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Political–structural poverty in the arena of village democracy: Poverty profiles and unequal political participation in West Java

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Abstract

Rural poverty is not solely a condition of economic deprivation; it can also intersect with unequal access to political participation, public deliberation, and village development governance. Grounded in political sociology, this study examines how poverty profiles relate to electoral participation, election-related material transfers, perceived political voice and involvement in village planning in three West Java villages. A cross-sectional survey covered 289 residents aged 17 years or older. The study constructed six exploratory poverty profiles by cross-classifying a researcher-defined nominal monetary threshold derived from the World Bank (WB) USD 2.15 reference, regional BPS poverty lines, and selected basic-needs indicators informed by Undang-Undang Nomor 13 Tahun 2011 tentang Penanganan Fakir Miskin (Law No. 13 of 2011 on the Handling of the Poor). Descriptive tabulations indicate high reported electoral participation across the six poverty profiles, accompanied by more differentiated patterns of material receipt and participation in deliberative and planning arenas. This contrast suggests that formal electoral inclusion should not be equated with equal opportunities to participate substantively in village governance. However, reported transfers do not establish vote buying, and perceived political voice does not demonstrate influence on decisions. Three poverty subgroups were very small (n = 4, 8, and 13). The WB-derived monetary threshold was obtained through nominal exchange-rate conversion rather than a PPP-based calculation and is therefore treated as a study-defined analytical reference, not an official World Bank poverty line. The study highlights why the analysis of village democracy needs to connect electoral participation with access to deliberative and development institutions.

Introduction

Poverty in rural Indonesia should not be conceptualized solely in terms of income deprivation; rather, it represents a multidimensional phenomenon encompassing limited access to resources, public services, and opportunities to participate in and influence development-related decision-making processes (D'Attoma & Matteucci, 2024; Evans et al., 2024; You et al., 2019). This multidimensional character is particularly important in rural settings, where economic deprivation often intersects with unequal access to institutions, political influence, and development resources (Haryanto et al., 2025; Syukri, 2024). Within the theoretical development of poverty studies, the classical debate between cultural and structural perspectives has located the causes of poverty within two distinct explanatory frameworks. First, the cultural perspective attributes poverty primarily to internal factors at the individual or household level (Lewis, 2016; McClelland et al., 1953; Suparlan, 1984). Second, the structural perspective views poverty as resulting from inequalities embedded

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within socioeconomic structures (Alfian et al., 1984; Hancock, 2005). More recent scholarship has extended these perspectives by incorporating a political dimension that emphasizes the role of institutions and power relations in both producing and reproducing poverty. From this perspective, poverty is not merely a condition of deprivation but also one of powerlessness within social relations and policy processes (Brady & Burton, 2016; Michener, 2018; Soss et al., 2011; Watkins-Hayes & Kovalsky, 2017). Taken together, these perspectives suggest that understanding rural poverty requires attention not only to what resources poor people possess, but also to how they are positioned within institutional arrangements and local relations of power. This article is situated in political sociology, treating poverty as a socioeconomic condition that intersects with citizenship, distributive politics, and unequal access to local political arenas. Political–structural poverty is employed as a theoretical perspective on these intersections, not as a causal mechanism directly identified by the survey.

Within this context, rural poverty must also be understood in relation to the extent to which poor groups are able to participate in and influence democratic processes and village development. At the macro level, democratization and decentralization in Indonesia have generated expectations that development policies would become increasingly participatory and responsive to local needs. The strengthening of decentralization and the enactment of Law No. 6 of 2014 on Villages positioned villages as important arenas for local democracy and participatory development (Vel et al., 2017). Hamlet deliberation meetings (*Musyawarah Dusun* or *Musdus*), Village Development Planning Meetings (*Musyawarah Perencanaan Pembangunan Desa* or *Musrenbangdes*), and other deliberative forums are normatively designed as inclusive spaces in which all citizens, including poor groups, can articulate their needs, establish priorities, and influence the direction of development. Village democracy, therefore, concerns not only electoral mechanisms but also the extent to which poor groups have substantive opportunities to influence policies and development strategies that affect their well-being (Hakim et al., 2025a). This makes the village an important arena for examining whether formal political inclusion translates into substantive influence over development decisions (Haryanto et al., 2025). Here, "rural poverty" denotes the socioeconomic situation of people living in rural settings, whereas "village democracy" denotes the specific electoral and participatory institutions through which village-level decisions are negotiated. The distinction preserves the analytical difference between social deprivation and the institutional arena in which citizens act.

In practice, however, national poverty alleviation policies often confront this participatory ideal with approaches that are more administrative and short-term in orientation. In some contexts, poverty alleviation is implemented predominantly through the distribution of social assistance, although participatory programs can also strengthen citizens' capacities and involvement in development decisions (Hakim et al., 2025b). Poor communities should instead be positioned as subjects rather than objects of policy (Huraerah, 2013). Government institutions should therefore act as facilitators rather than dominate the planning, implementation, and evaluation of development programs. Where opportunities for substantive participation remain limited, poverty alleviation programs risk being insufficiently responsive to local needs and may leave inequalities in village decision-making unaddressed (Syukri, 2024; Xiaoyun, 2025). The problem, therefore, is not only whether assistance reaches poor households, but also whether poor citizens acquire greater capacity to influence the institutions and decisions that shape their livelihoods.

For the statutory definition of social assistance, Article 1 of Peraturan Menteri Sosial Nomor 1 Tahun 2019 tentang Penyaluran Belanja Bantuan Sosial di Lingkungan Kementerian Sosial (Minister of Social Affairs Regulation No. 1 of 2019 on the Distribution of Social Assistance Expenditure within the Ministry of Social Affairs) defines assistance as money, goods, or services provided to poor, disadvantaged, or socially vulnerable individuals, families, groups, or communities. Law No. 14 of 2019 regulates social workers and is therefore not used as the basis for this definition. However, empirical studies indicate that social assistance tends to have a short-term orientation and is largely used to meet basic consumption needs, meaning that it does not automatically enhance recipients' empowerment (Sugiastuti & Ulinnuha, 2024). Concerns have even emerged that social assistance may be perceived as a form of regular income, potentially fostering dependency among recipients (Iqbal & Marto, 2022). At this point, poverty is no longer merely a question of program effectiveness but also concerns the relationship between public policy and the social position of its beneficiaries. A critical issue, therefore, is whether such programs strengthen citizens' capacities as active subjects of development or instead perpetuate relations of dependency (Gassmann et al., 2022; Jara & Palacio Ludeña, 2024; Reyes, 2024; Riphahn, 2001). This distinction is particularly consequential in rural political settings, where material assistance may intersect with unequal access to authority, patronage networks, and electoral mobilization. The study does not evaluate the effectiveness of specific social assistance programs; the discussion of assistance

and dependency provides a critical context for assessing the political positioning of economically vulnerable villagers.

Furthermore, social assistance programs cannot be separated from the dynamics of electoral politics. Saragintan and Hidayat (2016) demonstrate that grants and social assistance tend to be used as political instruments by electoral actors at both national and local levels. Rahmanto et al. (2021) documented an increase in social assistance expenditure prior to the 2019 election. Similar concerns regarding the political use of distributive programs have continued to inform debates on electoral competition in Indonesia. This tendency reinforces arguments concerning the politics of distribution, whereby social policy may operate not only as an instrument of welfare provision but also as an electoral instrument. Within the framework of distributive politics, such practices are frequently associated with pork-barrel politics, referring to the allocation of public resources or programs to particular constituencies in order to strengthen political support through the distribution of collective benefits (Ferejohn, 1974; Wilk, 2010). The forms, values, and duration of specific transfer programs discussed in the cited studies should be obtained from those publications; they are not presumed to be identical to the election-related payments or food packages reported by the present respondents.

Conceptually, pork-barrel politics differs from clientelism. Pork-barrel politics is collective and territorially based, typically indicated by the allocation of particular projects or programs to specific geographical areas for practical political purposes. Clientelism, by contrast, operates through personalized patron–client relationships characterized by reciprocity and moral obligations (Berenschot, 2021; Kurer, 1993). In practice, however, the two patterns frequently intersect within social and development programs, particularly when political brokers utilize bureaucratic networks to cultivate electoral loyalty (Aspinall & Hicken, 2020; Aspinall & Rohman, 2017). Berenschot and van Klinken (2018) describe this phenomenon as an informality trap, in which formal state institutions operate through informal mechanisms that are personalized and politically embedded. In this context, poverty is not merely an object of public policy but may also become an arena for political competition in which electoral support is contested through material distribution, power networks, and control over access to resources. Accordingly, the political significance of poverty lies not only in the distribution of material benefits, but also in the way economically vulnerable citizens are positioned within unequal relationships of exchange, influence, and dependence. These concepts are analytically distinct: receiving money or food in an election context does not, without evidence of conditionality or reciprocity, demonstrate vote buying, clientelism, or a patron–client relationship (Hicken et al., 2022; Pradhanawati et al., 2019). This study therefore uses such frameworks to interpret possible political dynamics rather than to identify their full mechanisms.

These dynamics are particularly relevant at the village level because the quality of local democracy is determined not only by electoral procedures but also by the distribution of influence within development processes (Asenbaum et al., 2024). Procedural democracy may function alongside high levels of electoral participation and public satisfaction with the administration of elections (Boese, 2019). Substantive democracy, however, requires equal access to deliberative arenas, independence in political choice, and the minimization of transactional practices within political competition (Bühlmann et al., 2012; Fuchs & Roller, 2018; Gonzalez-Ocantos et al., 2012). Accordingly, poverty studies that focus exclusively on monetary dimensions risk overlooking the ways in which poverty intersects with unequal institutional access and local power relations.

Likewise, studies that assess political participation primarily through electoral turnout may fail to capture whether poor citizens are able to exercise autonomous political choices, gain access to deliberative forums, and influence development decisions (Granö, 2024).

Although previous studies have established important relationships among poverty, distributive politics, clientelism, and local democracy, several issues remain insufficiently examined. First, poverty is frequently operationalized through monetary indicators, leaving the political implications of different combinations of income poverty and basic-needs deprivation underexplored. Second, research on political participation often emphasizes electoral turnout without simultaneously examining transactional politics, deliberative access, and citizens' involvement in development governance. Third, limited attention has been given to whether different poverty profiles occupy different positions across electoral, deliberative, and village decision-making arenas. Consequently, it remains unclear whether the high formal participation by poor citizens coexists with differentiated access to deliberative forums, material transfers, and perceived opportunities for voice.

To address these gaps, this study develops a profiling framework comprising six poverty categories constructed from monetary and non-monetary dimensions of deprivation. The framework is used to examine how different

poverty profiles are associated with electoral participation, exposure to transactional political practices, access to deliberative forums, civil liberties, and involvement in monitoring village development planning processes. By integrating poverty measurement with indicators of democratic participation and development governance, the study seeks to contribute empirically and conceptually to the understanding of poverty not merely as an economic condition, but also as a differentiated position within village social structures and political configurations.

The study therefore addresses two research questions: (1) How do electoral participation, reported election-related material transfers, and participation in village governance vary across the six analytically constructed poverty profiles? (2) How do these patterns illuminate the different political positions occupied by poor groups within the electoral and deliberative arenas of the three study villages? The objective is to examine the relationship between socioeconomic deprivation and procedural and substantive dimensions of village democracy. Cultural, structural, and political perspectives guide interpretation; the cross-sectional survey is not designed to adjudicate among them as rival causal explanations.

Method

Research design

This study employed a quantitative cross-sectional survey design to examine variations in village democratic participation and development governance across different categories of rural poverty. A quantitative approach was selected because the study sought to systematically compare observable patterns of electoral participation, transactional politics, deliberative access, civil liberties, and involvement in village development governance across a relatively large number of respondents. The cross-sectional design enabled these relationships to be examined at a particular point in time while allowing respondents to be classified according to both monetary and non-monetary dimensions of poverty. This design was therefore considered appropriate for addressing the study's objective of examining whether different poverty profiles are associated with different positions within electoral, deliberative, and village governance arenas.

Research locations

This study was conducted in West Java Province, Indonesia, across three study sites: Gelaranyar Village (Pagelaran District, Cianjur Regency), Pantai Bahagia Village (Muara Gembong District, Bekasi Regency), and Margahayu Village (Pagaden Barat District, Subang Regency) (Figure 1).

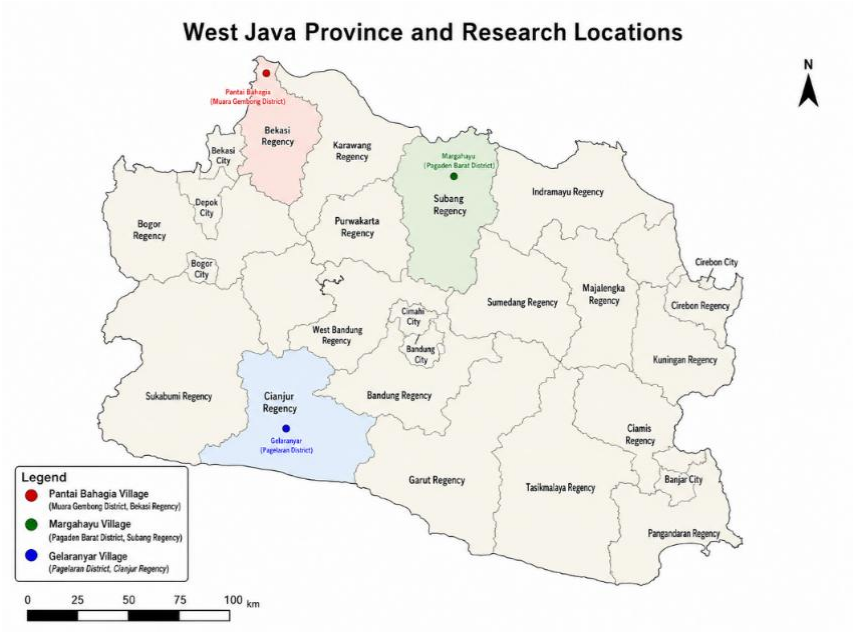


Figure 1. The geographical locations of the three study villages within West Java Province.

The study sites were selected based on several considerations. First, West Java had a poor population of 4,070,980 people, consisting of 3,010,360 people in urban areas and 1,060,630 people in rural areas (BPS-Statistics Indonesia, 2023). Second, inequality in West Java was relatively high, as indicated by a Gini Index that consistently remained above 0.4 during the 2014–2022 period, reaching a peak value of 0.417 (BPS-

Statistics of Jawa Barat Province, 2022). Third, the poverty rates in Cianjur Regency (11.18%) and Subang Regency (10.03%) were higher than the provincial average (8.40%), whereas the poverty rate in Bekasi Regency (5.21%) was below the provincial average (BPS-Statistics of Jawa Barat Province, 2023). Fourth, the three villages represent different ecological typologies: Gelaranyar Village is located in a highland and plantation area, Pantai Bahagia Village represents a coastal village, and Margahayu Village represents a lowland village. The selection of villages with contrasting ecological and socioeconomic contexts was intended to capture variations in rural poverty and village-level political dynamics rather than to represent all villages in West Java statistically.

Data collection technique

The unit of analysis was the individual resident aged 17 years or older. This age criterion was adopted because individuals aged 17 years are generally eligible to participate in elections in Indonesia and are therefore relevant to the study of electoral participation and village democracy. Respondents were also required to be residents of the respective study villages and to be included in the population frame derived from Precision Village Data (*Data Desa Presisi*).

The sampling procedure employed proportional allocation across *Rukun Warga* (RW), or neighborhood administrative units, within each study village. The required sample size was estimated using the Taro Yamane formula, expressed as $n = N/(1 + Nd^2)$, where n represents the sample size, N denotes the eligible population, and d indicates the specified level of sampling precision. The sampling frames were derived from Precision Village Data collected in 2021 for Gelaranyar Village and in 2022 for Margahayu and Pantai Bahagia Villages. Precision Village Data (*Data Desa Presisi*) is a village-level data collection method integrating spatial, census-based, and participatory approaches (Sjaf et al., 2021; Sjaf et al., 2022).

Based on these population frames, Gelaranyar Village had 2,252 residents aged 17 years or older distributed across five RWs, from which 97 respondents were surveyed. Margahayu Village had 1,849 eligible residents across eight RWs, with 95 respondents surveyed. Meanwhile, Pantai Bahagia Village had 4,953 eligible residents across six RWs, with 97 respondents surveyed. Within each village, the sample was proportionally allocated according to the distribution of eligible residents across RWs. This resulted in a total of 289 respondents from the three study villages.

Primary data were collected through structured questionnaire interviews conducted in Gelaranyar Village from October 1 to 9, 2024, Margahayu Village from October 14 to 17, 2024, and Pantai Bahagia Village from September 22 to October 18, 2024. The questionnaire covered respondents' socioeconomic characteristics, electoral participation, experiences of material incentives during elections, access to deliberative forums, perceptions of political influence, and involvement in village development governance.

Although the sampling frame covered adult residents eligible for electoral participation, the age restriction limits the direct representation of all household members experiencing poverty, particularly children. Furthermore, the use of 2021–2022 population frames for the 2024 survey requires consideration of potential demographic changes between the reference and data collection periods.

Measurement of multidimensional poverty

Poverty was examined through three complementary measurement references: a monetary threshold derived from the nominal conversion of an international-dollar reference, the regional poverty lines published by Statistics Indonesia (BPS), and selected non-monetary basic-needs indicators informed by Undang-Undang Nomor 13 Tahun 2011 tentang Penanganan Fakir Miskin (Law No. 13 of 2011 on the Handling of the Poor, hereafter UUFM). These measures were combined to construct six analytical poverty profiles that distinguish different levels of monetary vulnerability and basic-needs deprivation. Rather than estimating official poverty prevalence, this approach aims to capture the heterogeneity of rural poverty and examine how different socioeconomic positions relate to political participation and village development governance.

The monetary dimension employed two reference thresholds. The first was a researcher-defined monetary threshold derived from the nominal conversion of USD 2.15 per person per day, a numerical reference originally associated with the World Bank's international extreme poverty line expressed in 2017 purchasing power parity (PPP) dollars. Using a nominal exchange rate of USD 1 = IDR 15,095.10 and a 30-day reference period, the resulting threshold was approximately IDR 973,634 per capita per month. Since the conversion employed a market exchange rate rather than a PPP conversion factor, this amount is treated as an operational monetary reference rather than an official World Bank poverty line. The second reference comprised the 2024 BPS regional poverty lines of IDR 466,509 for Gelaranyar, IDR 674,924 for Pantai Bahagia, and IDR 434,161

for Margahayu per capita per month (BPS-Statistics Indonesia, 2024). The two thresholds were used to distinguish three monetary positions: below the regional BPS poverty line, between the BPS line and the researcher-defined threshold, and above the latter. This differentiation provides an analytical basis for examining socioeconomic vulnerability beyond a binary poor–non-poor classification. As the official BPS measure is expenditure-based, comparisons using respondents' reported income are interpreted as analytical classifications rather than replications of official BPS poverty measurement.

The non-monetary dimension was assessed using an author-constructed basic-needs deprivation measure conceptually informed by UUFM. The composite measure comprised ten indicators grouped into five equally weighted domains: dietary diversity, clothing purchase frequency, housing and basic facilities, educational attainment, and employment status. The housing domain included six indicators: electricity capacity, floor materials, wall materials, roof materials, toilet availability, and housing tenure. Indicators were scored on an ordinal scale from 1 (greater deprivation) to 3 (better conditions), while employment was assigned four scores (1, 1.9, 2.8, and 3) according to employment status. The housing domain score was calculated as the mean of its six indicators, while the overall basic-needs score was obtained by averaging the five domains, each contributing 20%. Respondents with scores below 1.67 were classified as experiencing non-monetary deprivation. The original calculation recorded no missing values in the scored variables and classified 25 of 289 respondents (8.65%) as non-monetary poor, subject to verification of the employment coding.

The intersection of the three monetary positions and two non-monetary conditions generated six exploratory poverty profiles. These profiles constitute an analytical classification developed for this study rather than official poverty categories established by the World Bank, BPS, or UUFM. Their principal purpose is to examine variations in electoral participation, transactional politics, deliberative access, and involvement in village development governance across differentiated socioeconomic conditions. The robustness of the profiles remains subject to validation of indicator coding and sensitivity to alternative monetary thresholds.

Village democracy and development governance variables

To assess the relationship between poverty categories and the dynamics of village democracy and development, this study employed six sets of indicators. First, electoral participation was measured by whether respondents exercised their voting rights in presidential elections, elections for the House of Representatives (*DPR RI*), Provincial Regional House of Representatives (*DPRD Provinsi*), Regency Regional House of Representatives (*DPRD Kabupaten*), Regional Representative Council (*DPD*), village head elections, and Village Consultative Body (*BPD*) elections. Second, transactional politics was measured through respondents' experiences of receiving material incentives, either monetary or non-monetary, including basic food packages, across different levels of electoral competition. Third, satisfaction with democratic processes included satisfaction with the conduct of general elections and village head elections. Fourth, access to and involvement in deliberative processes included opportunities to participate in public discussions, perceptions that one's voice was heard in participatory meetings, the frequency of invitations to village public forums, and participation in hamlet deliberation meetings (*Musdus*) and Village Development Planning Meetings (*Musrenbangdes*). Fifth, involvement in development governance concerned participation in ensuring that village development planning documents were consistent with the outcomes of participatory deliberations. Sixth, civil liberties were measured through respondents' experiences of threats of violence or other forms of pressure that constrained freedom of expression and association. These variables represent different empirical levels: reported voting is an indication of participation; receipt of money or goods is evidence of a reported transfer, not necessarily reciprocal exchange; invitations and attendance describe access and engagement; and the feeling that one's views were heard measures perceived political voice rather than actual influence on decisions. Exact questionnaire wording, response scales, recall periods, and missing-value rules require confirmation in the survey instrument.

Data analysis technique

The data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and cross-tabulation to examine distributions and variations in patterns across the six poverty categories for each indicator of village democracy and development governance. This analysis was used to identify empirical patterns linking poverty categories, based on both income and basic-needs deprivation, to the quality of participation, vulnerability to transactional political practices, and access to deliberative arenas. The results were subsequently interpreted using the theoretical frameworks of cultural, structural, and political poverty.

Results

Categorisation of rural poverty

The intersection of three poverty measurement references—a researcher-defined nominal monetary threshold derived from the World Bank (WB) USD 2.15 reference, the regional poverty lines of Statistics Indonesia (BPS), and basic-needs indicators informed by Law No. 13 of 2011 on the Handling of the Poor (UUFM)—provides a basis for differentiating rural poverty. The study applied this operational monetary threshold of IDR 973,634 per capita per month, obtained through nominal exchange-rate conversion. Of the 289 respondents, 195 (67.47%) fell below this operational threshold, while 89 (30.79%) were below their respective BPS regional poverty lines and 25 (8.65%) were classified as experiencing basic-needs deprivation (Figure 2). These are descriptive classifications within the surveyed sample rather than official poverty prevalence estimates.

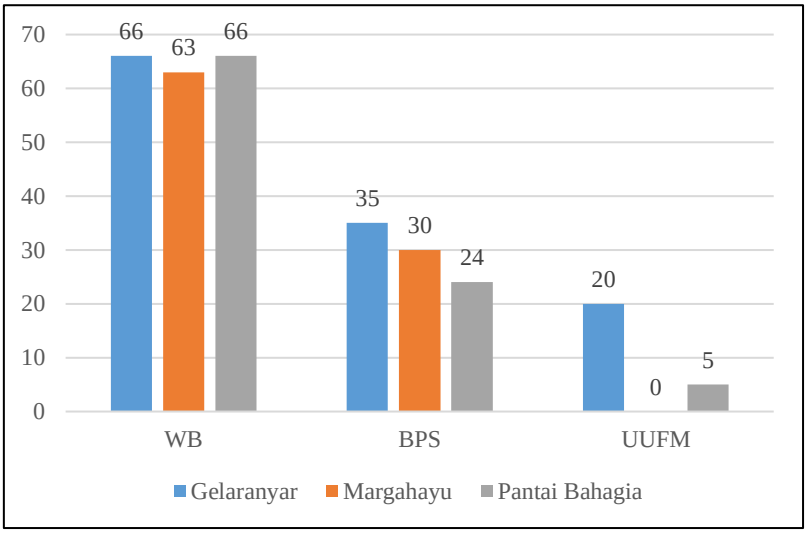


Figure 2. Distribution of respondents by monetary and non-monetary poverty references across the three study villages

The village-level tabulations show that 66 respondents in Gelaranyar, 63 in Margahayu, and 66 in Pantai Bahagia fell below the WB-referenced nominal monetary threshold. The corresponding counts below the BPS reference lines were 35, 30, and 24, respectively, whereas the original basic-needs measure classified 20, 0, and 5 respondents as deprived (Figure 2). These distributions illustrate differences among the three study locations, although the non-monetary figures remain conditional on verification of the employment coding. They do not indicate differences in the quality of democracy across villages.

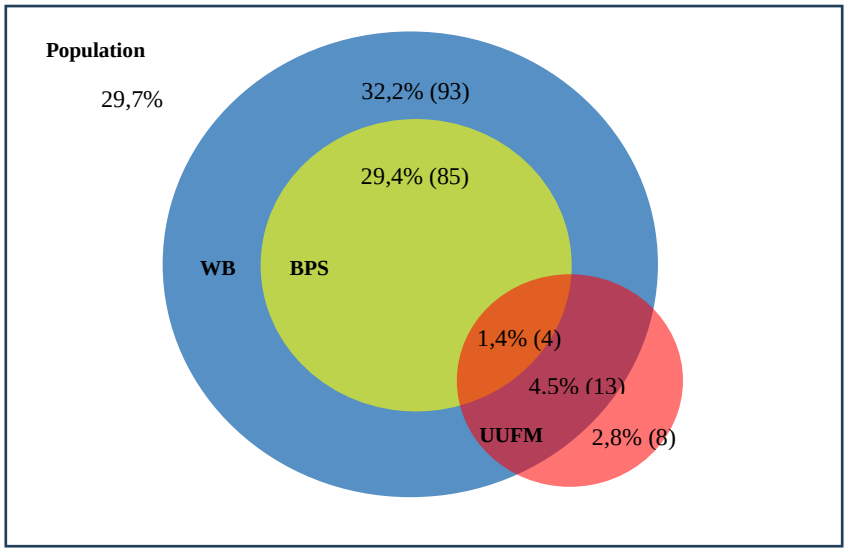


Figure 3. Intersection of the WB-referenced nominal monetary threshold, BPS regional reference lines, and UUFM-informed basic-needs deprivation among respondents

The Venn diagram reveals different combinations of monetary vulnerability and basic-needs deprivation (Figure 3). A total of 93 respondents fell below the study-defined nominal threshold but were above the BPS poverty line and did not meet the basic-needs deprivation criterion; eight experienced non-monetary deprivation while remaining above both monetary thresholds. No respondent fell below the BPS reference line without also falling below the higher nominal threshold. This pattern reflects the ordering of the monetary cutoffs used in the study, rather than an inherent inclusion relationship between official World Bank and BPS poverty classifications. The position of the 93 respondents does not itself establish eligibility for or exclusion from social assistance programs.

The intersections also show that 85 respondents were below both monetary thresholds but did not experience deprivation according to the selected basic-needs indicators. A further 13 were below the study-defined nominal threshold, above the BPS line, and non-monetarily deprived; only four respondents met all three conditions. These findings indicate that different combinations of monetary position and basic-needs conditions can coexist in the same rural population. The six analytical poverty profiles obtained from these intersections are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Six analytical poverty profiles based on monetary position and basic-needs deprivation (initial classification)

No	Category	Income	Basic Needs Accessibility	Numbers of Individuals
1	Extreme Poor	Below both the WB and BPS poverty	Deprived	4
2	Vulnerable to Extreme Poverty	Above the BPS poverty line but below the WB poverty line	Deprived	13
3	Non-monetary Poor	Above the WB poverty line	Deprived	8
4	Regional poor	Below both the BPS and WB poverty lines	Adequate	85
5	Regional Vulnerable Poor	Above the BPS poverty line but below the WB poverty line	Adequate	93
6	Non poor	Above the WB poverty line	Adequate	86

Conceptually, this categorization distinguishes two principal dimensions of poverty. The first is the monetary dimension, which differentiates respondents according to their position relative to the BPS regional poverty line and the WB-referenced nominal threshold defined for this study. The second is the non-monetary dimension, which identifies deprivation or adequate fulfillment of selected basic needs using the UUFM-informed scoring procedure. The six profile names are analytical labels rather than official poverty classifications; in particular, the terms “extreme” and “vulnerable” do not imply an official World Bank designation or a directly measured risk of future poverty.

Through this cross-classification approach, the study identifies respondents whose monetary position is above the higher reference threshold but who continue to experience deprivation in basic needs, as well as respondents below the BPS reference line whose selected basic needs are relatively adequate. This categorization provides a differentiated account of rural poverty beyond a single income-based measure and forms the analytical basis for examining electoral participation, election-related material transfers, access to deliberative arenas, and involvement in village development governance. The profiles are interpreted descriptively, particularly because three categories contain only 4, 8, and 13 respondents and the classifications remain sensitive to the chosen monetary cutoff and non-monetary coding.

Electoral participation across poverty profiles

Electoral participation was high across the six poverty profiles. Respondents reported using their voting rights in several types of election, including presidential, legislative, and village head elections. In the village head election specifically, 279 of 289 respondents (96.54%) reported voting, of whom 273 stated that they voted consciously and voluntarily (Table 2). The prevalence of reported voting among respondents in the lower monetary categories indicates that low electoral participation was not a general feature of the surveyed poor groups. This finding challenges a simplified association between poverty and political apathy, without testing whether apathy causes poverty.

The circumstances of voting nevertheless varied. Ten respondents (3.46%) reported not voting because of coercion, three (1.04%) reported voting due to coercion or peer influence, and three (1.04%) reported voting with hesitation. Among the Regionally Vulnerable Poor, three of 93 respondents reported hesitation, while one of eight Non-monetary Poor respondents reported abstention associated with coercion. Given the very small numbers in several profiles, these differences are best understood as descriptive experiences rather than evidence of a consistent socioeconomic gradient.

The distinction between procedural and substantive democracy is therefore important. Voting demonstrates participation in formal electoral processes, but a self-reported decision to vote voluntarily cannot alone establish full political autonomy or exclude the possibility of social pressure. Responses may also be influenced by social desirability bias. The data support a conclusion of broad reported electoral engagement, while the conditions under which political choices were made require interpretation alongside the other dimensions of village democracy.

Table 2. Self-reported voting participation and circumstances in village head elections, by poverty profile

Category	No, due to coercion		Yes, due to coercion/peer influence		Yes, but with hesitation		Yes, consciously and voluntarily		Total	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Extreme Poor	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	4	100.00	4	100.00
Vulnerable to Extreme Poverty	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	13	100.00	13	100.00
Non-monetary Poor	1	12.50	0	0.00	0	0.00	7	87.50	8	100.00
Regional poor	3	3.53	1	1.18	0	0.00	81	95.29	85	100.00
Regional Vulnerable Poor	1	1.08	1	1.08	3	3.23	88	94.62	93	100.00
Non poor	5	5.81	1	1.16	0	0.00	80	93.02	86	100.00
Total	**10**	**3.46**	**3**	**1.04**	**3**	**1.04**	**273**	**94.46**	**289**	**100.00**

Overall, the data reveal high reported voting participation across poverty profiles, while experiences of coercion and hesitation were reported by a smaller number of respondents. Neither income-based deprivation nor non-monetary deprivation was accompanied by uniformly low electoral participation. However, the survey responses should not be taken as a validated measure of political independence, particularly in the absence of additional evidence on how voters formed their preferences.

From a political-sociological perspective, this pattern is consistent with the distinction between formal political inclusion and the social conditions of political action. Electoral participation may occur within local networks of mobilization, material exchange, and unequal influence, yet the present survey does not identify these mechanisms directly. The coexistence of widespread voting and some reported pressure therefore warrants examining other arenas of village democracy rather than equating turnout with the full exercise of political citizenship.

Thus, electoral participation in these villages appears broadly inclusive in quantitative terms, but the available indicators offer a more limited basis for evaluating its substantive quality. Strengthening village democracy requires attention not only to voting opportunities but also to freedom of choice, participation in deliberative forums, and the extent to which citizens can voice their interests in development governance.

Election-related material transfers and economic vulnerability

In the context of village head elections, income-based poverty profiles, particularly the Regional Poor and Regionally Vulnerable Poor, reported more frequent receipt of money associated with the electoral period. As shown in Figure 4, 31.76% of the Regional Poor and 34.40% of the Regionally Vulnerable Poor reported often or always receiving monetary transfers, compared with 17.44% of the non-poor. Although 25.00% of the Extreme Poor reported such receipt, this category comprised only four respondents. The corresponding proportion was 7.69% among those Vulnerable to Extreme Poverty, while no repeated receipt was reported among the Non-monetary Poor. These descriptive differences suggest that reports of material transfers were more common in the two larger income-vulnerable profiles.

A similar pattern emerged for non-monetary transfers in the form of basic food packages. The proportions reporting frequent receipt were 27.06% among the Regional Poor and 33.33% among the Regionally Vulnerable Poor, compared with 13.96% among the non-poor. No frequent receipt was reported among the Extreme Poor, Vulnerable to Extreme Poverty, or Non-monetary Poor groups, although their small sample sizes constrain comparisons. Taken together, the monetary and non-monetary patterns suggest differentiated exposure to election-related material transfers rather than a uniform experience across poverty profiles.

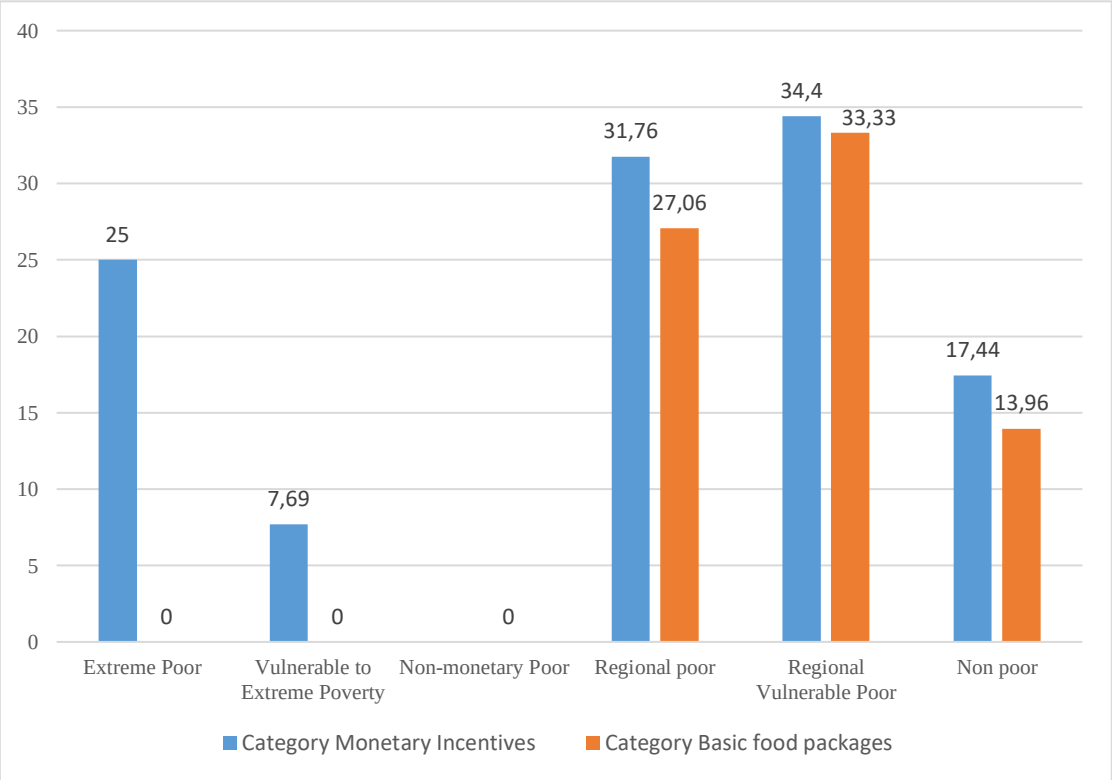


Figure 4. Percentage of respondents reporting frequent receipt of money and basic food packages during village head elections, by poverty profile

These results suggest that economic vulnerability may coincide with greater reported exposure to material distribution during electoral competition, although the pattern is neither uniform nor sufficient to establish a statistically significant association. Importantly, receiving money or food packages does not by itself establish vote buying, political dependency, or a reciprocal political exchange. The survey tabulations do not identify whether transfers were conditional on electoral support, who provided them, or whether recipients were expected to reciprocate.

From a political-sociological perspective, these patterns remain relevant to the study of distributive politics and local power relations. Material distribution may be one context in which economic conditions and political mobilization intersect, but the evidence reported here does not establish clientelistic mechanisms. The findings therefore indicate differentiated experiences of election-related transfers and provide a basis for further investigation of the circumstances under which such exchanges may shape political participation.

Satisfaction with electoral procedures and perceived legitimacy

The findings show that most respondents across the poverty profiles reported being moderately satisfied, satisfied, or very satisfied with the conduct of village head elections (Table 3). Only two of 289 respondents reported dissatisfaction, whereas 108 were moderately satisfied, 105 satisfied, and 74 very satisfied. This pattern indicates generally favorable reported evaluations of electoral procedures among the surveyed respondents, although subgroup comparisons are constrained by the small sizes of several profiles.

Satisfaction is considered here as a contextual indicator of perceived procedural legitimacy. It captures respondents' evaluation of electoral arrangements, rather than their influence over political decisions or satisfaction with village development outcomes. Accordingly, this subsection complements the analysis of electoral participation by examining how respondents perceived the procedures in which they participated.

However, procedural satisfaction does not automatically demonstrate the substantive quality of democracy. Respondents may evaluate the conduct of elections positively while experiencing unequal access to deliberative forums or other constraints on political participation. The distinction is important because formal acceptance of an electoral process does not establish equality in the distribution of political voice or influence.

Although the distribution of satisfaction did not show a simple gradient across the preliminary poverty profiles, Table 3 does not establish whether satisfaction is associated with receipt of election-related material transfers. Such a relationship would require respondent-level cross-tabulation or statistical testing. The present results therefore describe perceived electoral satisfaction separately from experiences of material receipt.

Table 3. Number and percentage of poverty categories by level of satisfaction with the conduct of village head elections

Category	Dissatisfied		Moderately Satisfied		Satisfied		Very Satisfied		Total	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Extreme Poor	0	0.00	2	50.00	1	25.00	1	25.00	4	100.00
Vulnerable to Extreme Poverty	0	0.00	5	38.46	7	53.85	1	7.69	13	100.00
Non-monetary Poor	0	0.00	6	75.00	2	25.00	0	0.00	8	100.00
Regional poor	0	0.00	26	30.59	36	42.35	23	27.06	85	100.00
Regional Vulnerable Poor	1	1.08	35	37.63	27	29.03	30	32.26	93	100.00
Non poor	1	1.16	34	39.53	32	37.21	19	22.09	86	100.00
Total	**2**	**0.69**	**108**	**37.37**	**105**	**36.33**	**74**	**25.61**	**289**	**100.00**

These findings can be considered in relation to theories of democratic legitimacy: positive evaluations of procedures may coexist with differentiated experiences of political participation. However, the data do not determine whether material transfers have become normalized or whether such transfers affect satisfaction. Satisfaction with election administration should also be distinguished from the perceived fairness of the allocation of village resources and opportunities to influence development decisions.

The high level of reported satisfaction suggests that electoral procedures were generally accepted by the respondents. Its analytical significance lies in the contrast between broadly positive procedural evaluations and the more varied experiences recorded in material transfers, deliberative participation, and village planning. Thus, satisfaction is one contextual dimension of village democracy, not a comprehensive measure of democratic quality.

Access to deliberative arenas and perceived political voice

While electoral participation represents a formal dimension of democracy, access to deliberative arenas concerns opportunities to discuss public issues and express community aspirations. This study examined reported opportunities for discussion, respondents' perceptions that their views were heard, and attendance at village public forums. Hamlet deliberations (Musdus) and Village Development Planning Meetings (*Musrenbangdes*) are relevant institutional contexts, but invitations, actual attendance, perceived voice, and influence on decisions refer to distinct empirical dimensions and should not be treated as interchangeable.

In contrast to the high frequency of reported voting, participation in public discussions showed a more heterogeneous pattern across poverty profiles. Respondents in the Regional Poor and Regionally Vulnerable Poor groups were frequently represented in intermediate response categories rather than uniformly in the highest participation categories. The evidence therefore suggests varied experiences of deliberative engagement, without demonstrating a straightforward increase in participation as economic position improves.

A related pattern emerged in the responses concerning whether respondents felt their views were heard during participatory meetings. The Regionally Vulnerable Poor were represented at both the low and very high ends of the perceived-voice scale, whereas the non-poor were more concentrated in the moderate category (Table 4). This finding describes perceptions of being heard rather than verified influence over decisions. Its interpretation also depends on the original survey item's wording and the response categories used to construct the scale.

Table 4. Distribution of perceived political voice in participatory meetings by poverty profile

Category	Very Low		Low		Moderate		High		Very High		Total	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Extreme Poor	0	0.00	1	25.00	1	25.00	1	25.00	1	25.00	4	100.00
Vulnerable to Extreme Poverty	0	0.00	0	0.00	5	38.46	8	61.54	0	0.00	13	100.00
Non-monetary Poor	0	0.00	0	0.00	7	87.50	1	12.50	0	0.00	8	100.00
Regional poor	5	5.88	14	16.47	38	44.71	11	12.94	17	20.00	85	100.00
Regional Vulnerable Poor	1	1.08	28	30.11	31	33.33	8	8.60	25	26.88	93	100.00
Non poor	3	3.49	24	27.91	39	45.35	11	12.79	9	10.47	86	100.00
Total	**9**	**3.11**	**67**	**23.18**	**121**	**41.87**	**40**	**13.84**	**52**	**17.99**	**289**	**100.00**

The responses reveal differentiated perceptions of political voice but do not demonstrate that any poverty group exercised greater substantive influence over village decisions. Perceived voice may vary both within and between socioeconomic groups. Attendance at a meeting and the feeling of being heard are therefore important indicators of engagement, but neither alone establishes decision-making power.

The frequency of attendance at village public discussions also varied across poverty profiles. The Non-monetary Poor were relatively concentrated in the "sometimes" and "often" categories, whereas the non-poor recorded a comparatively high proportion in the "never" and "rarely" categories. The Regional Poor were distributed across participation levels, while the Regionally Vulnerable Poor were more concentrated in the "rarely" category (Table 5). This table reports attendance rather than invitations; the two indicators should be interpreted separately.

Table 5. Frequency of attendance at village public discussions by poverty profile

Category	Never		Rarely		Sometimes		Often		Always		Total	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Extreme Poor	1	25.00	1	25.00	1	25.00	0	0.00	1	25.00	4	100.00
Vulnerable to Extreme Poverty	0	0.00	3	23.08	7	53.85	3	23.08	0	0.00	13	100.00
Non-monetary Poor	1	12.50	0	0.00	4	50.00	3	37.50	0	0.00	8	100.00
Regional poor	14	16.47	21	24.71	30	35.29	5	5.88	15	17.65	85	100.00
Regional Vulnerable Poor	15	16.13	36	38.71	14	15.05	9	9.68	19	20.43	93	100.00
Non poor	14	16.28	36	41.86	18	20.93	9	10.47	9	10.47	86	100.00
Total	**45**	**15.57**	**97**	**33.56**	**74**	**25.61**	**29**	**10.03**	**44**	**15.22**	**289**	**100.00**

The attendance patterns provide additional context for understanding participation in village deliberation. The smaller non-monetary and extreme-poverty profiles contain too few respondents to support strong comparisons, while the larger income-based profiles exhibit varied frequencies of attendance. These results describe presence in public discussions, not whether participants held institutional positions or shaped village planning priorities.

Overall, the distributions do not indicate a clear socioeconomic gradient in attendance at village public discussions. Some respondents in lower monetary positions reported regular attendance, while others with higher monetary positions attended infrequently. Differences may also reflect village context, invitations, or institutional roles that were not separated in the pooled tables.

The contrast between high electoral participation and more heterogeneous deliberative attendance highlights the need to examine several dimensions of political inclusion. The evidence suggests that citizens who are active as voters do not necessarily engage in public discussion with the same frequency.

From a deliberative-democracy perspective, this distinction matters because opportunities to attend and express views do not necessarily translate into equal influence over collective decisions. The observed differences in attendance and perceived voice are consistent with the possibility of differentiated access to village political arenas, although the study does not directly establish the power relations underlying them.

Experiences of threats and civil liberties

Another dimension of village democracy concerns respondents' experiences of threats that restricted freedom of expression or assembly. The survey recorded the frequency with which respondents reported threats of violence or other pressures affecting these freedoms, whether associated with village officials or other members of the community (Table 6). These reports provide information on experiences of intimidation rather than a comprehensive institutional assessment of civil-liberty protection.

Table 6. Number and percentage of poverty categories by experience of threats of violence restricting freedom of expression

Category	Never		Rarely		Sometimes		Often		Always		Total	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Extreme Poor	4	100.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	4	100.00
Vulnerable to Extreme Poverty	12	92.31	0	0.00	1	7.69	0	0.00	0	0.00	13	100.00
Non-monetary Poor	6	75.00	0	0.00	2	25.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	8	100.00
Regional poor	57	67.06	2	2.35	15	17.65	2	2.35	9	10.59	85	100.00
Regional Vulnerable Poor	69	74.19	5	5.38	9	9.68	1	1.08	9	9.68	93	100.00
Non poor	75	87.21	5	5.81	6	6.98	0	0.00	0	0.00	86	100.00
Total	**223**	**77.16**	**12**	**4.15**	**33**	**11.42**	**3**	**1.04**	**18**	**6.23**	**289**	**100.00**

Most respondents (223 of 289; 77.16%) reported never experiencing such threats. Nevertheless, 66 respondents (22.84%) reported threats at least rarely, including 18 who selected “always” and three who selected “often” (Table 6). These responses do not support a conclusion that civil liberties were uniformly protected or that systematic intimidation was absent. They indicate that reported experiences of political pressure remain relevant to understanding participation in the study villages.

Reports of threats were especially visible in the two larger income-based poverty profiles: 28 of 85 Regional Poor respondents and 24 of 93 Regionally Vulnerable Poor respondents reported threats at least rarely, compared with 11 of 86 non-poor respondents. This descriptive difference warrants attention but does not establish which actors were responsible or why such experiences differed across groups. The measure also cannot distinguish all forms of social pressure from direct threats of violence.

These experiences suggest that political vulnerability may involve more than material conditions or reported election-related transfers. Pressure surrounding expression and assembly is another dimension through which citizens may encounter unequal conditions of participation. However, attributing these experiences to specific power relationships would require additional contextual and qualitative evidence.

Civil liberties are an important condition for substantive democracy, alongside electoral participation and deliberative access. The presence of reported threats among some respondents cautions against evaluating village democracy solely through voting participation or satisfaction with electoral procedures. It also indicates the importance of considering whether citizens can express opinions without fear.

Threats attributed to village officials and threats arising from other community members would have different implications for the role of formal authority and local social relations. The pooled data presented here, however, do not allow these sources to be separately assessed. Consequently, institutional explanations remain questions for further investigation rather than established findings.

Thus, although the majority of respondents did not report threats, the experiences of the remaining respondents should not be disregarded. They contribute to the broader finding that political participation in the villages involves different levels of reported security and freedom across respondents, requiring attention alongside socioeconomic position and deliberative engagement.

Involvement in village development planning governance

Involvement in village development governance was examined through participation in Village Development Planning Meetings (*Musrenbangdes*) and reported monitoring of village development planning documents. These indicators extend the analysis beyond electoral participation to citizens' engagement with the institutions

and documents through which development priorities are discussed. However, participation and document monitoring do not by themselves establish influence over final decisions or budget allocations.

Musrenbangdes is a key village forum in which residents can express priorities for local development. Figure 5 presents the proportion of respondents who reported participating at least occasionally, defined as answering "sometimes," "often," or "always." The same frequency grouping is used to describe reported monitoring of village development planning documents.

Participation in *Musrenbangdes* did not follow a simple socioeconomic gradient. As shown in Figure 5, 50.59% of the Regional Poor reported participating at least occasionally, followed by 43.01% of the Regionally Vulnerable Poor and 31.40% of the non-poor. The corresponding proportions were 25.00% among the Extreme Poor, 25.00% among the Non-monetary Poor, and 23.08% among those Vulnerable to Extreme Poverty. These descriptive results indicate that the income-based poverty profiles were not uniformly excluded from formal village planning meetings, although comparisons involving the smallest groups require caution.

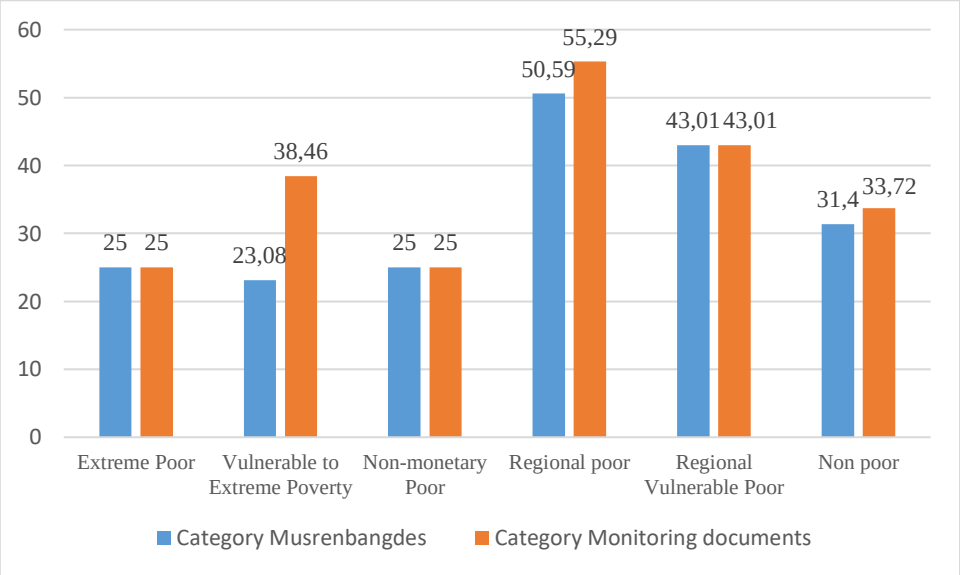


Figure 5. Respondents participating at least occasionally in *Musrenbangdes* and monitoring village planning documents, by poverty profile

A similarly differentiated pattern appeared in reported monitoring of village development planning documents. The Regional Poor recorded 55.29% participating at least occasionally, followed by the Regionally Vulnerable Poor (43.01%), Vulnerable to Extreme Poverty (38.46%), and non-poor (33.72%). The Extreme Poor and Non-monetary Poor each recorded 25.00%. These figures describe reported monitoring activities rather than evidence that respondents influenced the content or implementation of the documents.

Taken together, these patterns show that participation in village development governance did not increase uniformly with socioeconomic position. Some income-based poor groups reported comparatively frequent engagement, while several groups experiencing non-monetary deprivation reported lower participation. The findings contribute to the study's political-sociological perspective by showing that distinct poverty profiles occupy varied positions across the electoral, deliberative, and village-planning arenas. However, the pooled descriptive data do not establish causal relationships or allow the relative effectiveness of democracy in the three villages to be ranked.

Discussion

The findings of this study indicate that rural poverty cannot be reduced to a single dimension, whether cultural, structural, or political. The six analytically constructed poverty profiles show that differences in monetary position and basic-needs deprivation do not correspond to a uniform pattern of political participation. The principal contrast is between widespread reported electoral engagement and more differentiated experiences of election-related material transfers, deliberative attendance, perceived political voice, threats, and involvement in village planning. From a political-sociological perspective, this contrast suggests that formal inclusion as voters should be distinguished from opportunities to participate in other arenas of village democracy (Fuchs & Roller, 2018; Hakim et al., 2025a; Haryanto et al., 2025; Syukri, 2024).

The high reported level of voting in village head elections (279 of 289 respondents; 96.54%) does not support characterizing the surveyed poor groups as generally apathetic in electoral politics. This finding qualifies simplified cultural explanations that associate poverty with limited political motivation or participation (Lewis, 2016; McClelland et al., 1953). However, it does not establish that respondents exercised fully autonomous political choices: most described their voting as conscious and voluntary, but self-reported motivations may be affected by social-desirability bias and do not reveal the social conditions under which preferences were formed (Pradhanawati et al., 2019). Nor can a cross-sectional survey determine whether attitudes or political participation cause poverty. The evidence therefore challenges a stereotype of electoral disengagement without resolving the broader debate over cultural and structural explanations of deprivation.

However, when the quality of participation is examined in the context of transactional politics, a more complex picture emerges. Frequent receipt of election-related money was reported by 31.76% of the Regional Poor and 34.40% of the Regionally Vulnerable Poor, compared with 17.44% of the non-poor; reports of food-package receipt followed a similar descriptive pattern. The acceptance of material incentives should not be interpreted immediately as evidence of a culture of dependency. Equally, such reports do not by themselves demonstrate vote buying or clientelism, because the available tabulations do not establish who distributed the transfers, whether they were conditional on electoral support, or whether reciprocity was expected (Hicken et al., 2022). Reporting bias may further affect these sensitive responses (Gonzalez-Ocantos et al., 2012). Distributive politics and clientelism therefore remain relevant interpretive perspectives (Berenschot & van Klinken, 2018), but their specific mechanisms are not identified by these data.

From the perspective of structural poverty, the findings reveal differentiated rather than uniformly unequal patterns of access to deliberative arenas and village governance. For example, participation at least occasionally in *Musrenbangdes* was reported by 50.59% of the Regional Poor and 43.01% of the Regionally Vulnerable Poor, compared with 31.40% of the non-poor. Reported monitoring of planning documents also varied, without following a simple socioeconomic gradient. The non-poor do not consistently occupy the highest levels of participation. These patterns suggest that economic disadvantage does not necessarily coincide with exclusion from formal village forums. Nevertheless, an invitation, attendance at a meeting, perceived political voice, and influence over a development decision are analytically distinct. The available indicators establish differences in reported engagement and perceptions, not the distribution of actual decision-making power or the institutional mechanisms through which it operates.

The coexistence of favorable evaluations of village head elections with uneven participation beyond voting further illustrates the limits of treating procedural acceptance as a comprehensive measure of democracy. Although only two respondents expressed dissatisfaction with the electoral procedures, 66 of 289 respondents (22.84%) reported experiencing threats affecting freedom of expression or assembly at least rarely. These findings do not establish systematic intimidation, but neither do they justify concluding that civil liberties are uniformly protected. Together with variations in attendance and perceived voice, they show why assessments of village democracy must consider multiple dimensions of political experience rather than infer substantive inclusion from voter turnout or electoral satisfaction alone (Fuchs & Roller, 2018).

The three study villages also differ in their preliminary socioeconomic classifications. In Gelaranyar, Margahayu, and Pantai Bahagia, respectively, 35, 30, and 24 respondents fell below the relevant regional BPS monetary reference lines, while 20, none, and five were initially classified as basic-needs deprived. The latter figures depend on verification of the employment scoring. These variations are consistent with the contrasting highland, lowland, and coastal contexts of the selected villages, but they do not demonstrate that one village has stronger democratic practices than another. Because the reported political indicators are principally cross-tabulated by poverty profile across villages, the evidence cannot identify which village performs best in electoral participation, deliberative inclusion, civil liberties, or development governance. A defensible village-level comparison requires disaggregated political indicators and attention to invitations, institutional positions, and local context (Haryanto et al., 2025; Vel et al., 2017).

Conceptually, the profiling of six poverty categories in this study makes an important contribution to the understanding of rural poverty by distinguishing socioeconomic positions that may be obscured by a binary poor/non-poor classification (Evans et al., 2024). The political-structural perspective is useful for asking how these positions intersect with material distribution, opportunities for political voice, and access to village institutions. However, the present findings cannot establish that unequal power relations caused or reproduced the observed poverty conditions. Such a proposition is an interpretive hypothesis, consistent with structural approaches to poverty (Alfian et al., 1984; Brady & Burton, 2016), and would require evidence tracing

institutional decisions, resource allocation, and changes in household conditions over time. The practical implication is to examine the inclusiveness and accountability of village decision-making alongside economic assistance, rather than to assume that either electoral turnout or the distribution of benefits is sufficient evidence of empowerment.

These interpretations are subject to important limitations. Three poverty profiles contain only four, eight, and 13 respondents, making subgroup percentages unstable. The profiles also depend on a study-defined nominal monetary threshold derived from the World Bank reference rather than a PPP-consistent poverty line, and on a basic-needs score whose employment coding requires verification. Self-reported political experiences are susceptible to recall and social-desirability bias; the three villages were purposively selected; and the cross-sectional descriptive design cannot identify causation or support generalization to West Java as a whole. Further analyses should test classification sensitivity, report uncertainty in group comparisons, examine associations at the respondent level, and disaggregate democratic participation by village. Qualitative and longitudinal evidence would be needed to investigate the political mechanisms potentially linking deprivation to village governance.

Conclusion

Across 289 surveyed adults in three West Java villages, reported electoral participation was high across the six preliminary poverty profiles, including 279 respondents (96.54%) who reported voting in village head elections. At the same time, receipt of election-related money or food, deliberative attendance, perceived political voice, reported threats, and involvement in village planning varied across profiles. Some income-based poor groups reported substantial participation in *Musrenbangdes* and document monitoring. These findings indicate that socioeconomic deprivation was not accompanied by uniformly low electoral or village-planning participation, while formal voting inclusion did not imply equivalent experiences across other arenas of village democracy.

The findings are descriptive and do not establish vote buying, actual influence over decisions, or causal pathways through which political relations reproduce poverty. Interpretation is constrained by very small subgroups (n = 4, 8, and 13), self-report and potential social-desirability bias, purposive selection of villages, a cross-sectional design, and the need to verify the exploratory poverty classification. The available village-pooled political indicators also do not support ranking Gelaranyar, Margahayu, and Pantai Bahagia by democratic quality. The study's contribution is therefore to identify differentiated political experiences across socioeconomic profiles and to frame political-structural poverty as an empirical agenda for investigating unequal opportunities within village democracy.

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Authors' Contributions

Lukman Hakim: Conceptualization, Methodology, Investigation, Data curation, Data Processing, Formal analysis, Writing – original draft, and Writing – review & editing. **Lala M. Kolopaking:** Conceptualization, Methodology, Analysis, Supervision. **Sofyan Sjaf:** Conceptualization, Methodology, Analysis, Supervision. **Rilus A. Kiseng:** Conceptualization, Methodology, Analysis, Supervision. All authors have read and approved the final version of the manuscript and agree to be accountable for their respective contributions to the research.

Ethics Statement

This study complied with ethical standards for research involving human participants. The research design and instruments were formally reviewed and approved for ethical compliance by the Rural Sociology Study Program, Faculty of Human Ecology, IPB University (Ref. No. 0820/IT3.F8.3/KM.00/M/B/2024, dated April 3, 2024). Prior to data collection, informed consent was obtained from all participants after assuring them of voluntary participation, the right to withdraw, and strict data confidentiality.

Declaration of generative AI and AI-assisted technologies in the writing process

During the preparation of this manuscript, the authors used ChatGPT (OpenAI) to assist with English-language translation and language refinement, as well as to support the visualization of selected data and research information. All AI-assisted outputs were carefully reviewed, verified, and edited by the authors to ensure their

accuracy, relevance, and consistency with the original data and scientific content of the manuscript. The authors take full responsibility for the integrity and accuracy of the published material.

Statement of Originality and Plagiarism-Free

This article is an original work that has not been published elsewhere and is free from plagiarism. All references and citations have been properly acknowledged according to the applicable standards.

Declaration of Conflicts of Interest

No conflicts of interest related to this research, authorship, or publication.

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