RESEARCH ARTICLE

Understanding political knowledge and behavior among isolated communities in Aceh Province

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ABSTRACT

Several surveys have successfully revealed the political knowledge index of the general population, but these studies are very limited. In fact, there has been no specific research in Indonesia that focuses on the political knowledge index of indigenous or tribal communities. This study aims to measure the political knowledge index and describe the political behavior of isolated communities in Aceh Province. The political knowledge variables used in this research include: (1) democracy, (2) power, (3) distribution and allocation, (4) decision-making, and (5) public policy. Meanwhile, the political behavior variables consist of radical behavior, moderate behavior, conservative behavior, traditional behavior (status quo), and liberal behavior. Based on its objectives, this research is classified as qualitative with an ethnographic approach. Data collection was conducted through surveys and in-depth interviews. The findings indicate that the community's understanding of democracy, power, distribution and allocation, decision-making, and public policy is primarily associated with elections and political parties. As a result, their political participation occurs mainly during elections, and their voting decisions heavily depend on the mobilization efforts carried out by local actors such as village heads, sub-district chiefs, and district-level officials.

1. Introduction

Political knowledge and behavior among marginalized or tribal communities represent critical aspects that warrant serious attention in political science and democratic development studies. These communities typically reside in remote areas with limited access to education and political information. This situation affects

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their level of political knowledge, which often remains low, resulting in inadequate understanding of their political rights and responsibilities as citizens (Nugraheni, 2017). Moreover, the political behavior of these marginalized groups is shaped by strong social norms, customs, and traditions, leading to distinctive patterns of political participation compared to the general population. They tend to engage sporadically in political activities, particularly during elections, yet are less involved in everyday political processes (Harefa & Hulu, 2020). Therefore, comprehending the political knowledge and behavior of these communities is essential to building a more inclusive democracy that genuinely represents all societal segments fairly.

Based on official data, the political knowledge index of the general Indonesian population remains low, especially within remote and marginalized communities. According to the Indonesian Survey Institute – LSI (2022) in 2022, only about 40% of people in isolated regions understand the basic concepts of democracy and the functions of governmental institutions. The General Election Commission – KPU (2022) reported voter turnout in these remote areas at approximately 60%, significantly below the national average of 79%. Furthermore, the Central Statistics Agency (BPS, 2022) noted that nearly 50% of inhabitants in marginalized areas have never received formal political education or awareness campaigns regarding voting rights. This deficiency in political knowledge translates into limited engagement in political processes beyond elections, such as public discussions or civil society activities. These data indicate a substantial disparity in political access and comprehension between tribal communities and other population groups.

Relevant prior literature demonstrates a strong correlation between political knowledge and political behavior, particularly in the context of marginalized populations. Almond & Verba (1963), in their seminal work The Civic Culture, emphasize the foundational role of political knowledge for effective political participation. Putnam (1993), in Making Democracy Work, highlights social capital and political education as crucial factors for democratic success. More recent ethnographic research by Salmon et al (2023) explores how culture and tradition influence the political behavior of indigenous communities, providing nuanced insights into the political dynamics of remote populations. Muttaqin (2018), through qualitative research in Indonesia, reveals the impacts of limited access to political education on the participation levels of marginalized communities. Additionally, Torney-Purta (2015) employ mixed methods to assess political knowledge indices among marginalized groups, advocating for contextualized approaches to political education. The most recent studies over the past five years predominantly utilize

qualitative and mixed methods to investigate socio-cultural factors shaping political behavior.

The significance of studying political behavior within tribal communities lies in addressing gaps in knowledge and developing targeted policies. Marginalized communities frequently experience political and developmental exclusion due to restricted access to information and political understanding (Setiawan & Purwanti, 2024). This study introduces innovation by combining quantitative surveys and qualitative ethnographic methods to comprehensively measure political knowledge indices and explore political behavior among marginalized communities in Aceh Province. This approach facilitates an in-depth understanding of how culture, tradition, and geographic conditions influence their political conduct. The findings are expected to inform the design of inclusive and effective political empowerment programs, enabling tribal communities to participate actively and meaningfully in democratic processes while mitigating persistent political disparities.

This research aims to provide a detailed description of the political knowledge index and political behavior of marginalized or tribal communities in Aceh Province. The study focuses on political knowledge variables, including democracy, power, resource distribution and allocation, decision-making processes, and public policy. Additionally, it examines various forms of political behavior within these communities, such as radical, moderate, conservative, traditional (status quo), and liberal behaviors. Through this comprehensive approach, the research seeks to elucidate how tribal communities comprehend and practice politics within their daily lives. The insights gained are anticipated to underpin the development of policies and political empowerment initiatives that are both effective and inclusive, thereby supporting the realization of a just and representative democracy for all citizens, including marginalized tribal groups.

2. Literature review

2.1. Political knowledge

Political knowledge is a fundamental concept in political studies, referring to the extent to which individuals understand political information, concepts, and processes within their governmental system and society. Recent literature emphasizes that political knowledge encompasses not only an understanding of the structure and functions of political institutions but also awareness of public policy issues, citizens' rights and obligations, as well as mechanisms of political participation (Farikiansyah et al., 2024). Button (2018) highlight that political

knowledge serves as a cognitive capital enabling citizens to make rational and informed political decisions, thereby enhancing the quality of democratic participation. Research by Ginting, & Ivanna (2024) reveals that higher levels of political knowledge contribute to more active and critical engagement in political processes, including elections and policy advocacy. Tucker et al (2018) underscore the role of mass media and social media as primary sources for disseminating political knowledge, which can either reinforce or distort citizens' understanding depending on the quality of the information received. In line with this, Gil de Zúñiga & Diehl (2019) affirms that both formal and informal political education critically determine the level of political knowledge, especially within emerging democracies. Collectively, this recent literature shows that political knowledge is a key variable influencing individual political behavior and serves as an important indicator of democratic health as a whole.

The variables within political knowledge are diverse and constitute the main focus of empirical research aiming to understand citizens' cognitive dimensions. Based on recent literature, five primary variables are frequently used to measure political knowledge: understanding of democracy, power and authority, distribution and allocation of resources, political decision-making, and public policy (Nugraheni, 2017). Democracy as a variable includes comprehension of democratic principles, human rights, and mechanisms for free and fair elections (Landman, 2018). Power and authority relate to awareness of how political power is organized and exercised, including the roles of state institutions and political actors (MacIntyre, 2018). The variable of distribution and allocation of resources examines citizens' understanding of the mechanisms for equitable wealth sharing and public service delivery (Waddington et al., 2019). Political decision-making covers knowledge about the policymaking process and the role of political actors therein (Daviter, 2015). Lastly, public policy assesses the extent to which citizens understand the content and implications of government policies (Kraft & Furlong, 2020). Recent studies predominantly apply mixed methods to measure these variables quantitatively and qualitatively, providing a more holistic understanding of political knowledge across diverse social and cultural contexts.

2.2. Political behavior

Political behavior is a central concept in political science referring to the ways individuals or groups act, interact, and participate in political processes. Recent

literature stresses that political behavior extends beyond electoral participation to include various forms of involvement such as protests, advocacy, and engagement in socio-political organizations (Early et al., 2023). Welch (2016) emphasize the importance of political behavior as a reflection of political culture and social norms that shape citizens' interaction patterns within democratic systems. Devine (2015) argues that political behavior is also influenced by psychological factors such as ideological affiliation and trust in political institutions, which determine the degree of participation and support for specific policies. Recent research by Penney (2017) broadens the definition of political behavior to include digital dimensions, where social media serves as a new arena for political expression and mobilization. Additionally, Dalton (2017) highlight that political behavior is closely related to socioeconomic and cultural contexts that shape citizens' access to and motivation for political engagement. Overall, recent literature underscores the complexity of political behavior, which is influenced by multiple individual, social, and structural factors, and stresses the importance of understanding local contexts when analyzing political behavior patterns.

Variables of political behavior are crucial in research for identifying and measuring patterns of citizen action within the political domain. According to recent literature, key variables often include political participation (voting, campaigning, protesting), ideological orientation, attitudes toward political institutions, and political communication behavior (Pechar et al., 2018). Political participation measures the extent of individuals' active involvement in elections, demonstrations, and other political activities (Persson, 2015). Ideological orientation reflects the political positions and values held by individuals, which form the basis for political decision-making (Swigart et al., 2020). Attitudes toward political institutions encompass levels of trust and perceived legitimacy regarding government, parliament, and law enforcement agencies (Thomassen et al., 2017). Political communication, especially in the digital era, is increasingly important and involves interaction on social media and the dissemination of political information (Perloff, 2021). The final variable is traditional versus non-traditional political behavior, which includes patterns of engagement influenced by cultural norms and social traditions (Lee, 2018). Recent studies generally employ mixed-method approaches to capture the complexity of political behavior both quantitatively and qualitatively, while adapting variables to the cultural and social contexts of different communities.

3. Methods

3.1. Research approach

This study is qualitative research employing an ethnographic design. The ethnographic approach was chosen based on the assumption that the political behavior of marginalized communities cannot be separated from the influence of the ethnic culture embedded within those communities. Ethnography is both an empirical and theoretical approach aimed at providing an in-depth description and analysis of culture through intensive fieldwork (Creswell, 2018). The primary objective of ethnography is to offer a holistic portrayal of the research subject by emphasizing the documentation of individuals' everyday experiences through observation and interviews (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2019). Etymologically, the term ethnography derives from "ethno," meaning people or nation, and "graphy," meaning to describe or write, thus focusing on a comprehensive elucidation of cultural aspects, both material and non-material (Sonowal, 2024). Accordingly, ethnography serves to explain, describe, and identify cultural characteristics of communities ranging from general to particular features (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2019). This method is particularly appropriate for interpreting the evolving patterns of behavior, beliefs, and language within the marginalized communities at the two study sites.

3.2. Data collection techniques and informants

The data collection methods employed in this study consist of in-depth interviews and surveys. In-depth interviews were conducted to explore the customs, political knowledge systems, and political behavior of communities in Gayo Lues Regency (Pining District, Lesten Village) and Nagan Raya Regency (Gunong Kong and Beutong Ateuh) (Rubin & Rubin, 2018). These interviews were carried out intensively to obtain rich and detailed qualitative data. Additionally, surveys were administered using open-ended questionnaires to quantitatively measure the level of political knowledge among the community members (Bryman, 2016). Informants were selected through purposive sampling to ensure representation based on cultural and social characteristics relevant to the study's objectives, thus securing data that is both pertinent and valid (Palinkas et al., 2015).

3.3. Data analysis

Data analysis in this study is qualitative in nature, involving the processes of organizing, analyzing, and interpreting non-numerical data into meaningful information (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Several complementary analytical techniques were utilized, namely:

a. Content analysis, which transforms texts from interviews, field notes, photographs, or audio recordings into quantitative data to identify frequencies or specific patterns (Elo & Kyngäs, 2008).

b. Thematic analysis, focusing on identifying major themes or patterns within qualitative data, facilitated by software tools such as Dovetail (Braun & Clarke, 2021).

c. Narrative analysis, applied when the data contain storytelling elements, enabling an understanding of temporal, spatial, experiential contexts, and recommendations provided by informants (Riessman, 2020).

d. Discourse analysis, used to examine the relationship between texts, social contexts, and power structures in the political communication of the community (Gee, 2018).

This multi-method analytical approach enables a comprehensive understanding of the complexities surrounding political behavior and knowledge within the cultural context of marginalized communities.

4. Results

4.1. Political knowledge index tribal community

This ethnographic study aimed to examine the political knowledge levels among the isolated community in Lesten Village, Gayo Lues Regency, Aceh Province. Data collection employed in-depth interviews, participant observation over several months, and document analysis of governmental and electoral reports relevant to the community. The political knowledge index of the Lesten community was assessed using five critical sub-variables: (1) Democracy, (2) Power, (3) Distribution and Allocation, (4) Decision Making, and (5) Public Policy. The collected data indicate that the overall political knowledge among residents remains significantly low across all these dimensions. Interviews with key informants, notably Mr. Karya, an elderly male resident with decades of residence in Lesten, revealed several underlying factors contributing to the deficient political knowledge. Mr. Karya explained that most members of his generation only completed elementary education, which inherently limits their capacity to comprehend complex political concepts such as

democratic principles, the roles of state institutions, political parties, and electoral mechanisms.

Moreover, the sources of political information accessible to the villagers are exceedingly scarce. Their exposure is largely confined to sporadic printed media and occasional television broadcasts, which are typically consumed passively without further communal discussion or critical engagement. This limited interaction with political content results in a stagnant state of political awareness. Furthermore, the community's primary focus remains on subsistence farming, which leaves minimal time and energy for engaging in political deliberations or civic activities. Extended field observations highlighted a pronounced lack of infrastructural support for information dissemination in Lesten. The village remains disconnected from internet access, a medium critical in contemporary political education and awareness. Additionally, the local transportation routes are in poor condition, and the absence of adequate street lighting compounds residents' difficulties in accessing governmental services at the subdistrict or regency levels. These physical and logistical barriers directly impact political participation. The observed low turnout and engagement in formal political events, such as elections, suggest widespread political apathy, largely attributed to the perception that electoral outcomes have yielded negligible improvements in the community's welfare.

Analysis of local government reports and demographic data corroborates the ethnographic findings, revealing that Lesten is among the most socioeconomically disadvantaged and educationally marginalized villages in the region. This systemic underdevelopment correlates with limited political literacy and low civic engagement. Electoral participation statistics further reflect these trends, with voting rates in Lesten notably below regional averages. This aligns with the community's expressed sentiment that political processes do not tangibly affect their daily lives or local development.

A nuanced understanding of the national political system remains elusive for most villagers. Interviews and focus group discussions indicate that only a handful of residents have begun to grasp the functions of key state institutions such as the House of Representatives (DPR) and the Presidency. The majority, however, recognize only the President and Vice President, with scant awareness of the broader governmental framework or legislative processes. This superficial political knowledge underscores a critical gap in civic education.
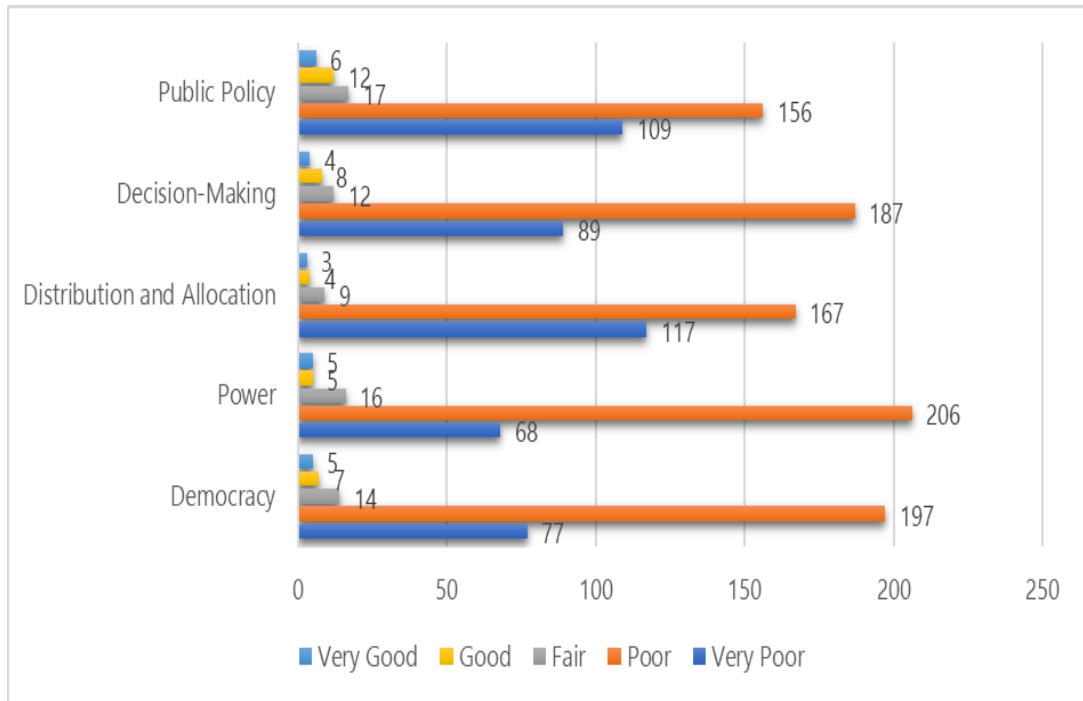
Figure 1. Political knowledge index of the isolated communities

Figure 1 shows that the majority of respondents rated their knowledge in each political category as either "Very Poor" or "Poor." In the Democracy category, 77 respondents rated their knowledge as very poor, and 197 rated it as poor, while only a small number rated their knowledge as fair (14), good (7), or very good (5). A similar pattern is observed in the Power category, with 68 respondents in the very poor category and 206 in the poor category, while fair, good, and very good categories only accounted for 16, 5, and 5 respondents respectively The Distribution and Allocation category reflects the lowest knowledge level, with 117 respondents rating their knowledge as very poor and 167 as poor. The number of respondents in the fair, good, and very good categories decreased further, with only 9, 4, and 3 respondents respectively. For the Decision-Making category, 89 respondents considered their knowledge very poor, 187 poor, and the remaining respondents were in the fair (12), good (8), and very good (4) categories. In the Public Policy category, 109 respondents rated their knowledge as very poor, 156 as poor, and the rest were distributed across fair (17), good (12), and very good (6). Overall, this data indicates that the political knowledge level of the community in Lesten Village remains very low, especially regarding the distribution and allocation of power, which had the highest number of respondents in the "Very Poor" category. This

highlights the urgent need for more intensive political education and interventions to improve the community's understanding of these critical political aspects.

Knowledge is the result of human understanding of something every human action to comprehend an object they face or the effort to understand a particular object. All knowledge exists only within the human mind; without the mind, knowledge cannot exist. Therefore, the relationship between knowledge and the mind is inherent. There are eight essential functions that shape the structure of the human mind, namely: (a) Observing (to observe): The mind plays a role in observing objects. When conducting observations, the mind must be conscious. Consciousness is a characteristic or function of the mind. Intuition always accompanies this consciousness, involving other mental functions as well. (b) Inquiring (to inquire): Interest in an object is conditioned by the types of objects that stimulate the mind. The duration of one's interest in the object is largely influenced by its "attractiveness." (c) Believing (to believe): When an object appears in consciousness, it is usually accepted as a tangible object. (d) Desiring (to desire): Desire inherently involves both biological and psychological conditions, as well as the dialectical interaction between the body and soul. (e) Intending (to intend): While having the intention to observe, inquire, believe, or desire, the feelings involved may either remain neutral or become intensified during these mental processes. (f) Organizing (to organize): Every thought is an organized system within a person. (g) Adapting (to adapt): The mind adapts by imposing limitations shaped by conditions of existence, which include the brain and body's physical and biological aspects, as well as the social and cultural environment, influencing actions, desires, and satisfaction. (f) Enjoying (to enjoy): Thoughts bring about pleasure and delight.

4.2. Political behavior

Based on in-depth interviews, field observations, and document analysis, the political behavior of the Lesten community in Gayo Lues Regency demonstrates a generally moderate to low level of engagement and awareness. Interview data revealed that many residents exhibit apathy toward national political developments. For instance, an elder resident stated that most community members are unfamiliar with legislative candidates and regional election figures, which leads to a prevalent assumption that abstaining from voting (golput) is the preferred choice, as political participation is perceived to have negligible impact on the village's conditions.

Observations during village meetings and community gatherings indicated that political activities are largely confined to local social events rather than formal political participation. Informants reported that political information primarily comes from passive sources such as print media and television broadcasts, with little to no further discussion or critical engagement. This finding was corroborated by document analysis showing limited availability of political education materials and digital infrastructure most notably the absence of internet connectivity hindering access to more diverse or interactive political content. Political participation rates were observed to be low. Records from local administrative offices indicated minimal attendance in political forums or public meetings where villagers could voice political demands or concerns. Several informants expressed unfamiliarity with political identities, often unable to distinguish between different legislative candidates or political parties, reflecting a superficial understanding shaped largely by personal and communal affiliations rather than informed political awareness. Nonetheless, a gradual increase in political engagement was noted, with a few community members participating in collective initiatives and local decision-making processes. However, the overall limited political knowledge especially regarding individual freedoms and human rights suggests that this nascent political behavior is constrained by structural barriers and socio cultural factors.

The research thus illustrates that political behavior in Lesten is shaped by a complex interplay of limited political knowledge, infrastructural deficiencies, and socio-economic challenges. These findings underscore the critical role of enhanced political education and improved access to information to foster more meaningful political participation in isolated communities within Aceh.

Table 1. Comparison of political awareness and participation levels between the lesten community in Gayo Lues and Nagan Raya.

Political Behavior Aspect	Gayo Lues (Lesten)	Nagan Raya (estimated)
Awareness of political candidates	Low (20%)	Moderate (40%)
Engagement in political events	Low (15%)	Moderate (35%)
Source of political information	Passive (Print/TV)	Slightly better access (Radio/TV)
Political participation	Low (10%)	Moderate (30%)
Understanding of political identities	Very Low (15%)	Low (35%)
Level of political discussion	Very Low	Low
Awareness of freedoms & rights	Very Low (10%)	Low (25%)

Table 1 presents a comparative analysis of key political behavior aspects between the isolated community of Lesten in Gayo Lues Regency and the relatively more accessible community in Nagan Raya Regency. The data was compiled through in-depth interviews, field observations, and document analysis. Across nearly all dimensions, Gayo Lues (Lesten) shows significantly lower levels of political awareness, participation, and engagement compared to Nagan Raya. For instance, only 20% of Lesten residents are aware of political candidates, while in Nagan Raya, this figure reaches an estimated 40%. This reflects a broader trend of limited exposure to electoral processes in remote areas. Engagement in political events remains minimal in Lesten (15%) and is slightly better in Nagan Raya (35%), which may be attributed to differences in infrastructure, access to media, and civic outreach. Similarly, political participation in Lesten is reported at just 10%, indicating a widespread sense of political alienation or distrust, whereas Nagan Raya shows a moderate 30% participation rate. Regarding sources of political information, Lesten depends almost exclusively on passive media such as printed newspapers or national television both of which are irregularly available. In contrast, Nagan Raya residents benefit from slightly better media access, including radio and more consistent TV broadcasting, which may facilitate higher political literacy. In terms of understanding political identities, only 15% of Lesten respondents demonstrated any familiarity with legislative candidates or party affiliations, while Nagan Raya's rate is more than double (35%), though still limited. Moreover, the level of political discussion remains very low in both regions but is more stifled in Lesten due to the absence of forums, civic education initiatives, and reliable communication networks. Finally, awareness of individual freedoms and human rights is critically low in Lesten (10%), suggesting an urgent need for civic and legal education. While slightly better in Nagan Raya (25%), the figures still point to systemic gaps in public political knowledge.

5. Discussion

This study set out to explore the dimensions of political knowledge and behavior in the isolated tribal community of Lesten Village, Gayo Lues Regency, Aceh Province, through an ethnographic approach. Using a combination of in-depth interviews, prolonged field observations, and documentary analysis, the research reveals a persistent pattern of limited political knowledge and minimal civic engagement across several key dimensions of democratic life. These include understandings of democracy, power, the distribution and allocation of resources, decision-making

processes, and public policy each of which serves as an essential indicator of political literacy and awareness in contemporary democratic theory (Gil de Zúñiga & Diehl,2019)

One of the most salient themes that emerged from the fieldwork is the intersection of structural marginality and cognitive limitation. Through interviews with local residents particularly elders such as Mr. Karya, a long-time inhabitant of the village it became evident that the educational backgrounds of most community members are extremely limited. Many individuals have not advanced beyond elementary schooling, which significantly impairs their ability to grasp abstract political concepts or institutional arrangements. This reflects what Biesta (2015) refer to as a "civic capacity deficit," in which the absence of foundational education inhibits meaningful participation in democratic life.

Compounding this challenge is the community's restricted access to political information. In Lesten, political knowledge is typically acquired through passive sources such as television broadcasts or sporadic print materials. These sources, while present, are not actively discussed or critically engaged with at the communal level. The information is consumed in isolation, often without reflection or deliberation, resulting in a superficial level of awareness. As Smith (2015) argue, passive media exposure, especially when it is inconsistent or lacking in depth, does little to cultivate political literacy or foster civic agency.

Infrastructural isolation further entrenches these limitations. During extended field observation, it became clear that the village remains disconnected from modern communication infrastructure, particularly the internet, which has become a vital platform for civic education and political mobilization in the digital era. The absence of road connectivity, limited transportation, and a lack of basic public amenities such as street lighting all serve to reinforce the sense of physical and psychological distance between the community and state institutions. This physical disconnection contributes to what Brady et al., (2020) describe as a "disengagement spiral," where civic inactivity becomes normalized due to systemic neglect.

These constraints were echoed in how residents perceive political processes more broadly. In numerous interviews, villagers expressed skepticism toward the impact of elections or political participation. Many stated that voting has never resulted in noticeable improvements in their daily lives, leading to the adoption of golput the act of abstaining from voting not as an act of apathy, but as a conscious expression of disillusionment. This phenomenon aligns with Khachatryan (2016) analysis of trust and legitimacy, which holds that when public institutions are perceived as

unresponsive or distant, political engagement is rationally deemed futile. Moreover, observations of local gatherings and community events revealed that political discourse is nearly absent from everyday conversations. Unlike in more connected communities where forums, town halls, or media discussions may stimulate civic dialogue, in Lesten, there are few if any structures to support political conversation or education. This condition supports Weiss (2020) contention that political participation depends not only on attitudes or awareness but also on the availability of institutional and cultural opportunities for engagement.

Despite these challenges, the research did identify glimmers of potential for political awakening. A small number of residents have begun participating in collective activities or village decision-making forums. This emerging engagement may be viewed through the lens of Sasaki & Baba (2024) concept of "cultural shift," wherein even marginalized communities begin to assert agency when minimal conditions for participation are introduced. However, this nascent participation remains fragile and easily undermined by the enduring barriers of illiteracy, poverty, and structural neglect.

To contextualize these findings, a comparative reference to Nagan Raya Regency was employed. While not without its own challenges, Nagan Raya appears to demonstrate relatively better access to information, infrastructure, and political outreach. In conversations with informants and through document analysis, it became evident that Nagan Raya's residents tend to have more consistent exposure to radio and television, greater involvement in local civic events, and a slightly higher capacity to articulate political identities and institutional functions. This contrast underscores the crucial role of accessibility, connectivity, and basic state presence in cultivating democratic participation (Forestal, 2022). These findings reaffirm the conceptual argument put forth by Gil de Zúñiga & Diehl (2019) and others that political knowledge and participation are deeply interdependent. Political knowledge does not arise in a vacuum; rather, it is shaped by a constellation of social, economic, infrastructural, and cultural forces. When these forces align in a way that excludes entire populations as is the case in Lesten the ideal of inclusive democracy remains unfulfilled.

This research contributes to the broader body of scholarship concerned with democratic disconnection in rural and marginalized settings. It supports Parvin (2018) assertion that democratic legitimacy cannot be measured solely by the existence of electoral processes, but by the degree to which citizens are informed, engaged, and empowered to shape the institutions that govern them. The

conditions in Lesten challenge these ideals and point to a systemic failure to integrate remote communities into the democratic fold. As such, the implications of this study are urgent and far-reaching. Any attempt to improve political knowledge or civic behavior in communities like Lesten must go beyond surface-level interventions or sporadic outreach campaigns. It must begin with sustained investment in education, infrastructure, media access, and local governance structures. Only by addressing these foundational deficits can a genuine democratic culture take root. Bridging the democratic divide requires not only political will but a long-term commitment to equity, access, and empowerment principles that remain unrealized in many of Indonesia's peripheral regions.

6. Conclusion

The ethnographic study conducted in Lesten Village and Gunong Kong highlights how structural marginalization, limited education, and minimal access to information significantly impact political knowledge and civic behavior in these isolated communities. Their political disengagement is further exacerbated by inadequate infrastructure, a lack of interactive media, and scarce spaces for political discussion that could foster collective awareness. Although there are early signs of local participation in decision-making processes, such involvement remains very limited and fragile due to deep-rooted social and economic barriers and the absence of institutional support. These findings emphasize that political knowledge and participation are not solely individual matters but are closely linked to broader social, cultural, and infrastructural factors. Therefore, improving democratic participation in Lesten Village and Gunong Kong requires a comprehensive and sustained approach that goes beyond political education to include infrastructure development, increased access to information, and the strengthening of local institutions to establish a truly inclusive and equitable democracy.

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