

Problems and Challenges of Suku Anak Dalam in the 2019 General Election: A Policy Recommendation

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Abstract

In a democracy, the state is obligated to guarantee citizens' political rights, particularly the right to vote and to run (and be elected) in any general election. However, case studies in four districts of Jambi Province (Batanghari, Sarolangun, Tebo, and Merangin) reveal the opposite. Many members of the Suku Anak Dalam (SAD) community were excluded from the permanent voter list, effectively depriving them of their constitutional right to vote. This study investigates what causes this exclusion and offers relevant policy recommendations. The interviews with key informants identified several underlying causes in the 2019 elections: the absence of identity cards, low levels of literacy and education, poor economic conditions, and various technical obstacles. Other barriers included the lack of special polling stations and non-inclusive voting procedures. These findings suggest the need to strengthen education and literacy programs and establish accessible polling stations, as well as more inclusive voting procedures for the SAD community.

Keywords:

electoral political rights; minority groups; elections; democracy

Introduction

This paper focuses on the problems and challenges faced by the Suku Anak Dalam (SAD) in Jambi Province, Indonesia, in the 2019 general elections, particularly in Batanghari, Sorolangun, Tebo, and Merangin districts. The study aims to identify the root causes of SAD's low political participation in the 2019 general elections. It addresses gaps in existing research by providing a deeper analysis of SAD's political engagement and offers policy recommendations to help improve participation.

This paper explores how formal state institutions, particularly the Election Commission (KPU), reinforce systematic obedience to the political right. We argue that the exclusion of SAD's political rights stems from institutional weaknesses within the KPU. Our aim is not to trace the cause and effect, but to provide recommendations grounded in

empirical data. Marginalised groups are often left out and alienated in terms of their human rights. The state should be most responsive to such issues, especially because its sustainability hinges on the welfare of its citizens. However, society must also be responsive to these marginalised and alienated groups for the betterment of the societal order. In Indonesia, each election reveals the same problem: the political rights of marginalised groups are routinely ignored or manipulated. At both national and local levels, these groups remain especially vulnerable to money politics.

Political participation determines the quality of democracy—the higher the voter participation in elections, the better the quality is, and vice versa (Bisong Tambe, 2024; Budiardjo, 2008). As such, the state must ensure the electoral rights of citizens. In Indonesia, this includes members of the SAD community. However, many SAD votes

were not included in the 2019 elections. Table 1 shows the distribution of the SAD in Jambi Province, residing across the Bukit Dua Belas National Park (TNBD), Kerinci Seblat National Park (TNKS), Bukit Tiga Puluh National Park (TNBT), and various forests and oil palm plantations up to the South Sumatra region (Juaini, 2020).

Table 1.
Distribution of the SAD in Jambi Province

No.	District	Number of People	Percentage
1.	Sarolangun	2,228	42.56
2.	Merangin	1,276	24.37
3.	Tebo	707	13.51
4.	Batang Hari	629	12.01
5.	Bungo	395	6.86
	Total	5,235	100

Source: Juaini (2020)

This project uses the discrimination against SDA's political rights in Jambi as a case study. Since this issue recurs in every election and no fundamental strategy has addressed it, we argue that an immediate response is needed. Our analysis is grounded in the principle that good and accountable governance depends on broad, fair citizen participation and equality. In this sense, Norris, Frank, and Coma (2013, p. 125) remind us that "...after all, even some long-established democracies have in recent years experienced major problems with electoral integrity—for example, allegations of voter suppression and voter fraud in the United States, the "robocall" scandal in Canada, and security flaws in the administration of postal voting in the United Kingdom". Electoral rights are closely tied to voter turnout, which in turn is linked to the voting process itself. High voter political participation will improve the quality of democracy (Fumagalli & Narciso, 2012; Schraufnagel, Buehler, & Lowry-Fritz, 2014). Conversely, low voter turnout indicates a serious problem with democracy in a country, especially in a patronage democracy country such as Indonesia. We argue that discrimination

against SAD's political rights is systematically carried out by the state, weakening the overall quality of Indonesian democracy. This problem, together with money politics and low voter participation, contributes to the continued deterioration of democracy in Indonesia.

In the 2019 elections, more than 2,000 SAD community members were not accommodated and lost their political rights. This was driven by several factors, including the lack of identity cards as proof of residence, economic hardship, limited literacy, the distant location of polling stations (TPS), and other internal challenges. Our estimation refers to the Jambi Election Commission Board (KPUD) data. For example, at least 2,612 SAD residents were not included in voting in the 2019 elections (KPU Jambi, 2020). Few domestic or international studies have examined the role and political rights of the SAD. This paper seeks to fill that gap and offers policy recommendations to increase their political participation in general elections.

Building on this background, the research addresses two key questions: (1) Why are many SAD people excluded from the permanent voters' list, and what factors contribute to this? (2) What solutions and policy recommendations can address the repeated exclusion of SAD people from the voters' list in Jambi Province elections?

Political Marginalisation of Indigenous People

Existing studies in the area of SAD research include that by Wulandari, Sardini, and Fitriyah (2016), which examined the role of the Jenang as a liaison between SAD and the outside world in the Muara Kilis sub-district, Tebo Regency, Jambi. Meanwhile, Salfutra (2009) researched SAD political participation, and Hertanto, Haryanto, and Maryanah (2021) investigated the strategy of fulfilling SAD electoral political rights in Batanghari Regency. Prasetyo (2008) studied the ethnic identity of the Orang Rimba and their relations in local and

regional contexts, finding that the Orang Rimba can improve their social status or position within the broader, multi-ethnic community.

In a broader context, Persoon (1998) argues that infrastructure development, along with development patterned on economic unity, has led to the isolation and marginalisation of certain groups. Meanwhile, Bertr (2014) shows that recognising indigenous peoples' rights can serve as a strategy for ethnic accommodation, based on studies of the Cordillerans in the Philippines and the Papuans in Indonesia.

Fahner (2017) explained that human rights in a democracy provide opportunities for every citizen to be involved in the political decision-making through elections. In that context, the rights of minorities and marginalised people are equal to those of any other member of society. However, the political rights of minorities and marginalised groups are often overlooked. For example, they receive little guidance or socialisation about the meaning, purpose, and principles of their rights or about the electoral system. Furthermore, minority groups are often mobilised for certain political interests (Stevens & Bishin, 2011; Leighley, 2001).

In a similar context, several studies have examined the participation of marginalised groups in elections. For instance, the Dayak Bumi Segandu community in Indramayu Regency refrains from voting in various elections for two main reasons (Irawan & Nurmantoro, 2022). Firstly, the Dayak Indramayu community upholds the principle of *ngaji rasa*, which emphasises self-introspection and avoiding hurting others. In the context of the electoral process through the practice of *golput*, they believe that choosing one candidate would be considered a violation of *ngaji rasa*, as it is seen as hurting others. Secondly, although stakeholders have facilitated civil administration registration, leaders within the Dayak Indramayu community refuse to obtain electronic resident identity cards (KTP). However, it is noteworthy that the *ngaji rasa*

principle is not an obligatory doctrine for all members of the community; young adults and women within the community are still allowed to vote as an expression of their political freedom and to obtain civil registration documents.

Meanwhile, the voting behaviour of the Samin tribe in Central Java during the 2014 presidential election in Blora Regency highlighted the strong influence of psychological factors, which at times led to seemingly irrational political choices (Bahar, 2016). The Samin culture continues to uphold the principles of *sedulursikep*, characterised by an unwillingness to pay taxes, refraining from acquiring identity cards (KTP), avoiding formal education, preferring agricultural occupations, and rejecting trade and capitalism as they are perceived to be harbouring elements of deceit. Another study by Kirom (2021) on the Samin ethnic group found that this resistance is rooted in the community's historical legacy of opposing colonial rule, which has led some members of the Samin community to refrain from participating in elections.

In the context of the Baduy community, a study by Mahpudin (2020) examined the political engagement of the Baduy community, highlighting debates on political representation and the need for entities that can advocate for this minority group in Lebak Regency, Banten. By employing the context of the 2014 and 2019 legislative elections, the study found that the political participation of the indigenous Baduy population exhibited no significant impact on the interests of the Baduy community. They were not represented by parties or candidates in parliament, either symbolically or substantively.

Some cases in Indonesia have provided clear evidence that not all of the community practising *adat* (traditions) in this country have approved of the idea of modern democracy, which requires their people to cast the ballot regularly (at least once every five years in

Indonesia). The incompatibility of *adat* and electoral democratic values and principles needs to receive more attention from the government. In this sense, the government, through KPU, needs to provide more accommodating regulations for some of the *adat* communities. Without such measures, the democratic principle of safeguarding the political rights of marginalised groups will remain absent from Indonesia's electoral democracy.. The quality of the electoral process also depends on the pre-election steps, which include how the election commission board is able to register all the eligible voters. In addition, the issue is further complicated by the persistence of patronage in contemporary Indonesian politics.

Voting rights are part of basic human rights, which include the right to both vote and to be elected (to run in an election and be elected). In this context, the state has an obligation to guarantee the political rights of all citizens, including the indigenous SAD community. Yet, indigenous groups are often among the most vulnerable to losing their votes. As explained by Titi Anggraini in Ramadhanil, Pratama, Agustyati, and Sadikin (2019: vii), at least three factors contribute to this vulnerability among groups such as the SAD. "First, because their residence is distant, isolated, mobile, or all three, making it difficult to access. Second, public legal powers do not recognise and even take ownership of customary land (*ulayat*) that indigenous peoples collectively own. Third, because of the internal concept of indigenous peoples' beliefs." After independence, Indonesia did not necessarily recognise the sovereignty of customary homelands (*adat* collectives). In this context, Henley and Davidson (2008) argue that *adat* revivalism in Indonesia requires several conditions, foremost among them ideological and practical support from international organisations and networks committed to indigenous rights.

Some of the existing studies, explained above, have researched the SAD's problems with its political rights, such as Wulandari et al. (2016) and Salfutra (2009), but none

have provided the policy recommendations needed to resolve the problems. This paper contributes to the field by offering several recommendations, which we believe can help policymakers improve the political participation of SAD in Jambi Province.

Methods

In this research, we used a qualitative method with a typical case study. Gerring (2007: 89) explained, "by definition, the typical case is representative". This paper attempts to analyse case studies in four districts, namely Batanghari, Sorolangun, Tebo, and Merangin, located in Jambi Province. Jambi is located on the east coast of central Sumatra, one of the provinces within Sumatra Island. Jambi is one of province in Sumatra Island that consist of some ethnicities, with the majority being Malay. It relies on palm oil production economically. The selection of the four districts in Jambi Province was based on the argument that the SAD in those four districts is sufficiently representative of the SAD people in the province, for two reasons. First, the four districts are home to a large number of SAD people. Second, the four regions represent different geographic and demographic characteristics.

The study focused on the 2019 general election and employed purposive sampling. Participants were selected based on criteria such as having direct relationships or connections with SAD residents, particularly in social and electoral contexts. A total of 12 participants were selected from various professions, namely members of the Regional General Election Commission (KPUD) and the Election Supervisory Body (Bawaslu), politicians, KPUD officials, democracy volunteers, and SAD assistants. Furthermore, we also used information from some NGOs advocating for the political rights of the marginalised community in Jambi since 1991. This secondary data enables a more in-depth analysis and supports the overall argument.

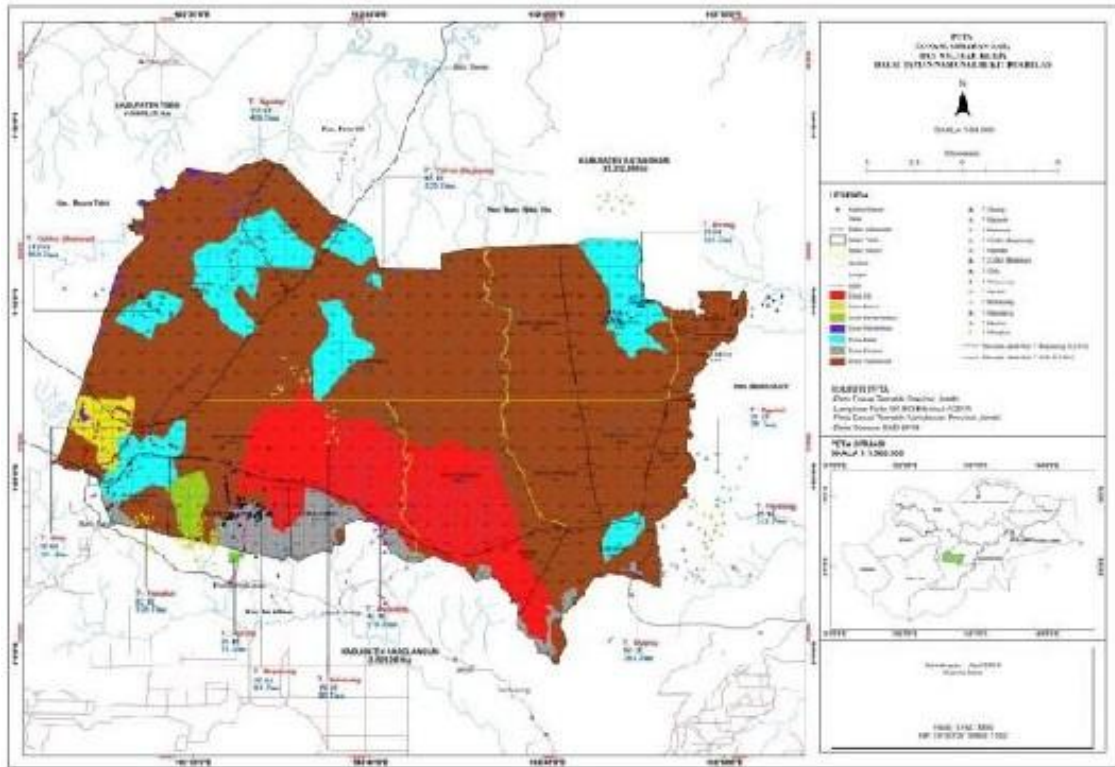


Figure 1. A Map of the SAD Population

Source: Mulyani and Parapat (2018)

This study employs a case-study approach rather than ethnographic methods because of the restrictions on conducting fieldwork during the COVID-19 period. The interviews were conducted face-to-face, via telephone, and through written interviews. The telephone and written interviews were conducted in line with restrictions imposed by the government during the COVID-19 pandemic. We were assisted by a research assistant to conduct the interviews and field observation. Furthermore, we also reviewed various documents relevant to this research. The results of the interviews, documentation analysis, and observations were then transcribed and analysed using thematic analysis, synthesising the data analysis results with relevant theories.

Results

Suku Anak Dalam's (SAD): Problems and Challenges

The SAD in Jambi Province are recognised as an ethnic minority group in Indonesia. In this context, minority refers to an ethnic

group with a small population compared to other tribes or ethnicities. The United Nations (2018) defines ethnic minorities as "ethnic or racial groups in a given country in which they are in a non-dominant position vis-à-vis the dominant ethnic population". Historically, SAD is also known as *Orang Kubu*. According to Hauser-Schäublin (2013, p. 69), *Kubu* "is an Isolated Tribe or Children of the Interior by governmental discourses and the sedentary population". The term was used by the Dutch colonial administration and is no longer used for racial reasons.

Based on this definition, the SAD are an ethnic minority due to their marginalised and non-dominant position within Indonesia's population structure. The SAD are also categorised as an alienated group and/or a remote indigenous community (KAT). SAD people's perspective and a social and geographical context differ from those of most people in Jambi Province. One tradition that has been passed down from generation



Figure 2. How Suku Anak Dalam Dresses

Source: Mulyani and Parapat (2018)

to generation is the concept of *melangun*, or nomadic living (Putra, Indraddin, & Miko, 2021). This tradition of *melangun* is why SAD are often not included in the voter list because the state requires registered voters to have an identity card (KTP). Therefore, in this context, there is state domination of citizens' political rights, which should not be the case in a modern democratic country such as Indonesia.

The SAD community is among the five isolated tribes in Indonesia: the Mante in Aceh, the Polahi in Gorontalo, the Korowai in Papua, and the Samin in Central Java (Melalatoa, 1995). They live in the forests of Jambi Province and retain a very traditional way of life, far from civilisation and technology, moving from one area to another. As a group, the SAD face threats from industrial development in Sumatra's forests, particularly in Jambi Province. Across the province, they are marginalised within the social system and often experience economic, political, and cultural exclusion. In this context, marginalisation refers to the condition of communities excluded by prevailing economic, educational, and cultural structures that fail to support them (Ramadhanil et al., 2019; Sari, 2018; Ulfa, Albayudi, & Sirait, 2019; Wazan, Astuti, Kismartini, & Afrizal, 2020). Ultimately, the SAD are an inseparable part of the country; therefore, their political rights must be accommodated.

This paper argues that the SAD community faces significant barriers to exercising its political rights in electoral politics. Observations reveal two major challenges: technical and substantive. A key technical issue is the difficulty of obtaining identity cards (IDs). Because the SAD are a mobile, nomadic community that moves across forest areas, they cannot meet the government's requirement of a permanent address, making it nearly impossible to secure official IDs. Interviewees have revealed their argument, "In the 2019 election, there were 588 members of SAD identified as not registered in Disdukcapil, so they did not have a KTP. In this sense, the Batanghari KPU consulted with the local government, concluding that those who did not have a KTP would not be able to cast their ballot, and there was no solution to that problem at that time. As a result, they are unable to cast the ballot" (PAR1). Another participant who was a KPU member revealed that the policy on KTP was not their responsibility, but the local civil population office. According to the regulations, the local government can issue a KTP if a person lives in a particular place for at least six months. However, a nomadic lifestyle becomes a problem, as some of them live in each area for less than six months (PAR7; PAR2).

Another technical issue related to the location of the polling station, which is too

far for the SAD community, as they need to spend a lot of time to reach the polling station. The problem is that they need to work daily or they will not get money to buy food. This condition then makes the SAD community choose between coming to the polling station and fulfilling their daily need. As a result, most of the SAD people choose to work rather than come to the polling station, as captured in the following statement: "Talking about political rights, I think in my opinion, there are some problems faced by the SAD community. For example, they live far away from the polling station, which means they choose hunting [fulfilling economic needs] instead of coming to the polling station, and also, they don't really understand politics, how to vote and what the importance of politics is to them" (PAR5, 2020).

The lack of literacy is another issue observed in the fieldwork, which is a persistent problem for the Indonesian government. Even though the level of literacy of Indonesia has increased dramatically since its independence in 1945, there are disparities in terms of providing a good and equal education for its people, especially in remote areas such as the SAD community in Jambi. The education gap remains a major issue, particularly between Java and regions outside the island. Our research recommends implementing affirmative education policies for marginalised communities, especially those in remote and frontier areas, such as the SAD people in Jambi.

Furthermore, we also found that there are at least two key problems that impacted the voting rights of the SAD community. *First*, the poverty and economic problems of SAD arise from a lack of economic support from the local government. As they are nomadic and non-registered, the SAD community members are unable to access public services provided by the local government. The solution to resolve this problem is that the government, through the civil register office, should adopt an affirmative policy on population registration by introducing

more accommodating regulations to ensure that every member of the SAD community can obtain an ID, rather than being excluded from public services provided by local authorities. The special law that regulates this matter needs to be realised as soon as possible. *Second*, the paternalistic politics, which are characterised by non-individual voting [community-based voting], are also another substantial problem. Literacy problems also contribute to this situation, as proper political education and outreach should be provided by the local election commission. Finally, the technical and substantive challenges outlined here will be examined further in the discussion. The following sections explore the marginalisation of the SAD people's political rights in their interactions with the state.

Discussion

SAD and Elections: Challenges and Problems of Political Participation

Geographically, the SAD community resides across the Bukit Dua Belas National Park (TNBD), Bukit Tiga Puluh National Park (TNBT) and Kerinci Seblat National Park (TNKS), as well as secondary forests and oil palm plantations along the trans-Sumatra route to South Sumatra. This population, totalling 5,298 people, is distributed across five districts in Jambi Province: Sarolangun, Merangin, Tebo, Batanghari and Bungo (Juaini, 2020).

Since the reformation, members of the SAD community have participated in several elections; however, their overall level of voting rights and participation remains very low. The low participation of the SAD community in the 2019 elections was confirmed by the Chairman of the Sorolangun KPUD in a statement to the media: "The low voter participation among the SAD community is because they prefer to hunt or gather food in the forest rather than having to go to the polling station" (Herlianto, 2019).

As indigenous citizens, the SAD should be able to play an active role in state politics.

Table 2.
Distribution of SAD Voters in the 2019 Elections in Jambi Province

No.	District	Number of Voters Data (DPT)			Non-ID cards, and not included in the DPT			Total
		M	F	Total	M	F	Total	
1.	Batanghari	-	-	-	358	230	588	588
2.	Tebo	374	346	720	-	-	-	720
3.	Sarolangun	433	382	815	45	52	97	912
4.	Merangin	170	171	341	27	24	51	392
Total		977	899	1,876	430	306	736	2,612

Source: KPU Jambi (2020)

Yet, as a minority group, they often face discrimination despite having equal voting rights. One major barrier to their participation is limited access to voter registration. The non-registration of voters due to administrative issues is not limited solely to marginalised minority groups such as the SAD, but also by the Moro-Moro Mesuji community in Lampung (Rasyidi, 2017; Ricco, Sumarja, & Sulastuti, 2017; Sihite & Sardini, 2018; Tisnanta & Wahab, 2014; Wahab, 2013; Wahab & Ridho, 2016). This issue recurs in nearly every election in Indonesia. Yet, despite its persistence, problems with data collection and voter registration remain unresolved.

According to Table 2, a total of 588 SAD people could not be accommodated in the 2019 elections in Batanghari District, with as many as 720 people excluded in Tebo District. A further 912 people were excluded in Sarolangun District and 392 in Merangin District. Thus, from the data in Table 2, a total of 2,612 SAD people were not accommodated as voters in the 2019 elections (KPUJambi, 2020). Further, DetikNews (2019) reported on the total number of Jambi SAD who were included in the voters list (DPT) in five districts in Jambi. In Merangin District, 389 people were able to exercise their voting rights in the 2019 election, with 731 in Sarolangun, 59 in Batanghari, 300 in Muaro Jambi and 83 people in Tebo.

Our research concludes that the lack of ID cards was the principal reason why many of the SAD community members were not

included in DPT. In Indonesia's population politics, holding a KTP requires a permanent address. This poses a challenge for many SAD residents in Jambi Province, who are nomadic. The dilemma is compounded by Permendagri No. 11/2010 on Guidelines for Data Collection and Issuance of Population Documents for Vulnerable Populations, which requires every citizen to reside in a fixed area for the state to maintain official population records. The Head of the Batanghari District Population and Civil Registration Office (Disdukcapil) stated the following:

Many of the SAD community members in the Batanghari District did not have the right to vote in the 2019 elections. They did not have ID cards as a requirement for voter registration and could participate as voters in the presidential election. (PAR1, aligning with PAR2 and PAR3).

A research participant from the District KPUD stated that "the biggest obstacle in collecting data on the jungle people is that most of them do not have legal identity documents" (PAR 4, similarly to PAR5 and PAR2). One of the *temenggung* (tribal chiefs) we interviewed proposed that the government should provide special housing for SAD people so that they no longer move around. The *temenggung* told us, "Obviously, Sir. Sayo (I) want it. Kito (we) have always lived there [...] we have often proposed, but until now there has not been (any realisation)" (PAR6). In contrast, an official

from the Batanghari District Population and Civil Registry Office confirmed to us:

In my view, not all jungle people in Batanghari District are unable to exercise their right to vote because they do not have an E-KTP. Some Suku Anak Dalam have married into the local community, are permanently settled, and are eligible to have their civil registration data recorded. (PAR1, aligning with PAR2)

The Department of Population and Civil Registration office further explained that in the run-up to the 2020 simultaneous regional elections, it submitted 95 to 100 E-KTPs for SAD in Padang Kelapo and Sungai Lingkar. However, in the 2018 Regent and Deputy Regent elections in Merangin District, Jambi, SAD people's political participation fell in comparison to the Regent and Deputy Regent elections in 2013. In this context, Fuhaidah and Mubarak (2021: 105) reveal that the Merangin District KPUD faced challenges related to the Melangun traditions of the Orang Rimba and conflicts between the Orang Terang and Orang Rimba, and the dominance of the *tumenggungs* in determining the political preferences of the Orang Rimba.

The issue is exacerbated by the lack of a systematic blueprint among the organisers to overcome these classic problems (PAR9, similar to PAR7 and PAR2). One of the participants in this study, a teacher who served as a companion to SAD people, highlighted the lack of socialisation by the organisers: "More socialisation about political participation so that SAD knows what politics is" (PAR10). Similar notions were revealed by residents who worked as paramedics and communicated frequently with SAD residents. They highlighted the low socialisation of elections for SAD people. "Due to limited information about elections and incomplete population records, many SAD community members are not officially registered" (PAR11, similarly to PAR12).

At the same time, however, the requirement for KTP ownership to be eligible for voting is a persistent, unresolved issue (Hertanto et al., 2021). In a democracy, citizens' political rights should not be denied based on administrative requirements. These rights may only be revoked in cases such as criminal offences against the state, for example, the removal of political rights from those convicted of corruption. As a universal right, political participation must be protected by the state. Yet, our case studies of SAD citizens across four districts reveal a recurring pattern of exclusion. Although election organisers have attempted to safeguard their rights, both technical and budgetary constraints have limited these efforts. A political party representative questioned the state's responsibility to ensure that the SAD community can fully exercise their political rights:

If the state, either in the population law in general or the law in particular, alienates people or indigenous peoples. If the state accommodates them in the law as legal citizens, even though they are not recorded in the population data or civil records. Then, their state recognition as legal residents in the status of indigenous peoples must also ensure that their rights as citizens are fulfilled, allowing them to participate in elections. (PAR7)

In addition to external issues such as the lack of legal identity documents, various internal barriers contributed to the low political participation of the SAD community in the 2019 elections, including a low level of literacy. Since most of the SAD community is unable to read or write, they would benefit from the inclusion of candidate pictures on voting cards; however, the use of pictures in elections is prohibited by law. Internal constraints further complicate efforts to accommodate the SAD community's political rights in each election. A democracy volunteer participating in this study explained:

Yes, like the 2019 legislative and presidential elections, they are faced with five ballots, and there are many candidates on one of the ballots. They are confused about which candidate to choose because most do not know how to write or read. (PAR2).

Similarly, another interviewee stated, "The low level of education and knowledge about elections is another issue that causes the low voter participation of SAD residents" (PAR8). Our participants agreed with democracy volunteers that literacy problems are a major factor behind low participation. Literacy is crucial to the success of elections, and it is easy to see the challenges the SAD voters face when confronted with large ballot papers filled with text but lacking photos. These internal barriers, combined with external constraints, ultimately contribute to the low political participation of the SAD community. In the 2019 elections, the KPUD prepared a Special Polling Station (*TPS Khusus*), which can provide a short-term solution to encourage the increased participation of the SAD voters. One of the participants in our research said:

While at this time, the TPS is fixed, making it difficult for SAD to leave the area. In 2012 and 2017, good TPSs were mobile. Unfortunately, this kind of thing is not continued anymore. We proposed that two people participate in election monitoring training at the district level, but only one person participated at the provincial level, while there are two areas of SAD. They depend on the facilitator (PAR9).

The Chairman of KPUD Sorolangun added:

There are 784 SAD residents scattered in Sarolangun District, namely in Bathin VIII, Limun, and Air Hitam sub-districts. But those

with a special polling station are in the Air Hitam sub-district with 56 people, while hundreds of other SAD join the general public polling stations. (Herlianto, 2019)

Referring to the results of our interviews, unlike in the 2012 and 2017 Pilkada, the organisers specifically provided mobile polling stations, while in the 2019 election, referring to media news (interview results with the head of the Sorolangun KPUD), the organisers did not optimise the use of special TPS. Beyond the absence of special polling stations, distance also poses a challenge. For economic reasons, many SAD residents cannot afford to travel far from their villages, and reaching distant polling stations often requires considerable time and effort. A participant in our study explained: "Yes, it is too far and takes time from morning to evening, and food needs to be provided" (PAR9). The geographically inappropriate location of polling stations, therefore, created further problems.

Political Empowerment of the SAD Community: A Policy Recommendation

The findings show that political representation of the SAD remains a major challenge for the Regional Government and Election Organisers in Jambi Province. In a democracy, every citizen's voice should be accommodated, yet the case study of the SAD in Batanghari, Sarolangun, and Merangin districts reveals the opposite: many SAD residents continue to be excluded from the voters' list. This amounts to a deliberate neglect of their right to vote.

Our research concludes that both internal and external factors account for the neglect of political rights in Jambi Province, particularly those of SAD residents. The external factors include the absence of ID cards as valid proof of residence and a lack of innovation from election organisers. Meanwhile, the internal factors

Table 3.
Problems of SAD Electoral Participation in Jambi Province

No.	Issues and Challenges	Category	Policy Recommendations
1	Ownership of Civil Registration Documents (KTP)	External	The state develops population and election regulations that are accommodating and inclusive for the SAD voters.
2	Lack of organisational innovation	External	Election organisers need to adopt adaptive and innovative approaches, such as providing transport services, escort teams, and special polling stations to ensure SAD voters can exercise their voting rights.
3	Low levels of literacy and education	Internal	Central and local governments develop affirmative policies to improve the literacy and educational capacity of SAD voters.
4	Poverty and economic problems	Internal	Central and local governments develop affirmative policies to encourage the economic empowerment of SAD residents.
5	Paternalistic politics	Internal	Political training and education for SAD residents.

Sources: Authors' compilation and analysis (2022)

include low levels of literacy and education, which result in a lack of understanding of the rules of the election process. Other factors include economic issues and the paternalistic political attitudes of SAD citizens, who generally depend on the political choices of the *temenggung*. Furthermore, election organisers did not maximise the functionality of the *temenggung*, such as to encourage the political participation of SAD residents. Nevertheless, a positive aspect of political paternalism for SAD citizens is that the *temenggung* can be the key to increasing their level of political participation, although this must be reduced in the future so that SAD citizens' political choices become more individual and less communal.

Based on these internal and external challenges, this study makes several recommendations for the political empowerment of SAD voters in future elections: long- and short-term strategies (see Table 3).

The three long-term strategies are: *First*, the problem concerning the lack of official residence documents can be solved by accommodating affirmative election and residence regulations for minority groups, such as the SAD community. The state should be able to provide an accommodating and affirmative code for ensuring the voting rights of SAD voters in every election.

Second, regarding politics, customary communities are characterised by patrilineal

attitudes. The dominant role of the *temenggung* in the political activities of the SAD community must therefore be reduced by raising the political awareness of the SAD community members about the importance of voting. While the role of the *temenggung* is required in certain contexts, such as election socialisation or the collection of election data, in other areas, basic education and literacy are the main keys to changing the patrilineal political mindset. In our research, we sensed an opportunity to alter the political perspective of this group. A participant stated that a small number of the SAD community members have begun to understand the importance of elections and feel hopeful about them and what they can do for their lives. One participant said, "Yes, because the jungle people (SAD) at this time their thinking is a little more advanced, they know that the election is a form of election 'to choose *rajo* (king)', with the hope that later the jungle people (SAD) will be cared for or taken care of" (PAR2).

Third, local governments must prepare free or subsidised education schemes to improve levels of literacy and education for the SAD community. This type of affirmative policy has also been developed in Australia and Canada, with the governments in both countries actively providing scholarships and educational support for indigenous people. This has significantly impacted the political

empowerment of indigenous people in the two countries.

Meanwhile, the short-term strategies are: *First*, election organisers need to ensure there is special assistance for SAD voters in every election. The KPUD must provide this assistance from the time of voter data collection until election day. *Second*, ad hoc election organisers should assign SAD voters to the special polling stations. This would make it easier for SAD citizens to cast their votes. Special polling stations may be in the form of mobile polling stations or stations in special locations close to temporary SAD residences. *Third*, the issue of literacy is both a barrier and a key factor in the SAD community's political participation. A short-term solution would be to provide special ballot papers containing photos of the candidates. This would make it easier for SAD residents to make political choices in elections. *Fourth*, the low literacy levels among SAD residents make the voting method a crucial issue. Using symbols or simplified ballot techniques may be more effective than the current system, which relies heavily on reading skills. Based on our research, we propose several programme strategies as alternative solutions. These recommendations are offered to the government and election organisers to help ensure that, in the future, the voices of all SAD voters are fully accommodated in elections.

Conclusion

In the last decade, Indonesian democracy has been facing stagnation (Mietzner, 2012, 2014; Power & Warburton, 2020), including the decreasing number of voter turnout, especially in local elections. Despite the rise in voter turnout in the 2020 local elections—from 69.9% to 76.6% (Kompas, 2020)—this increase does not necessarily reflect an improvement in the quality of democracy. For example, in the 2019 general election, many SAD people residing in the Batanghari, Sorolangun, Tebo,

and Merangin districts of Jambi Province were unable to exercise their right to vote. This was due to a variety of internal and external factors. One of the key factors was the lack of legal identity documents for most SAD residents, meaning they could not be registered as voters. The SAD community does not have a permanent domicile/address as they are nomadic people, in line with the customary tradition of *melangun*. This type of tradition is considered contrary to general election law in terms of the criteria for a person to be able to vote and have the right to vote. As a marginalised community, discretion should be exercised for the SAD community in the same way that has been for groups who have secured affirmation rights.

Another factor concerns the lack of literacy and innovation from the organisers that would help enable voters to access polling stations; for example, by providing polling stations close to the residences. Beyond identifying these problems, this research offers several short- and long-term recommendations. These include increasing literacy, expanding voter education for SAD residents, providing escort teams and special polling stations, and involving SAD residents as ad hoc election committees. Ultimately, the state must guarantee that every citizen's voice is accommodated in every election.

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