made it difficult for the villagers to obtain their services. However, there were only a few cases in the last decade of the New Order when a caretaker was sent from the sub-district office, because more than one third of the villages had an interim head who was nominated by the village council.

During the New Order, one of the functions of the village head was to ensure that Golkar won the village vote. One popular and successful way to do this was to promise villagers that streams of development projects would come to their village or to threaten that a Golkar loss would mean the end of ‘progress’. The development of roads, schools, and health clinics was achieved by rotating the distribution of development funds and projects to each village in the sub-district. The village head would then rotate the funds and projects to each hamlet in the village. It was the promise of ‘bringing progress’ that villagers used to evaluate the village head’s achievements, which would then determine the village head’s success or failure in the next election. Since funds and projects needed to be rotated among all of the villages in the sub-district, a village that received funds then had to wait for the next cycle. The longer the ‘waiting period’, the smaller the chance of the village head winning in the next election. Success in bringing ‘progress’ to the village would prolong the village head’s term of office and a fresh election might not even be needed.

The primary and most steady source of village development projects was the small annual village development fund (bangdes or dana pembangunan desa). The most commonly used way to use the fund was to build gorong-gorong (small bridges) and to gravel the village’s unpaved roads each year. The fund was used only to buy the materials because the labour obtained through gotong royong or kerja bhakti (community works) was unpaid community work for all of the men in the village or hamlet.

Until recently, the village head received neither salary nor office space. The only legal sources of income for a village head were a small portion of funds collected from land tax (pajak bumi dan bangunan) and fees for services needed by the villagers. The amount from both sources was extremely small. In general, villagers accept that village officials take a portion of development funds and
projects, but still refuse to accept the absence of village development projects. This creates a requirement for the village heads to accumulate wealth from state resources through the continued influx of development projects to the village.

One could safely say that what the village communities in the region would like to have is a village head who can fulfil the villagers’ aspirations by bringing progress to the village. This is a formidable task. To ensure the flow of state resources into the village, the village head needs to get closer to higher levels of the state apparatus. During the New Order, this would be managed through the Golkar network and would involve petty corruption at various levels of administration, hence more cash in the pocket of the village head. If the village head went ‘too far’ with this petty corruption, however, the village community would react by setting up opposition in the village, developing factions, and spreading gossip to prevent the corrupt village head from winning in the next election. But without some involvement in petty corruption, it would be hard to bring development funds and projects to the village. No one would be able or willing to personally bear the transaction costs. A few village heads in the region were somehow able to maintain a balanced position. They managed to bring regular development funds and projects to the village, but were not overly corrupt, thus allowing them to maintain village community support (dukungan masyarakat). These village leaders managed to prolong their terms of office.

Efforts to keep the office within the family line by passing the office to children and/or to close kin have resulted in more failures than successes. In a few villages, the communities have nominated one of the children of a former village head to run in the next village head election. However, the nomination is usually based more on the nominated person’s active involvement in village and community affairs, such as sports, religious feasts and village projects and/or administration. In other words, it is the quality of the nominee that matters more than kinship per se. The village communities would be supportive of the nomination of anyone with such qualities, and village community support is incredibly important in village head elections. During the New Order, a connection to Golkar was much more important than community support, but more recently, community support has been the determining factor. Even during the New Order, community support could not be totally ignored. To avoid a win by an empty box in the village head election, community support was obtained by selecting a candidate who had the ability to use his relationships with higher government officials, via Golkar, to bring development to the village.

In West Lampung, the uniform name *desa* for administrative village, which had previously been the official designation throughout the nation, was changed to *pekon*. The head of the sub-village or *dusun*, formerly known as *kepala dusun* or *kepala suku*, then came to be known as *pemangku*. The village head formerly known as *kepala desa* — but informally called *lurah* — was renamed as *pertain*.
in 1999–2000 in line with the new national trend toward regional autonomy, which gave more authority to the district level. All of the new terms were said to be the original adat (customary) terms used by the native Lampung communities in West Lampung prior to Indonesian independence in 1945. This is when the former village councils came to be known as lembaga himpun pekon (village representative councils) and lembaga pemberdayaan masyarakat pekon (village councils for community resilience). Another important change was that village officials such as the village heads, village secretaries, village council leaders, and heads of hamlets were given a monthly allowance by the district government. The annual village development fund, increased to Rp 5 million from Rp 3 million, did not need to be used only for physical infrastructure such as gorong-gorong (small bridges) and roads, but could also be used for the village administration’s operational costs. Another change was that the village head’s term of office was reduced from eight to four years.

Previously identified as part of the New Order, these village leaders now act more as if they are part of the West Lampung district administration. One example is that there is reluctance among village leaders to show clear loyalties to a particular political party. With the new disconnection of village administration from the political parties as well as the provision of monthly allowances from the government, the official village leaders’ attachment to the district administration was strengthened. The village leaders began to act as if they were low-level parts of the government apparatus and now paid more attention to district policies and affairs.

In 2000, the head of the sub-district of Sumber Jaya launched a new policy which stated that 2002 would be the end of caretaker office terms in all of the villages in the sub-district. He also announced that the sub-district office would send one of its staff to be the village caretaker, and that no more village-nominated caretakers would be approved. Villages that still had village-appointed caretakers had to hold new village head elections.

Case Studies of Village Politics

I shall now examine the dynamics of village politics as illustrated by actual village head elections and leadership. In these examples, aliases are used for both village names and individuals.

Elections in ‘Sukakarya’ Village

Sukakarya is one of the villages created by the early BRN transmigrants. The last elected village head, Sarman, ended his term in the mid-1990s. Since then,
the village has had an interim or caretaker — a position occupied in the first year by the former village secretary (carik), Amin. Another caretaker, Otong, was appointed for the next few years until a village election was held in late 2002. Both Amin’s and Otong’s appointments were based on nominations by the musyawarah desa (village assembly), with the approval of the sub-district head. Amin’s nomination was based chiefly on his experience and knowledge of village administration, since he had previously served as village secretary. For Otong, it was his activity in the New Order and Golkar youth organisations at the sub-district level that led to his nomination. Otong’s appointment was made possible because of his father’s intensive lobbying within the village and at the sub-district office.

Otong’s father Darsi was an elected village head from 1964 to 1983, while Sarman, his successor, won the village head election against an empty box. Among the early BRN transmigrants, not many had a high school education, and Darsi was among the few that did. His active involvement in village administration and community projects amazed the elders who then supported him to become the village head. It was during his term that most ‘progress’ (like school and road construction) was brought to the village, which enabled Darsi to enjoy a very long term in office. When he resigned as village head, he managed to become a member of the district house of representatives — first in North Lampung and then in West Lampung when the latter separated from the former in the early 1990s. He represented Golkar until the national election in 1999 that brought down Golkar and lifted the PDIP and the middle axis parties. Darsi’s prominent involvement in the military hunt against Warman (Darsi himself was explicitly targeted by Warman’s gerombolan) helped him to establish contact with higher levels of government, the military, and Golkar. It is through these well-established contacts that he was able to take a Golkar seat in the district assembly.

However, later on Darsi’s son Otong was sacked from his caretaker office by the village assembly which was comprised of the heads of more than ten hamlets and village councils and mainly consisted of village elders. The villagers were disappointed in Otong’s performance because he spent most of his time taking care of his agen bis (bus ticketing business) for passengers to Java, but they also opposed his father’s influence on village affairs. Darsi used his son’s position to gather popular support for himself and Golkar in the 1999 national election. With the reformasi following the fall of Suharto’s New Order and Golkar, Darsi suddenly lost his influential power in the village.

Following the sub-district policy to end caretaker appointments terms and require an election of a village head, an organising committee was set up in Sukakarya. Yet, surprisingly, no one officially registered with the committee as a candidate. The few who were interested or nominated by factions in the village
were either unwilling or unable to pay the costs of an election. The village committee had calculated the total cost for the election, and the candidates were responsible for paying this cost which was comparable to the cost of a wedding reception. For its part, the sub-district office asked for nothing except the cost of the photocopying and/or printing of the required materials. No bribe (pelicin) whatsoever was needed for a candidate to obtain official approval of a nomination.

Still, until late 2002, no one was willing to register as a candidate. The village assembly then decided that the village would be responsible for the cost of the village head election. An equal amount of cash was collected from each of the households in the village, and each head of hamlet was made responsible for collecting the money. In return, instead of candidates proposing themselves, the hamlets would select their own candidate to be nominated for village head. From more than ten nominees, the village committee approved seven candidates, and the sub-district office approved three of these nominated candidates. The rest failed since they had only an elementary school education and, according to the district regulation, a minimum of junior high school completion is a requirement.

Amin, the former village secretary and current interim head, was among those who were rejected. This led to great disappointment in the village since Amin was the favourite candidate. Election day was postponed to allow the village committee to lobby the sub-district office to allow Amin to be a candidate. The head of the sub-district advised the committee to persuade Amin to sit for an examination (ujian persamaan) equivalent to that of junior high school. If he passed the exam he would get a junior high school diploma (ijazah) and be officially approved as one of the candidates. The village committee, village council, and head of the sub-district were supportive of this idea and willing to postpone the village head election. But, to everyone’s surprise, Amin refused to take the test. His close friends said that he was frustrated (patah hati) and embarrassed to be openly seen as too ambitious. Most villagers agree that had Amin’s candidacy been successful, he would definitely have won the election. In his decades-long tenure as village secretary, he was neither involved in serious corruption nor in other wrongdoings and had significant village community support (dukungan masyarakat).

Since the money collected from all of the village households was insufficient to cover the costs of the election, the village council decided to pawn the village fishpond to the village saving and credit association. Sukakarya is among a few villages in the region in possession of such communal land. For several years to come, the village saving and credit association was expected to manage and reap the harvest of the fishpond, which was more than a hectare in size.
So the village head election went on with three candidates: Haryana; Odo; and Tatang. All of the candidates were young — in their 30s and 40s. Haryana was the head of a hamlet and the only one with a couple of years of university education. Otong was active in the village savings and credit association. Tatang was another son of Darsi, but had no leadership experience, and his candidacy was largely ‘steered’ by his father. While Haryana and Odo worked their own coffee gardens, Tatang sharecropped his coffee garden. Tatang’s house — the same house used by his father during his term as the village head — was the busiest on the day before the election. Friends and relatives gathered, and cars and motorbikes came and went. The host generously served meals and drinks for the guests. It was as if the house was holding a party. Large photos of Tatang were stuck on the front of houses, car windscreens, and shops in the village. By contrast, at both Haryana’s and Odo’s houses, it was as if nothing special was happening, with only one or two kin and neighbours chatting.

With so many people crowded in his house, Tatang’s confidence was high. On the morning of the election, half a dozen cars with Tatang’s poster on the windscreen were picking up voters from all of the hamlets in the village, including the two hamlets of his rivals, and taking them to the village hall. His confidence was further boosted by the odds in the gambling market, which were two or three to one in favour of Tatang. It is important to note, however, that those who were involved in the betting largely came from neighbouring villages.

The voting was held from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m., and began with a speech and official opening by the head of the sub-district, followed by a detailed explanation of voting procedures by the committee. There were no campaign speeches from the candidates. The candidates sat side by side with their wives in the centre of the hall during the opening, and all of them went back home immediately after the voting commenced. The voting began with women and elders entering the hall and exchanging the vote letter (surat suara) distributed the day before the election for the voting form with photos of the three candidates on it. The voters entered one of more than a half dozen voting booths (bilik suara) to punch a hole in one of the candidates’ photos on the paper and put the paper in a large locked box at the centre of the hall.

By 2 p.m., with no more voters entering the voting booths, the committee decided to start the counting. The ballot box was opened and the counting began. Each candidate appointed an official witness to ensure a fair count. The fairness of the counting was further enforced by the presence of sub-district officials, police and military officers, members of the village council, and anyone who wished to attend. A very small number of registered voters had abstained, and a few voting forms which were not properly punched were considered invalid. The result was contrary to the expectation of many, especially outsiders, as Haryana convincingly won the election. In the next couple of days there were stories
about those who had bet on Tatang losing their bank savings, coffee gardens or motorbikes. The few who had bet on Tatang losing gained a considerable amount of cash. Yanto, a local Chinese businessman, was said to have instantly won Rp 10 million.

Gossip that the villagers had deceived Tatang and his father Darsi soon spread. A few days before the election, key figures in the village had openly expressed their support of Tatang. Some of the villagers said that this was done to avoid humiliating Tatang’s camp because that might have led to chaos or disturbances (*rusuh* or *ribut-ribut*) in the village. Intimidation and violence were things that Tatang’s camp was said to be capable of if they were humiliated. However, by ensuring a fair (*jujur*) and clean (*bersih*) ballot there would be no reason for Tatang’s camp not to accept the final result.

Odo’s loss, on the other hand, was a surprise to no one, being largely due to the work of his own camp in persuading villagers not to vote for him. The night before the election and on the morning of election day, Odo’s close kin informed the key figures in the village that Odo’s candidature was a mistake. He was too young, economically unstable, and immature as far as leadership was concerned. Many felt it would be better to give Odo a chance to improve his family’s economy and his leadership skills in order to be better prepared for the next village head election.

**Elections in ‘Ciptapura’ Village**

A couple of months prior to the village head election in Sukakarya, Ciptapura, a village about 30 km from the capital of Sumber Jaya, held its own village head election. Ciptapura was created in the 1960s by two groups of Sundanese who now lived in the two main, neighbouring hamlets in the village. Each group had a charismatic leader — Sujana in Sukawaras, and Takim in Ciptajaya. Both leaders were legendary for their leadership roles in organising the early migrants to transform the forested land into the present-day Ciptapura. Both Sujana and Takim were separately able to persuade the neighbouring Semendo village head to give part of their village territory to the new migrants. Sujana and Takim were active in providing assistance to the migrants who settled in the village. Initially, assistance was given by simply clearing the forest and distributing the cleared land to each individual who helped. Later, newcomers were given a host in the village who allowed them to work on a piece of land as *numpang* (using a plot of land for free), as a sharecropper, or as a hired labourer, enabling them to accumulate enough money to buy land of their own. The communities in the two new hamlets sought advice from either Sujana or Takim, who were both among the richest men in the village, and who each owned more than 10 hectares of coffee gardens and rice fields. Later, Sujana focused more on formal leadership
of the village while Takim became an informal leader, regularly receiving fellow villagers who consulted him on supernatural things, such as asking for a good day to undertake different tasks or for help with healing severe sicknesses.

The settlement turned into an official village (desa) in the early 1980s. A village head election was held and Sujana won against an empty box. Sujana was also Golkar komisaris (commissioner) in the village, ensuring a majority vote for Golkar in the village until the 1999 national election when PDIP won. Sujana’s term as village head continued until the early 1990s when he retired, in large part because of his wife’s health problems. No village head election was held at the end of Sujana’s first eight-year term, and the village council and the sub-district office simply agreed to let him continue serving in the position for four years after his term ended. The villagers regarded Sujana as an ideal village head. He acted as a father to the village by ensuring fair decisions on internal affairs. He was also said to have never touched the village funds, and he let the village councils and village assembly make decisions on village funds and projects. More than that, Sujana was recognised for his achievements in bringing government projects to the village. It was during his term that the village built a health clinic, a market, two elementary schools, and several bridges so that the village’s unpaved road network could be reached by jeep. The village was also continuously selected as the site of demonstration plots (demplot) for various agricultural extension programs, and since the mid-1990s, the village had been one of the most productive and intensive coffee-growing villages in the region.

When Sujana retired in the early 1990s, the village council appointed Sudarto as the interim head and planned to hold a village head election a year or two later. In the 1980s, Sudarto had migrated to Ciptajaya from Central Lampung, where he had bought a plot of coffee garden which was sharecropped while he was involved in the lucrative business of cutting and selling timber from the remaining state forest nearby. Upon his arrival in the village, he was appointed by the village council as the assistant babinsa (village military officer), and his main responsibility was to keep the village market secure. He received a regular income from the village funds collected from the traders in the weekly village market. Sudarto was successful in doing his job, preventing the stealing and pick-pocketing that had frequently occurred in the village market prior to his appointment. His appointment as the market security guard, and later as the interim head, was largely due to Takim’s endorsement. Sudarto had long been in close contact with Takim.

Sudarto somehow managed to prolong his term as caretaker for almost a decade. A few years after his appointment, when the sub-district office questioned his status as caretaker and suggested a village head election, he was able to persuade the village council and the heads of hamlets to sign a letter stating that the village had agreed to extend his term of office. With this letter, the
sub-district accepted the extension of his term. Like Sujana, Sudarto was very active in bringing government projects to the village: roads were gravelled, bridges, schools and a market were rebuilt, and a land certification project was also brought to the village. Sudarto’s achievements and leadership were well recognised, but when it came to the issue of morality, the villagers expressed nothing but disappointment. Sudarto kept all of the village funds and left almost no room for the village council to have a say in village projects. It was also noted that he did shameful things, such as selling the gardens in the state forest zones whose settler owners had been evicted during military operations during the 1990s, stealing the villagers’ money to pay the cost of land certification, and continuing his illegal timber business. The list grew to include other forms of wrongdoing, from drinking, gambling and ‘playing with women’ (main perempuan) to asking for cigarettes or drinks from shops without paying. It was only the last of these things that Sudarto was reported to have done within his own village. The other forms of wrongdoing were said to have been committed elsewhere, making them difficult to verify. The only proof was his frequent absence. A story about Sudarto’s brother being caught in an act of burglary and later burning someone to death near the town of Metro in Central Lampung was used by the villagers to suggest the possibility of Sudarto’s involvement in criminal networks elsewhere in the region.

In addition to the sub-district policy of having an elected village head in all of the villages, the village head election in 2002 was also the result of conflict between Sudarto and Takim, which led to the end of Sudarto’s long term support from the most influential informal leader in the village. One of Takim’s sons was involved in a fight with a young man from a neighbouring village. Normally, in cases of youth fighting with no weapons involved, both parties would enter discussions to reach ‘peace’ (damai), and the injured party would receive an apology and compensation in cash equal to hospital costs. The peace agreement would indicate that the case was considered an instance of juvenile delinquency that had been taken care of by the community, rather than as a criminal act to be taken to court by the police. In Takim’s son’s case, his enemy’s family demanded compensation amounting to more than Rp 1 million — well beyond the actual medical costs required to treat the injury. Sudarto, in his capacity as head of village, did nothing to persuade both parties to discuss a peace settlement, but instead reinforced the demand for compensation and obliged Takim’s family to pay it. Many believe that, had the compensation been paid, Sudarto would have taken a portion of the payment for himself because he had done this before to others in the village. Due to his strong informal leadership, Takim himself was finally able to settle the dispute in a peaceful manner, but by then he had become so angry with Sudarto that he promised to topple him from the office of village head. Takim’s statement was embraced with much delight by most of the Ciptapura villagers.
A village committee for the village head election was soon set up. Juhana chaired the committee in his capacity as the head of the village council, but there was another problem. Apart from Sudarto, no one was willing to become a candidate. Takim soon asked Ujang, one of his sons, to contest the election. Less than 30 years in age, Ujang was studying at a private university in Bandar Lampung and, as a result, was frequently absent from the village. A couple of months prior to the election, Ujang married a Semendone girl from a neighbouring village. Since there was no news prior to the marriage and no wedding party, it was said that the marriage was for the purpose of the candidature because according to regulations, a village head must be married. Takim’s and Ujang’s next steps were to then approach key figures in the village to gain community support. There was no problem with this as many key figures in the village were more than willing to support Ujang.

It is interesting to note that both Sudarto and Takim actually nominated Hardi to become the next village head. Had Hardi agreed to run, both Sudarto and Ujang would have withdrawn their candidacies in order to ensure Hardi’s election. Hardi was in his forties and had a good leadership record. He was the head of the hamlet of Sukawaras, and was an active and influential young leader of the village council during Sujana’s term as village head. He was economically established, with more than 3 hectares of productive coffee gardens and a couple of plots of rice fields, and had managed to send his two sons to Yogyakarta and Bandung — two cities in Java that were known for providing a good higher education. In the early 1990s, Hardi and his wife Minah went to the state palace in Jakarta to receive a national award from President Suharto. They were treated as pioneers in the national family planning program because they only had two children. During Juhana’s term as village head, his wife’s problems with literacy and poor health prevented her from performing tasks as head of the local family welfare education program. Hardi’s wife Minah acted as leader of the program in the village and actively represented the village at higher levels of government. Thus, Hardi and Minah were seen by the villagers as an ideal couple to hold political office. To persuade Hardi to accept the nomination, the village council was willing to issue a decree that the village would be responsible for all of the costs of the village head election. However, both Hardi and Minah refused the nomination.

According to his friends, Hardi himself was quite willing and ready to accept the nomination, but not his wife Minah and their two sons. Minah felt from experience that the tasks associated with being the wife of the village head would be unbearably exhausting. Another problem was that the position of village head was not a particularly lucrative one. Although all village heads in West Lampung received a monthly allowance, the amount (Rp 250,000) was relatively small — equal to the cost of merely 100 kg of milled rice. The cost of
living for an established family was about two to three times higher, according to some of the village heads in the region. Even though it was acceptable for the village head to use annual village funds for his personal needs, it would lead to gossip. For this reason, Hardi’s youngest son strongly opposed the idea of his father becoming a village head. According to him, if his father became the village head, any goods (household goods, vehicles, and clothes) that the family bought in the future would be gossiped about as if the family had used the village’s money. In particular, he could not stand to hear any gossip that the cost of his own study was paid for with the village’s money.

Thus, it was eventually Sudarto and Ujang who competed in the village head election. To cover the cost, Sudarto sold one of his cars and some of his coffee gardens, while Ujang sold his motorbike and pawned some of his father’s coffee gardens and sawah. The village council decided that no village money would be used. On the morning of the village election day, a dozen jeeps, minibuses and lightweight trucks, with either Sudarto’s or Ujang’s posters stuck to them, were busy picking up voters from all of the hamlets to take to the village hall in Sukawaras. Sudarto was reported to have been very nervous and got drunk the night before election day. He rode his noisy (but fake) Harley Davidson motorbike from hamlet to hamlet, and said to anyone whom he met on the street that he would take note of those who did not vote for him, threatening that something bad could happen as a result. To cool Sudarto’s temper, hundreds of villagers gathered in his house on the night before election day, cheering him up and indicating that they would vote for him. Takim’s house, where Ujang also lived, was much less crowded. It was said later that the villagers deliberately kept themselves from openly showing their support of him.

The voting procedures were similar to those in Sukakarya. The candidates and their wives arrived at 9 a.m. and sat in the middle of the hall watching the final preparation. Sudarto looked calm sitting on a couch, while Ujang was clearly nervous and frequently went out of the hall. The voting began around 10 a.m. after the head of the sub-district’s official opening speech. Again there were no speeches from the candidates. In speeches delivered at both Sukakarya and Sukawaras, the head of the sub-district stressed that, unlike before reformasi, the government now had no favoured candidate (tidak ada lagi calon yang dijagokan pemerintah). This time, villagers should follow their hearts (mengikuti hati nurani) and vote for the best candidate for their village. Ujang and his wife left for home right after the opening speech and prior to the commencement of voting. Sudarto’s wife left early, but Sudarto sat relaxed on the couch, smoking, exchanging jokes with members of the committee, and teasing some of the voters. He left for home a couple of minutes before the lunch break.

Unlike the vote in Sukakarya, no bets were laid on which one of the candidates would win or lose. No one seemed to dare to bet for either Sudarto to win or
Ujang to lose. The betting was on whether Sudarto would be able to obtain 200 votes from the nearly 2,000 registered voters, and the odds were even. As in Sukakarya, but with far fewer participants, the betting in Ciptapura involved motorbikes and coffee gardens as well as cash.

At 3 p.m. the voting was completed and the counting began. When the votes were all counted, it was revealed that Sudarto got less than 200 votes. A party was held at Takim’s house that night to celebrate Ujang’s victory. A couple of weeks later, Sudarto was thought to have left the village to live elsewhere with his other wife. Takim had not only deposed Sudarto from the office of village head, he had also gotten rid of his village rival.

**Village and Sub-District Politics**

By the end of 2002, the leader and the secretary of the sub-district of Sumber Jaya were both promoted. It was these two men who had established the policy that no more villages in Sumber Jaya would have caretaker heads by 2003, and all would have village heads elected through democratic elections. The secretary of the sub-district was appointed head of a less developed neighbouring sub-district, whose head was promoted to the leadership of Sumber Jaya.

The previous head of the sub-district of Sumber Jaya was promoted to head an office at the West Lampung district level in the capital of Liwa. He was not really keen to take his promotion, as he much preferred to continue in his position as the head of the sub-district. The village heads in Sumber Jaya also preferred to keep him as head of the sub-district because, according to them, he was unlike other camat in treating the village heads more as colleagues (kawan) than inferiors (bawahan). Perhaps more importantly, he never unilaterally asked the village heads to deposit (setor) money at the sub-district office, nor did he take a cut (potong) worth a considerable portion of village projects as funds for his personal use. In the official ceremony for the handing over of the camat office, all of the village heads of Sumber Jaya made a declaration to the district head (bupati) that they wanted the present camat to stay. Acknowledging their sentiment, the bupati persuaded the village heads to give the new camat a chance. If in the following couple of months, they still could not accept the new camat, then a replacement would be arranged. This was a warning to the new camat to treat the village heads as colleagues rather than inferiors.

With the replacement of two key figures in the sub-district office, the policy of having elected village heads in all of the villages in Sumber Jaya was weakened. Among the fourteen villages, two villages still had caretaker heads in early 2003.

---

2 Nonetheless, this by no means indicates that there was no petty corruption at all.
and in both cases they were former village secretaries. In the first village, Trijaya, the village committee scheduled a village head election for the end of 2002. The cost of the election was an issue because the candidates were expecting the village to bear the cost, just as they did in Sukakarya, while the village council wanted the candidates to be responsible for the cost, as they were in Ciptapura. At the beginning of 2003, the issue had still not been resolved. In the second village, Sindang Cahaya, the situation was different. No one was willing to nominate as a candidate and there was no village council initiative (as in Sukakarya) where each hamlet nominated a candidate and the village bore the cost. As a result, the villagers were quite happy to have an extension to the term of the current caretaker.

In the sub-district of Way Tenong, unlike Sumber Jaya, the extension of the caretaker terms of office faced no obstacle. As long as there was no one willing to nominate as a candidate for the village head election, a caretaker’s term would be prolonged. Nevertheless, people were still attracted to the position of village head. Two village head elections were held in Way Tenong in 2002. In both villages the candidates were responsible for the cost of the election. In one village, Hendra, one of the candidates was the richest man in his village, an important coffee reseller in the region and the owner of a large shop. Many people were surprised by his decision to run, since the material gain from the office of village head would be nothing compared to his current business. Hendra eventually failed to win the election, to the surprise of no one. It is said that the position of village head is one that no one can get without money (*tidak bisa didapat tanpa uang*), but it is also something that money cannot buy (*tidak bisa dibeli dengan uang*). The winner of this particular election was an ordinary villager (*orang biasa*). What Hendra lacked and could not buy was the villagers’ popular support (*dukungan masyarakat*).

The granting and withdrawing of popular support for village leaders has played a key role in village politics throughout the region. *Dukungan masyarakat* was given to individuals who were able to meet villagers’ expectation of integrating the village into the state and bring ‘development’ to the village. Village leaders were expected to keep promoting resource flows to the village, otherwise the *dukungan masyarakat* would be withdrawn and given to someone else.