

Democratization of Village Autonomy in the Construction of Indonesian Administrative Law: Is It Possible?

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ABSTRACT

This article explores the potential for democratizing village autonomy within the Indonesian administrative law framework. Although Law No. 6 of 2014 and Law No. 3 of 2024 have granted formal recognition of village self-governance, significant challenges persist, including elite domination, corruption, limited community participation, and weak institutional capacity. Through a normative legal and comparative approach, this study examines the village autonomy experiences of India and the Philippines to identify best practices applicable to Indonesia. Findings indicate that democratization of village autonomy is achievable when supported by legal reform, institutional strengthening, transparent governance, and active citizen engagement. Democratization must go beyond procedural aspects like elections and include cultural adaptation, community empowerment, and the establishment of accountability mechanisms to prevent elite capture. Effective collaboration between central, regional, and village governments is essential to ensure participatory governance that aligns with local needs. Lessons from international cases underline the importance of community-driven planning and legally mandated public participation to achieve sustainable village development. This study concludes that democratizing village autonomy can significantly contribute to inclusive and resilient governance in Indonesia if systemic barriers are addressed comprehensively.

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1. Introduction

Village autonomy is the right, authority, and obligation to regulate and manage government affairs and community interests based on the rights of origin and socio-cultural values that exist in the community to grow and develop following the development of the village. Government affairs are based on village origins, and affairs that are the authority of the

regency or city government are delegated to the village.¹ The concept of Village Autonomy is actually a concept that is interpreted as the ability and initiative of village communities to be able to regulate and implement the dynamics of their lives based on their abilities. This means that intervention from outside the village should be eliminated or reduced as much as possible. While the nature of village autonomy is pure autonomy, it means that the existence of village autonomy has existed since the village began and is not a transfer of authority from the state.²

In Indonesian governance, the village government system has again begun to be standardized through Law Number 3 of 2024 on Villages. The birth of Law Number 6 of 2014 on Villages has at least two important implications.³ First, villages have full authority to develop because their existence is recognized and given autonomy to decide and manage their own local needs. Second, villages have large sources of funds and have the right to manage their funds to accelerate village development.⁴

The discussion on the democratization of village autonomy in the construction of the Indonesian state is very relevant in the context of decentralization and regional development in Indonesia. Since the enactment of the village law, villages have greater authority in managing their own affairs, including finance and development. This discussion is very important because villages are the foundation of a wider society and play an important role in equitable development, strengthening the local economy, and preserving culture.

Desi Satria stated in her thesis that the Implementation of Village Autonomy in Cipang Kanan Village, Rokan IV Koto District, Rokan Hulu Regency has not been implemented properly, this can be seen from the results of the study in the form of a questionnaire that the researcher made. From the results of the questionnaire, respondents who answered less well were 44% of the total sample. And from the results of the study, it can be seen that the development in the village is not running well, such as roads, bridges, and public facilities in the village, many of which have not been built.

In line with this, Fandi Latif and Irwan Soleman, in their journal that examines the problems of implementing village autonomy policies in Juanga village, also show that external intervention from the power institutions above it and the suboptimal use of village authority have reduced the substance of village autonomy. Therefore, proactive actions are needed to strengthen the capacity of the village government and the Village Consultative Body (BPD), as well as increase community participation in the formation of village policies to ensure the development of authentic and sustainable village autonomy. In addition, concrete efforts are also needed to overhaul the mechanism for compiling the Village Budget to be more inclusive

¹ Muhammad Syukri, 'Indonesia's New Developmental State: Interrogating Participatory Village Governance', *Journal of Contemporary Asia*, 54.1 (2024), 2–23. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00472336.2022.2089904>.

² Fajar Sidik and Muchtar Habibi, 'A Prize for the Village Ruling Class: "Village Funds" and Class Dynamics in Rural Indonesia', *Journal of Contemporary Asia*, 54.3 (2024), 387–411. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00472336.2023.2193968>.

³ Kadek Wijayato, Lusiana Margareth Tijow, and Fence M. Wantu, 'Kedudukan Peraturan Desa Dalam Sistem Pembentukan Peraturan Perundang Undangan Nasional', *Ius Civile: Refleksi Penegakan Hukum Dan Keadilan*, 4.2 (2020). <https://doi.org/10.35308/jic.v4i2.2548>.

⁴ Abustan Abustun, 'Implementasi Percepatan Pembangunan Desa Dalam Mewujudkan Pembangunan Berkelanjutan Berdasarkan Undang-Undang Nomor 6 Tahun 2014 Tentang Desa', *Jurnal Gagasan Hukum*, 1.02 (2019), 216–27 (p. 217). <https://doi.org/10.31849/jgh.v1i02.7701>.

and responsive to local needs, and reduce external intervention that can obscure village authority in determining development priorities⁵.

This study examines the limitations of the role of the BPD, which can be seen from three key aspects based on research conducted in two regions: Kulon Progo Regency in DI Yogyakarta and Banjarbaru Regency in South Kalimantan. These limitations include the process of filling BPD membership, which has not been carried out according to proper institutional procedures to ensure members possess the competencies required for fulfilling their duties. The selection process often only meets the minimum formal requirements of village governance. In some instances, the number of BPD members has not aligned with the mandates of Law No. 6 of 2014, which requires that membership reflect the specific characteristics and population of each village. This discrepancy often results from the delay in enacting district-level regulations concerning the BPD. Due to the non-competitive nature of BPD member selection at the village level, the competence and political commitment of the elected members are questionable. Internally, the BPD is also hindered by the lack of a dedicated secretariat with adequate facilities to support its role as a counterbalance to the village head. Furthermore, the BPD's institutional functions in the village development agenda remain limited. Its role in preparing the RKPDes, RAPBDes, and overseeing village government performance, including reviewing the village head's report, has not significantly contributed to the strengthening of village democracy. The BPD is not actively engaged in in-depth discussions on village governance issues, and when residents protest village policies, their objections are more often directed at the village head rather than being channeled through the BPD to advocate for reform.

The urgency of this discussion lies in the need to ensure that village autonomy truly improves the welfare and participation of village communities in government. Although autonomy has been granted, many villages still face obstacles such as corruption, lack of transparency, lack of capacity, and dominance of local elites. This can hinder democratization at the village level and result in inequality when implementing national policies.

2. Research Method

The research method used in this article is a normative legal method combined with a comparative approach. This combined method is selected to provide a deeper and more substantive analysis of village autonomy by not only examining the Indonesian legal framework but also comparing it with other countries that adopt similar forms and systems of government and village autonomy, specifically India and the Philippines. These two countries were chosen because, like Indonesia, they implement a unitary system with decentralized governance structures, where the village or local-level autonomy plays a significant role in governance and community development. The normative legal method involves a statutory, conceptual, and historical approach. The statutory approach examines regulations that form the legal basis for implementing village autonomy, especially Law Number 6 of 2014 on Villages and its implementing regulations. The conceptual approach explores the idea of democratization and autonomy as applied in the village governance context. The historical approach is used to trace the evolution of village autonomy in Indonesia and compare it with historical developments in India and the Philippines.

The comparative approach is used to analyze and contrast the legal frameworks, institutional structures, and policy outcomes related to village autonomy in Indonesia, India, and the

⁵ Fandi Hi Hi Latif and Irwan Soleman, 'Pseudo Otonomi Desa: Problematika Implementasi Kebijakan Otonomi Desa Di Desa Juanga', *Musamus Journal of Public Administration*, 6.2 (2024), 670–80. <https://doi.org/10.35724/mjpa.v6i2.5627>.

Philippines. This includes reviewing legal instruments such as India's Constitution (Part IX related to Panchayati Raj), and the Philippines' Local Government Code of 1991. The comparison aims to identify best practices, challenges, and alternative models that could enrich the Indonesian legal and institutional framework for village governance. Data collection was carried out through library research, including the collection of laws, legal documents, academic journals, policy papers, and comparative legal studies. The data were analyzed qualitatively using content analysis to identify major themes and challenges in the democratization of village autonomy. The comparative findings were then integrated into the analysis to provide broader insights and policy recommendations. The results of the data analysis are presented in a descriptive-analytical manner, focusing on evaluating the existing legal norms in Indonesia in light of comparative insights and proposing legal and policy improvements to better achieve the goals of democratic village governance.⁶

3. Results and Discussion

3.1. Village Autonomy in the Indonesian Government System

3.1.1. Understanding Village Autonomy and The Role of Villages in the Structure of the Indonesian Government

Village Autonomy comes from the Greek language, namely *autos*, and *nomos*; *autos* mean "self," and *nomos* means "command," so autonomy means "self-government." From the perspective of decentralization theory, village autonomy falls under the concept of devolution, which, according to Rondinelli and Cheema (1983), refers to the legal transfer of authority to local government units with independent decision-making powers. The village is a legal community unit with the authority to regulate and manage the local community's interests based on local origins and customs recognized in the national government system. It is located in the district. This genuine autonomy refers to the village's ability to govern itself independently, based on its traditional rights and local wisdom, without excessive interference from higher levels of government.⁷

Village autonomy is the right, authority, and responsibility to manage and regulate government affairs and community interests independently, in accordance with the community's original rights and socio-cultural values, so that the village can grow and develop according to needs. This is in line with participatory governance theory, which emphasizes the role of community engagement in decision-making, transparency, and accountability principles that are evident in the way villages hold community meetings and elect their leaders directly. Management of government affairs related to the village's origin will be handed over to the village, although basically, it is the authority of the Regency or City government.⁸ The concept of village autonomy is a concept that is interpreted as the ability and initiative of village communities to regulate and implement the dynamics of their lives

⁶ Aan Eko Widiarto and others, 'The Authority Relationship of Central and Local Governments in Forming Laws and Regulations: Between Indonesia and Malaysia', *Legality : Jurnal Ilmiah Hukum*, 33.1 (2025), 148–67. <https://doi.org/10.22219/ljih.v33i1.36629>.

⁷ Desy Hariyati, Defny Holidin, and Imas Cempaka Mulia, 'Centralized Local Development versus Localized Central Arrangement in Village Autonomy Policy Implementation in Indonesia', *BISNIS & BIROKRASI: Jurnal Ilmu Administrasi Dan Organisasi*, 27.2 (2021). <https://doi.org/10.20476/jbb.v27i2.11275>.

⁸ Rosita Novi Andari and Rizky Fitria, 'Village Funds Policy and Its Impact on Improvement and Autonomy Status of Villages in Indonesia', *KnE Social Sciences*, 2023.1 (2023), 1–30. <https://doi.org/10.18502/kss.v8i11.13537>.

based on their abilities. This means that intervention from outside the village should be eliminated or reduced as much as possible. While the nature of village autonomy is pure autonomy, it means that it has existed since the village began and is not a transfer of authority from the state.⁹ In this context, state theory, especially the pluralist view, recognizes villages as semi-autonomous socio-political units whose legitimacy stems not only from national law but also from customary and local norms.¹⁰

The existence of village autonomy is a pioneer of a fully autonomous and sovereign democratic system. This is because the village government has been given full authority to manage its own household, characterized by the election of village heads that can be carried out independently by the community. This certainly makes the relationship between the unity of the community more visible. However, each village may experience various shocks in government affairs. So far, the village government has been considered to have received less attention from the government, especially in developing Human Resources, which is sometimes still less accessible. Therefore, Law No. 6 of 2014 was introduced so that the implementation of village government continues to run well by its intended purpose.¹¹ The law reaffirms the subsidiarity principle in decentralization, where decisions are best made at the most immediate or local level capable of addressing them effectively.

Villages are the lowest units of government within the framework of the Unitary State of the Republic of Indonesia. They possess territorial boundaries and the authority to manage the interests of local communities based on community initiatives, ancestral rights, and/or traditional rights, all of which are recognized and respected in the national governance system. Villages have autonomy rights derived from customary law, which allow them to determine the government structure, manage household affairs, and have rights to all existing wealth and assets. With this crucial position, the village's existence must be emphasized to achieve the welfare of the village community. Thus, village autonomy must be understood not only as a legal recognition but also as a conceptual manifestation of decentralized governance and state pluralism.

3.1.2. Implementation of Law Number 3 of 2024 on Villages in Strengthening Village Autonomy

In detail, the implementation of Law No. 6 of 2014 on villages can be grouped into five areas: implementation in regional development, human resource development, overcoming and accelerating poverty reduction, structuring functional relations between the Regional People's Representative Council and regional governments, and increasing coordination or teamwork.¹² The implementation of regional autonomy has provided local governments with broad authority to manage development, including human resource capacity, poverty reduction, and executive-legislative coordination. However, its execution often suffers from weak coordination, limited capacity, and lack of synergy, which hinders the strengthening of village autonomy. The relationship between local governments (provincial and

⁹ Ilham Yuli Isdiyanto, 'Village Sovereignty in Dispute Resolution after Law No 6 of 2014 Concerning Village', *Jurnal Media Hukum*, 26.2 (2019), 223–39. <https://doi.org/10.18196/jmh.20190136>.

¹⁰ Yordan Gunawan and Zulfiani Ayu Astutik, 'The Importance of Bilateral Agreement on Mandatory Consular Notification for Indonesia: Tuti Tursilawati Execution', *Jurnal Hukum Novelty*, 10.2 (2019), 85–100. <https://doi.org/10.26555/novelty.v10i2.a13530>.

¹¹ Bondi Arifin and others, 'Village Fund, Village-Owned-Enterprises, and Employment: Evidence from Indonesia', *Journal of Rural Studies*, 79.1 (2020), 382–94. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jrurstud.2020.08.052>.

¹² Muhadam Labolo, 'Peluang Dan Ancaman Otonomi Desa Pasca Undang-Undang Nomor 6 Tahun 2014 Tentang Desa', *Jurnal Ilmiah Wahana Bhakti Praja*, 7.2 (2017), 73. <https://doi.org/10.33701/jiwbp.v7i2.42>.

regency/municipal levels) and village governments plays a crucial role in strengthening village autonomy in Indonesia. Several key aspects of this relationship contribute to the effective empowerment of villages:

- a. **Regulatory Support and Supervision**
Local governments are responsible for issuing regional regulations and policies that guide village governance in line with national law, particularly Law No. 6 of 2014 on Villages. They provide legal clarity and administrative frameworks that enable villages to exercise their autonomy effectively. At the same time, they supervise the implementation of village governance to ensure accountability and compliance without curbing village independence.
- b. **Capacity Building**
Local governments are instrumental in enhancing the administrative and managerial capacities of village officials. Through training programs, technical assistance, and mentoring, local governments help village administrations improve their planning, budgeting, financial management, and service delivery, making them more capable of self-governance.
- c. **Budgeting and Financial Oversight**
While villages receive direct funds from the central government (Dana Desa), local governments often assist in budget planning and ensure the synchronization of village development plans (RKPDDes) with regional development agendas (RKPD). They also monitor fund usage to prevent mismanagement and corruption, ensuring funds are used effectively for the benefit of the village community.
- d. **Facilitation and Mediation**
Local governments act as facilitators and mediators between villages and external parties, such as the private sector, NGOs, or other government institutions. This role helps villages gain access to additional resources, partnerships, and innovations that support local development.
- e. **Data Integration and Development Planning**
Local governments assist in integrating village-level data into broader regional development plans. This integration ensures that village needs and potentials are considered in regional policy-making, and that development is carried out in a more inclusive and participatory manner.

By fulfilling these roles, local governments do not overpower village autonomy, but rather reinforce it, ensuring that villages have the capacity, support, and strategic alignment needed to thrive as self-governing entities within the larger structure of the Indonesian state. In light of the above, it is essential to emphasize that the implementation of Law No. 3 of 2024 in strengthening village autonomy must be seen through the lens of both top-down and bottom-up policy integration. While the top-down approach ensures regulatory frameworks, funding, and oversight from the central and regional levels, the bottom-up approach is equally vital to empower local communities, ensure participatory governance, and make development more responsive to actual needs at the village level. Strengthening village autonomy thus requires synergy between directive support and grassroots initiative.¹³

¹³ Yordan Gunawan, 'Arbitration Award of Icsid on the Investment Disputes of Churchill Mining Plc v. Republic of Indonesia', *Hasanuddin Law Review*, 3.1 (2017), 14-26. <https://doi.org/10.20956/halrev.v3i1.948>.

3.1.3. Challenges in Implementing Village Autonomy in Indonesia

The problem of poverty that continues to exist in many villages in Indonesia is closely tied to a number of fundamental challenges faced by village governments. One major challenge is the limited number and capability of human resources. Many village administrations operate with insufficient staff, both in terms of quantity and quality, which restricts their ability to carry out development programs effectively.¹⁴ Additionally, there is a lack of consistent and high-quality support in the form of assistance, training, and monitoring for village development initiative¹⁵ This weakens the implementation of programs that are essential for village progress.

Geographical isolation also remains a persistent challenge. Many villages are located in remote areas, making access to public service centers difficult for residents. This contributes to low levels of village welfare, particularly in relation to the provision of basic services and efforts to stimulate local economic growth. Furthermore, the limited skills and competencies of village human resources hinder innovation and the ability to address local issues effectively. These challenges, if left unaddressed, will continue to hinder the ability of village governments to uplift community welfare and promote inclusive development.

3.1.4. Obstacles in Implementing Village Autonomy in Indonesia

In addition to the developmental challenges, there are several key obstacles that hinder the realization of effective village autonomy and sustainable development. One of the most serious obstacles is the occurrence of corruption at the village level. Misuse of village funds not only causes direct financial losses but also erodes public trust in village institutions and broader government structures. Such practices severely limit the impact of government programs and compromise transparency and accountability. Another critical obstacle is the dominant role of local elites in village governance. Often, power is concentrated in the hands of a few influential individuals, which leads to a lack of inclusivity in decision-making processes. This imbalance can marginalize other community members and prevent equitable development. Overcoming these obstacles requires a firm commitment to transparency, stronger monitoring mechanisms, and the promotion of participatory governance that involves the entire community in planning and decision-making processes¹⁶. Only then can village autonomy be truly effective and development be sustained in the long term.

3.2. The Importance of Democratization of Village Autonomy in the Construction of Indonesian State Administration

3.2.1. The Role of Democracy in Strengthening Village Autonomy

Democracy was originally an idea about a lifestyle that emerged as a reaction to the inhumane social and political realities in society. Democracy has a good image, because it is the foundation of national life by giving recognition to full human rights, all parties uphold the law, there is equal rights and obligations for all citizens to freedom of politics, association, expressing opinions, both written and oral.

¹⁴ Diding Rahmat and others, 'The Urgency of Administrative Law in Light of Ius Constituendum Regarding the Role of Village Heads', *Volksgeist: Jurnal Ilmu Hukum Dan Konstitusi*, 7.1 (2024), 53–67. <https://doi.org/10.24090/volksgeist.v7i1.10204>.

¹⁵ Erni Irawati, 'Peningkatan Kapasitas Desa Berdasarkan Pada Undang-Undang No. 6 Tahun 2014 (Sebuah Kajian Tentang Otonomi Desa)', *Jurnal Inovasi Penelitian*, 2.2 (2021), 635–42. <https://doi.org/10.47492/jip.v2i2.719>.

¹⁶ Latif and Soleman.

The real role of village democratization is a complex effort. This complexity arises because democratization is not merely the implementation of formal democratic procedures, such as direct village head elections, but also involves internalizing specific values and principles that must be reflected in everyday practices.¹⁷ Referring to Lawrence Friedman's theory of legal effectiveness, this complexity can be understood through three key aspects: structure, substance, and legal culture.¹⁸

First, the structural aspect relates to the institutions and mechanisms that enable democratic governance, such as village councils, the village head, and participatory decision-making processes. These systems form the procedural foundation for how democracy operates at the village level. Second, the substantive aspect refers to the actual content of laws, policies, and decisions made within the village. It ensures that democratic practices result in outcomes that are fair, responsive, and aligned with the needs and aspirations of the community. Third, the cultural aspect (legal culture) emphasizes the values, habits, and mindset of both leaders and citizens. It reflects how deeply democratic principles—such as transparency, mutual respect, and civic participation—are embedded in the daily life of the village community. Together, these three dimensions must be strengthened and work in harmony to ensure that village democratization is not only procedural but also meaningful, just, and sustainable¹⁹

3.2.2. The Relationship Between Democratization and Strengthening Village Governance

Democratization is an effort to redefine the relationship between the village community and the elite or organizers of the village government (village head, staff, and BPD). Through democracy, the general definition of power applies in the village, namely that power comes from and is in the hands of the people. Based on this definition, it means that the community or village residents are the true owners of power (the village), not the elite or organizers of the village government. The organizers of the village government are merely executors of the power of the village people, not the owners of power, let alone the village owners.

3.2.3. Benefits of Democratizing Village Autonomy for Inclusive and Sustainable Village Development

Democratization of village autonomy is important in promoting inclusive and sustainable village development. By giving more power and control to village communities, the democratization of village autonomy allows them to participate in decision-making and manage village resources actively. This has a positive impact on various aspects of village development, such as:

- a. Increasing Community Participation: Democratization of village autonomy encourages community participation in various aspects of village development. Villagers can convey their aspirations, needs, and ideas in village deliberation forums. This allows them to

¹⁷ Meri Yarni and others, 'Democratic Values in Nagari: An Analysis on Electoral System Shifts in One Province of Indonesia', *Volksgeist: Jurnal Ilmu Hukum Dan Konstitusi*, 7.2 (2024), 379–92. <https://doi.org/10.24090/VOLKSGEIST.V7I2.12106>.

¹⁸ Nasrullah and others, 'Optimizing the Role of Information and Communications Technology within the State Administrative Court Environment', *Jurnal Media Hukum*, 32.1 SE-Articles (2025), 78–95. <https://doi.org/10.18196/jmh.v32i1.25118>.

¹⁹ Siti Zuliyah and Triwahyuningsih Triwahyuningsih, 'The Implementation of Regional Regulations in the Process of Filling in the Village Civil Service', *Jurnal Daulat Hukum*, 4.4 (2021), 277. <https://doi.org/10.30659/jdh.v4i4.17989>.

participate in determining the direction of village development by their needs and priorities.

- b. Increasing Transparency and Accountability: Democratization of village autonomy encourages transparency and accountability in managing village governance and finances. Village communities can monitor the use of village funds and demand accountability from village heads and officials. This helps prevent corruption and ensures that village funds are used effectively and efficiently for development.
- c. Encouraging Justice and Equality: Village autonomy helps realize justice and equality in village development. By providing equal opportunities for all villagers to participate in decision-making, village autonomy's democratization ensures that all community groups' needs and aspirations are accommodated.
- d. Increasing Development Efficiency and Effectiveness: Democratization of village autonomy allows village communities to manage resources and development programs more efficiently and effectively. By understanding the needs and priorities of village communities, development programs can be designed and implemented more precisely.
- e. Building Sustainable Villages: Democratization of village autonomy encourages sustainable village development. By involving village communities in decision-making and resource management, the democratization of village autonomy ensures that village development is carried out sustainably and in an environmentally friendly manner.

Village democratization represents the spirit of the Village Law, which recognizes the Village as a subject under the umbrella of the principles of recognition and subsidiarity. The choice of this phrase is also intended to show that the Village is not an empty geographical space that is far from the socio-culture of the people who live in it, as captured by the phrase democratization in the Village. On the contrary, the Village is a territorial or regional unity attached and bound to the lives of the people above it, along with the traditions and customs that drive that life. Thus, the phrase or concept of Village democratization means an effort to move democracy within the uniqueness of the Village itself.²⁰

Democracy is implemented and developed to recognize the uniqueness and distinctiveness of Village traditions. The significance or important value of Village democratization is based on two things. First, in the Village arena, democracy is an effort to redefine the relationship between the Village community and the elite or organizers of the Village Government (Village Head and staff and BPD). Through democracy, the general definition of power also applies in the Village, namely that power comes from and is in the hands of the people. Based on this definition, it means that the Village community or residents are the true owners of power (Village), not the elite or organizers of the Village Government.²¹ The Village Government Organizer is merely an implementer of the power of the Village people, not the owner of power or even the owner of the Village. The second background is related to the progress marked by the Village Law in viewing the position of the Village. One of the most important parts of the Village Law is the State's recognition of the original rights of the Village (called the principle of recognition) and the determination of local-scale authority and local decision-

²⁰ Muhammad Taufiq and Rahmad Hidayat, 'The Constraining Dynamics to Promote the Inclusive Village Governance in an Autocratic Leadership Setting', *Journal of Governance and Local Politics (JGLP)*, 4.1 (2022), 55–69. <https://doi.org/10.47650/jglp.v4i1.442>.

²¹ Debjani Dasgupta and Glyn Williams, 'The Creation and Withdrawal of Spaces for Participatory Governance: The Case of Village Development Committees in West Bengal, India', *Politics & Society*, 51.4 (2022), 493–519. <https://doi.org/10.1177/00323292221102133>.

making for the benefit of the Village community (called the principle of subsidiarity). With these two principles, the Village has great authority to manage itself.

Viewed from the perspective of the interests of the Village community, recognition and subsidiarity provide opportunities for the Village to realize the common will in the spirit of Village development. The Village appears as a subject that plans and compiles its own development priorities, regardless of the government's or regional government's instructions or dictates. On the other hand, only with recognition and subsidiarity did the feudal and elitist character of the Village Government organizers have the opportunity to re-emerge. In that context, democracy is needed to develop the social capital of the Village community in dealing with and managing Village power. Through democracy, it is also hoped that awareness of its position as the source and true owner of power will grow in the village community. Recognition and subsidiarity as the principles of Village regulation have implications for the design of democracy developed in the Village. Village democracy has its emphasis and nuances that cannot be equated with democracy at the national level.²² The rights of origin, socio-cultural patterns of the Village, characteristics of the Village community, and sociological realities of the Village community demand adaptation from any modern system if it is to run in the Village, including democracy.²³

3.3. Challenges in Democratizing Village Autonomy

3.3.1. Limited Human and Financial Resources at the Village Level

Various human resources (HR) problems regarding village government finances include the low quality of accounting personnel, the suitability between competencies and job demands, and the lack of HR in rural areas. The implementation of regional autonomy must be seen as an opportunity for the authority to better manage HR regarding village government financial management. HR Management The village government's financial management needs attention, considering the still low education status. While managing village funds of up to 1 billion, the quality of HR regarding financial management must still be improved. Representation of the quality and quantity of HR working in the village shows that most HR still have a high school education background.²⁴ Human Resources (HR) must improve its quality as managers of village government finances. By Law Number 6 of 2014 on Villages, village financial management of up to IDR 1 billion must be managed professionally so that village government officials make no errors or deviations. Therefore, village government officials in the region must know about village financial management so that the implementation of village government is carried out properly and orderly. Through this law, it is hoped that village government officials will work more professionally in managing

²² Nurlinah and Haryanto, 'Transmigration Village Development: The State and Community Organizations in Rural Indonesia', *Frontiers in Political Science*, 6 (2024), 1441393. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpos.2024.1441393>.

²³ Arie Sujito and Mohammad Ghofur, 'The Nurturing Food Sovereignty from the Peripheral Side: The Village Law and the Soul of Agriculture in Rural Development in Indonesia', *Sodality: Jurnal Sosiologi Pedesaan*, 10.3 SE-Articles (2023), 305-16. <https://doi.org/10.22500/10202243672>.

²⁴ Jacqueline VEL, Yando ZAKARIA, and Adriaan BEDNER, 'Law-Making as a Strategy for Change: Indonesia's New Village Law', *Asian Journal of Law and Society*, 4.2 (2017), 447-71. <https://doi.org/10.1017/als.2017.21>.

financial administration so that the implementation of village government can run more orderly.²⁵

3.3.2. Expanding Community Participation in Decision Making

The concept of participation is related to democracy, as stated by Philipus M. Hadjon (1997), that around the 1960s, an idea of democracy emerged called participatory democracy. In this concept, the people have the right to participate in the government's decision-making process. In the idea of democracy, the principle of openness or participation is one of the minimum requirements, as stated by Burkens in a book entitled "*Beginselen van de democratische rechtsstaat*" (Philipus M. Hadjon, 1997), that 1). everyone has the same rights in free and secret elections; 2). everyone has the right to be elected; 3). everyone has political rights through freedom of opinion and assembly; 4). The people's representative body influences decision-making through the means of "*(mede) beslissing-recht*" (the right to participate in deciding and or through supervisory authority; 5). the principle of openness in decision-making and the open nature of decisions; 6). The rights of minorities are respected.²⁶

3.3.3. Efforts To Strengthen the Capacity and Quality of Village Government

Various efforts to strengthen the capacity and quality of village government through improving human resources, community participation, transparency, utilization of technology, and local economic development.²⁷

- a. Human Resource Development Training and education for village officials are key to increasing capacity. Training programs that cover management, budget management, and public services have shown positive results in village government performance.
- b. Community Participation Forms of community participation, such as village deliberations, increase community involvement in decision-making. This makes the policies taken more in line with community needs.
- c. Transparency and Accountability Implementation of a good accountability system, such as financial reports that are open to the public, increases community trust in the village government. Case studies show that villages with high transparency have better relationships with residents.
- d. Utilization of Technology The use of information technology, such as public service applications, makes it easier for the community to access information and services. Villages that implement this technology show increased efficiency in administration.
- e. Local Economic Development: Identification of local economic potential and community empowerment programs can improve welfare. Several villages have succeeded in developing micro-enterprises that provide jobs for residents.

²⁵ M Yamani and Tri Andika, 'Revitalization of Village Autonomy Based on The Principle of Subsidiarity and Village-Scale Local Authority in Natural Resource Management', *Journal of Law and Sustainable Development*, 12.1 SE-Articles (2024), e3102. <https://doi.org/10.55908/sdgs.v12i1.3102>.

²⁶ Na Li and others, 'Does the Democratization Level of Village Governance Affect Perceptions of Security and Integrity of Land Rights? -An Analysis from the Perspective of Social Network Abundance', *Journal of Rural Studies*, 94 (2022), 305–18. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jrurstud.2022.06.013>.

²⁷ Ward Berenschot, Wigke Capri, and Devy Dhian, 'A Quiet Revolution? Village Head Elections and the Democratization of Rural Indonesia', *Critical Asian Studies*, 53.1 (2021), 126–46. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14672715.2021.1871852>.

3.4. Efforts to Strengthen the Democratization of Village Autonomy

3.4.1. Encouragement from Central and Regional Governments in Supporting the Implementation of Village Autonomy

Before Indonesia gained independence, regional governance was heavily influenced by Dutch colonial rule. The colonial administration established a centralized system of control, with local leaders appointed by the Dutch to enforce colonial policies. This period saw limited autonomy for local governments, as the colonial powers prioritised the exploitation of resources and the maintenance of order over local self-governance²⁸.

The principle of the Unitary State of the Republic of Indonesia cannot be separated from the principle of centralization or regional autonomy which was based on Article 18 of the 1945 Constitution before the amendment, which "The division of Indonesian regions on the basis of large and small with the form of government structure is determined by the law by observing and living the basis of deliberation in the state government system and the rights of origin in special regions".^{29,30}

Furthermore, in the relationship between the central government and regional governments according to the basis of territorial *deconcentration*, it is not a relationship between two legal subjects (*public rechispersoon*) which are each independent. The territorial government unit of *deconcentration* does not have its own authority. The territorial unit of *deconcentration* is a single authority with the relevant department or ministry. And the nature of the authority of the territorial government unit of *deconcentration* is delegation or mandate; there is no authority based on attribution.³¹

The aspects of governance at the central, regional, and village levels are interrelated and function as a unified system to ensure effective public administration. At the central level, the government formulates national policies, laws, and strategic frameworks that serve as guidelines for lower levels of governance.³² These central decisions provide direction and consistency in national development, security, and public services.³³ Regional governments, such as provinces and districts, act as intermediaries by adapting and implementing central policies based on the specific needs and characteristics of their regions. They also have the authority to create regional regulations and manage local budgets, ensuring responsiveness to regional issues. At the village level, governance focuses on direct community engagement and

²⁸ Muhammad Mutawalli Mukhlis, Maskun, Muhammad Saleh Tajuddin, Dewi Andriani, and others, 'Regional Government Autonomy in Indonesia: The Ambiguity of the Federalism or Republic Model', *Malaysian Journal of Syariah and Law*, 13.1 (2025), 35–57. <https://doi.org/10.33102/mjsl.vol13no1.760>.

²⁹ Muhammad Mutawalli Mukhlis, Maskun, Muhammad Saleh Tajuddin, and Zuhilmi Paidi, 'Regional Government According to the 1945 Constitution: Ideas Refinements and Law Reform', *Journal of Law and Legal Reform*, 5.2 (2024), 485–530. <https://doi.org/10.15294/jllr.vol5i1.3125>.

³⁰ Hariyanto Hariyanto, Mabarroh Azizah, and Nurhidayatulloh Nurhidayatulloh, 'Does the Government's Regulations in Land Ownership Empower the Protection of Human Rights?', *Journal of Human Rights, Culture and Legal System*, 4.2 (2024), 391–421. <https://doi.org/10.53955/jhcls.v4i2.222>.

³¹ Hariyanto, 'Hubungan Kewenangan Antara Pemerintah Pusat Dan Pemerintah Daerah Berdasarkan Negara Kesatuan Republik Indonesia', *Volkgeist*, 3.2 (2020), 99–115. <https://doi.org/10.24090/volkgeist.v3i2.4184>.

³² Entang Adhy Muhtar and others, 'Smart Villages, Rural Development and Community Vulnerability in Indonesia: A Bibliometric Analysis', *Cogent Social Sciences*, 9.1 (2023), 2219118. <https://doi.org/10.1080/23311886.2023.2219118>.

³³ Rini Nuraini and others, 'Education On Simplifying Digital-Based Village Administrative Affairs', *Journal Of Human And Education (JAHE)*, 4.1 SE-Articles (2024), 36–41. <https://doi.org/10.31004/jh.v4i1.544>.

the delivery of basic services. Village administrations implement both central and regional programs while also addressing grassroots concerns, promoting participatory governance, and ensuring the inclusion of local wisdom and traditions. This multilevel interaction ensures that governance remains both nationally coherent and locally relevant, creating a balanced approach to public service delivery and development.³⁴

The strong role of the central government in implementing regional autonomy has several consequences. First, the development failed to capture the aspirations, potential, and needs of the community in the region. This occurs because of the strong dominance of the central government, so decision-makers fail to understand the aspirations and dynamics that develop at the grassroots level. In the end, the government's development fails to address the problems that exist in society because the regional government has a better understanding of the problems and aspirations that develop in its region. Second, development centralism has created regional dependence on the center. This is shown especially in financing development projects that the government carries out. There are at least four factors that make regions very dependent on the center regarding financing development projects, namely:

- a. Lack of role of regional companies as a source of income;
- b. High level of centralization in the field of taxation. In this context, the central government controls important sources of lucrative taxes (business and personal income tax, value-added tax, and customs);
- c. The impact of the second factor is the lack of reliable sources of regional income;
- d. Political factors.

However, delegating power to regional governments presents challenges, such as balancing power and resources between central and regional authorities and fostering healthy interaction between them. Then, many potential regions failed to develop because important regional resources, such as support for regional development, were withdrawn to the center, and regional governments only received a small amount of the results of their regional wealth. As a result, many regions felt dissatisfied with this condition, so there was pressure to form their own territorial regions separate from the Indonesian government. Lastly, centralism has created homogenization and domination in regional development.³⁵

3.4.2. The Role of Village Communities in The Decision-Making Process and Implementation of Village Development Programs

Decision-making is the process of choosing actions to solve problems. Planning is part of decision-making that deals with things in the future, so it requires a complex process. Decision-making aims to solve problems, while planning focuses on achieving certain goals in the future. Participation in decision-making is related to determining alternatives with the community to reach an agreement on various ideas that concern common interests. Participation in decision-making is very important because the community demands to participate in determining the direction and orientation of development. Its forms:

- a. Meeting attendance is the participation and physical and mental availability of the community to the meeting activities.

³⁴ Fokky Fuad and others, 'Ownership of Land: Legal Philosophy and Culture Analysis of Land Property Rights', *Jurnal Media Hukum*, 30.2 (2023), 98–116. <https://doi.org/10.18196/jmh.v30i2.18264>.

³⁵ Abdul Aziz Zuhakim and others, 'Context Analysis of the Implementation of Village Community Development and Empowerment Programs', *KnE Social Sciences*, 9.7 SE-Articles (2024), 412–430. <https://doi.org/10.18502/kss.v9i7.15520>.

- b. Contribution of ideas is a contribution of ideas, opinions or constructive thoughts, both to compile programs and to realize them by providing experience and knowledge to develop the following activities.
- c. Discussion is a negotiation to exchange ideas about a problem to reach an agreement and a joint decision about the problem being discussed.
- d. Response or rejection of the program offered. The response conveys support or criticism of the ideas and concepts presented in the meeting.³⁶

3.4.3. Collaboration Between Various Related Parties in Strengthening the Democratization of Village Autonomy

Community participation in implementing Village Development Planning Deliberations to the Village Government is interpreted as the community's involvement or participation in the program's implementation, starting from the planning stage, implementation, evaluation, and maintenance of activity results, as well as direct community contributions.³⁷ In implementing development planning deliberations, community aspirations are collected to obtain data or information from the community as input in the future village development planning process. One real example of collaboration is in the development of village infrastructure. The village government budgets funds to build roads, bridges, and other public facilities. Meanwhile, the community plays an active role in infrastructure planning, implementation, and maintenance. For example, the community is often involved in cooperative activities to build and repair village roads so that the infrastructure created can meet their needs.

However, in practice, this collaboration is not without challenges. In some villages, the level of community participation remains low due to a lack of awareness, limited access to information, or perceptions that decision-making is still dominated by elites. There are also reports that *Musrenbangdes* often becomes a formality, where community suggestions are collected but not necessarily reflected in the final village development plan.

This model of community involvement aligns with Arnstein's "Ladder of Citizen Participation", which emphasizes that genuine participation occurs when citizens have real influence over decision-making, not merely tokenistic involvement. In many Indonesian villages, participation remains at the level of consultation rather than true partnership, which challenges the realization of democratic village governance.

Collaboration between the government and the community is also important in social and cultural empowerment. The village government initiates various programs that support education, health, and local arts. The community actively participates in these activities, such as holding and participating in training, health counseling, and cultural festivals. Thus, this collaboration not only improves residents' quality of life but also maintains and preserves local cultural values. Nonetheless, implementation in the field shows varying outcomes. Limited human resources and budget constraints often hinder consistent program execution. For instance, cultural festivals may not be held regularly due to financial limitations, and health programs might lack continuity because of dependence on external support. This condition reflects what Paulo Freire described as "conscientization," the process through which

³⁶ Lalita Ika Pertiwi Abdillah, 'Partisipasi Masyarakat Dalam Pengambilan Keputusan Pembangunan Desa (Studi Di Desa Rungau Raya, Kecamatan Danau Seluluk, Kabupaten Seruyan)', *Journal Ilmu Sosial, Politik Dan Pemerintahan*, 9.2 (2021), 67-74. <https://doi.org/10.37304/jispar.v9i2.1535>.

³⁷ Haryanto, Andi Ilmi Utami Irwan, and Yusriah Amaliah, 'Elections, Governance, and Polarization in Indonesian Villages', *Asian Journal of Political Science*, 32.2 (2024), 175-93. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02185377.2024.2351400>.

communities become aware of social, political, and economic contradictions, and take action against oppressive elements of reality. In this sense, empowerment through collaboration should not only provide access but also foster critical awareness and agency among villagers.

The democratization of village autonomy must consider the socio-cultural characteristics of each village, including long-standing social bonds, collective decision-making traditions, and attachment to local territory. These factors influence how democratic governance models can be effectively adapted at the village level.

Based on Law Number 6 of 2014 on Villages, one of the tasks of the village government is to prepare a village development program in the form of a Village Medium-Term Development Plan (RPJM Des) and a Village Government Activity Plan (RKP Des). Basically, even before the enactment of the Village Law, the village government was already obliged to prepare the RPJM Des and RKP Des. However, in the era of implementing the Village Law, the mechanism for preparing the village development program (RPJM Des and RKP Des) has become more comprehensive than before. This planning process reflects the principle of participatory governance, as described by Stoker, where governance involves a network of actors beyond the formal government. Nevertheless, participatory mechanisms in Indonesian villages often still face limitations due to elite dominance and the uneven capacity of village institutions.

Village development planning is the initial step in determining the direction of village development, namely, determining the priority of village programs and activities that can support the realization of village development according to the vision and mission of the village government. According to him, if the village government is unable to plan properly, then it is certain that the direction of village development cannot realize the vision and mission of the village government, and in the end, the objectives of the Village Law cannot be realized properly. Therefore, the village government must understand and carry out village development planning properly and correctly. Development planning is the process of determining the best way to manage development that concerns the priority of activities, people, infrastructure, costs, and time to achieve the desired goals of community welfare. To realize good village development planning (good planning development), the community's active role is needed. As the definition of village autonomy in the Village Law states, the village government has the right to manage the village's potential by involving the community. Therefore, village development planning must involve the community. One of the objectives of community involvement in development planning is to formulate and create activity programs that are in accordance with the needs and potential of the local village.³⁸

However, the alignment between community inputs and program realization remains a concern in practice. Often, program execution is influenced by political factors or elite capture, making it difficult to fully reflect grassroots needs. Additionally, some villages face a lack of technical capacity in drafting development plans, which affects the quality of planning and prioritization. Strengthening village institutions through Community Institution capacity-building activities under the spirit of the Village Law is intended to optimize the role and function of institutions as partners of the village government in a harmonious working relationship. The Village Community Empowerment Institution (LPMD) is tasked with empowering the village community to participate in planning and implementing development and improving village community services.

³⁸ Dayana Lengauer, 'Emergency Activism: Indonesia's Eroding Democracy, Activist Students, and the Art of Protest. An Interview With Frans Ari Prasetyo', *ASEAS-Advances in Southeast Asian Studies*, 17.2 (2024), 213–28. <https://doi.org/10.14764/10.ASEAS-0111>.

In the era of village autonomy, the village government is mandated by the central government through the Village Law to manage a village budget much larger than before the Village Law was enacted. Regulation of the Minister of Home Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia Number 113 of 2014 on Village Financial Management with the Grace of God Almighty Minister of Home Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia Article 2 explains the principles of village financial management, namely:

- a. Village finances are managed based on transparent, accountable, participatory principles and are carried out in an orderly and disciplined manner.
- b. Village financial management is managed within a period of 1 (one) budget year, namely from January 1 to December 31.

Furthermore, Government Regulation No. 60 of 2014 on Village Funds sourced from the State Budget emphasizes that village funds must be managed in an orderly manner, under the provisions of laws and regulations, efficiently, economically, effectively, transparently, and responsibly by paying attention to a sense of justice and propriety and prioritizing the interests of the local community. Law Number 6 of 2014 states that a Village, or what is called another name, is a legal community unit that has territorial boundaries that are authorized to regulate and manage the interests of the local community, based on local origins and customs, which are recognized and respected in the Government system of the Unitary State of the Republic of Indonesia.

Thus, the Law recognizes the autonomy possessed by the village. This means that Village Autonomy is allowed to grow and develop following the development of its community. Thus, the village has a very strategic position that requires balanced attention in the implementation of regional autonomy because the strength and stability of the town will directly affect the realization of regional autonomy. Strengthening democratization also requires the application of social accountability mechanisms, as proposed by Fox, which emphasize the combination of citizen voice and state responsiveness. Without such mechanisms, formal structures for participation may exist but fail to deliver substantive outcomes.

Lessons learned from other countries can provide valuable insights into strengthening village democratization in Indonesia. India's Gram Sabha and the Philippines' Barangay assemblies exemplify structured participatory governance at the village level³⁹. These mechanisms ensure transparency, localized accountability, and direct citizen involvement, lessons that Indonesia can adapt through legal mandates and consistent institutional support. For Indonesia, adopting similar mechanisms, such as making *Musrenbangdes* deliberations legally binding and ensuring regular capacity development for village officials and community facilitators, can increase the effectiveness of democratization efforts. More importantly, these lessons reinforce the need to strengthen institutions, foster civic awareness, and reduce elite domination to enable meaningful participation at the village level.⁴⁰

Several solutions can be applied regarding the democratization capacity of village autonomy in constructing the Indonesian state system. Revise and improve the village law and related

³⁹ Franses Jeanne Castil Arrabaca and Renato L. Base, 'Citizen'S Level of Participation and Satisfaction in Barangay Assembly: A Case of Philippine Lgu', *Jurnal Ilmiah Peuradeun*, 8.2 (2020), 377-96. <https://doi.org/10.26811/peuradeun.v8i2.531>.

⁴⁰ Fahmi Fauzi, Mulyaningsih, and Yagus Triana, 'The Relationship of Administrative Philosophy in Village Governance', *Jurnal Dialektika: Jurnal Ilmu Sosial*, 23.1 SE-Articles (2025), 619-26. <https://doi.org/10.63309/dialektika.v23i1.527>.

regulations to ensure that village authority is exercised independently and clearly without overlapping with central and regional policies. Integrated training programs focusing on improving administrative competence, financial management, and village governance must be held periodically. Villages can expand community involvement in the decision-making process through village deliberation forums, village development planning deliberations (*Musrenbangdes*), and involving community groups such as youth, women, and indigenous groups. The central and regional governments can encourage community participation through routine socialization and political education. But to be effective, these solutions require monitoring and evaluation mechanisms to measure actual participation levels, identify implementation gaps, and respond adaptively. Without such mechanisms, the democratization process risks remaining symbolic rather than transformative.

4. Conclusion

The democratization of village autonomy in Indonesia marks a vital shift toward participatory and inclusive governance. Anchored in Law No. 6 of 2014 and its 2024 amendment, this autonomy empowers villages to manage their own affairs based on local values and original rights. However, democratization goes beyond formal elections; it requires active civic participation, institutional strength, cultural alignment, and transparency. Key challenges such as limited capacity, elite dominance, corruption, and weak accountability must be addressed to realize genuine village autonomy. Lessons from India and the Philippines highlight the need for legally mandated participation and continuous capacity-building. To move forward, legal reforms, inclusive planning, institutional strengthening, digital innovation, and multi-stakeholder collaboration are essential. Rooted in local culture and guided by justice and transparency, village autonomy can become a powerful force in Indonesia's decentralized governance, fostering empowered, resilient, and community-driven development.

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