

# Local elite rule over small villages in Indonesia

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Dutch-sponsored researcher Y. Argo Twikromo has investigated how the local ruling elite have retained their political control over the local population. He has tried to understand and analyse the dynamic processes of state formation and the interaction between national states and local communities.

For a long time it was thought that modern states were strong enough to stamp out the political and cultural independence of small, traditional communities. Instead however, 'modernity' has strengthened the position of the local ruling elite.

Initially, they were the ones who mainly reaped the benefits of the organised development programmes. This is because external organisations considered the local ruling elite to be the representatives of the community. Funds for the community flow via the ruling elite and are retained by them. Secondly, they have become the 'gatekeepers' of the community.

They maintain the key contacts between the kampong and the outside world. Without them local residents cannot find work and cannot send their children to secondary education. Therefore, the local ruling elite have proven to be extremely successful in protecting the social and economic boundaries of the village.

When Indonesia was still a colony, the government maintained a policy of indirect governance. This administration left power in the hands of

the local ruling elite and with tribal heads of local communities. Following independence in 1945, the government came with its policy of national unity. Argo Twikromo's research is focused on the village of Kamatuk on East Sumba.

Kamatuk is a highly resilient community that over the past fifty years has not only survived, but has also kept the regional powers at bay. They did this by adhering to the local traditions and by avoiding direct confrontations. At the same time they gratefully accepted all possible advantages of missionary work and the state.

The local population sees no opportunities to escape from the pressure imposed by the local ruling elite (maramba). The maramba have been able to maintain their local ruling positions, their control over land and cattle and their almost exclusive control of the labour market. The community of Kamatuk, just as in many other East Sumbanese villages, has proven to be immune to interference from external parties.

Source: Netherlands Organization for Scientific Research

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