

CUSTOMARY SYSTEM REGARDING VILLAGE HEAD LEADERSHIP IN HUTA TORUAN 1

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
Diterima: 16 Agustus 2026 Direvisi: 20 Agustus 2026 Disetujui: 26 September 2026 Tersedia Daring: 27 Oktober 2026 Keywords: <i>Leadership, Village Head, Customs, Dalihan Na Tolu</i>	This study aims to describe the customary system of village head leadership in Huta Toruan 1 and the supporting and inhibiting factors in the application of customary values in the leadership of the village head in Huta Toruan 1. The research method used is qualitative with an ethnographic approach. Data collection techniques are observation, interviews and documentation. The results of this study indicate that Toba Batak customary values have a significant influence on the leadership style of the Village Head in Huta Toruan 1. The leadership carried out is not only based on formal administrative authority granted by the state, but is also greatly influenced by a social and cultural legitimacy that is sourced from local customary values that are still alive and preserved. The main supporting factor in the application of customary values in leadership is the still strong social authority of customary leaders in the community structure, the strong culture of deliberation that has been rooted in the Dalihan Na Tolu system. The most prominent obstacle is the transformation of customary understanding among the younger generation, and the low public understanding of government mechanisms.

ABSTRAK
Kata Kunci; <i>Kepemimpinan, Kepala Desa, Adat, Dalihan Na Tolu</i> Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mendeskripsikan sistem adat terhadap kepemimpinan kepala desa di Huta Toruan 1 dan faktor pendukung serta penghambat dalam penerapan nilai adat pada kepemimpinan kepala desa di Huta Toruan 1. Metode penelitian yang digunakan adalah kualitatif dengan pendekatan etnografi. Teknik pengumpulan data yaitu observasi, wawancara dan dokumentasi. Hasil penelitian ini menunjukkan bahwa Nilai-nilai adat Batak Toba memiliki pengaruh yang signifikan terhadap gaya kepemimpinan Kepala Desa di Huta Toruan 1. Kepemimpinan yang dijalankan tidak hanya berdasar pada kewenangan yang bersifat administrasi formal yang diberikan oleh negara, tetapi juga sangat dipengaruhi oleh sebuah legitimasi sosial dan budaya yang bersumber pada nilai adat setempat yang masih hidup dan dilestarikan. Faktor pendukung utama dalam penerapan nilai adat dalam kepemimpinan adalah masih kuatnya otoritas sosial tokoh adat dalam struktur masyarakat, kuatnya budaya musyawarah yang telah berakar dalam sistem Dalihan Na Tolu. Hambatan yang paling menonjol yaitu adanya sebuah transformasi pemahaman adat dikalangan generasi muda, dan rendahnya pemahaman masyarakat terhadap mekanisme pemerintahan.

1. INTRODUCTION

Indonesia is a country with a rich diversity of cultures, ethnicities, languages, and customs. This diversity is one of the national identities that distinguishes Indonesia from other countries. Each region has its own customary system, developed based on history, values, norms, and customs passed down through generations. This customary system serves as a regulatory mechanism for social relations, maintaining order and harmony in society through cultural values passed down through generations (Fadhrullah & Syam, 2024).

The existence of customary systems in Indonesian society continues to be evident even though society has entered an era of modernization and globalization. Modernization has indeed brought changes in various aspects of life, such as developments in technology, education, the economy, and government systems. However, in many regions in Indonesia, customs are maintained because they are considered to have relevant values in maintaining social harmony and cultural identity. Customary systems often operate alongside formal government systems established by the state (Yasin et al., 2026). The relationship between these two systems creates a dynamic that is interesting to study, particularly in the context of village-level leadership (Purwaningrum et al., 2022).

As the smallest governmental unit, villages play a strategic role in implementing development and providing services to the community. Under Law Number 6 of 2014 concerning Villages, village heads have the authority to organize village government, implement development, provide community development, and empower communities. In carrying out their duties and functions, village heads are required not only to understand government regulations but also to understand the socio-cultural characteristics of the communities they lead. This is crucial because the success of a village head's leadership is often influenced by the level of community acceptance of the policies and decisions they make (Wiradnyana, 2011).

One community group in Indonesia that still strongly maintains its customary system is the Toba Batak. The Toba Batak have a unique social system based on the principle of kinship, known as Dalihan Na Tolu. This system serves as the basis for regulating social relations, family life, traditional ceremonies, conflict resolution, and decision-making within the community.

According to Sihombing (Handayani et al., 2023) Dalihan Na Tolu is a philosophy of life of the Toba Batak people that regulates the relationship between hula-hula, dongan tubu, and boru in a harmonious and mutually respectful manner. The principles of Dalihan Na Tolu contain noble values that serve as guidelines in the social life of the Toba Batak people. The value of somba marhula-hula teaches respect for the family that gives women, the value of manat mardongan tubu teaches caution and mutual respect among fellow clans, while the value of elek marboru teaches an attitude of protecting and caring for the boru. These three principles form a pattern of social relationships that complement each other and create balance in community life. These values not only

apply to traditional activities, but also influence communication patterns, deliberation processes, decision-making, and leadership in the Toba Batak community.

The Dalihan Na Tolu system not only serves as a kinship system but also serves as the basis for leadership formation in Toba Batak society. Firmando's (Sinaga & Elfemi, 2021) research found that leaders in Toba Batak society gain social legitimacy not only through formal positions but also through their ability to uphold customary values and maintain harmonious social relations within the Dalihan Na Tolu framework.

Leadership based on local cultural values is considered to have strong relevance in facing the challenges of modern leadership. Research on leadership models based on local wisdom of the Toba Batak people shows that the values of somba marhula-hula, manat mardongan tubu, elek marboru, customary deliberation (martonggo raja), and hasangapon are moral guidelines that are still relevant in contemporary leadership practices. These values encourage participatory leadership, prioritize deliberation, and are oriented towards the common good (Sihaloho, 2023)

Research conducted by Firmando (2018) shows that the traditional leadership system of the Toba Batak people remains relevant today, both in theory and in social practice. Leadership in the Toba Batak community is heavily influenced by traditional values, which position a leader as a role model, protector, and guardian of the community. In various social activities and village government, traditional leaders still wield significant influence, providing consideration, advice, and support for various decisions related to the community's interests (Bian & Wang, 2024).

Huta Toruan 1 is a village whose majority population is from the Toba Batak tribe and still upholds traditional values in their daily lives. The social life of the people in this village is inseparable from the influence of the traditional system inherited from their ancestors. Various community activities, such as traditional festivals, funeral ceremonies, village deliberations, and social conflict resolution, still often involve the role of traditional leaders and apply the principles of Dalihan Na Tolu. This condition indicates that the traditional system still plays a significant role in the social life of the Huta Toruan 1 community. The continuity of traditional practices in the village community's life indicates that local cultural values remain a social capital that influences community participation and decision-making processes at the local level (Nugroho et al., 2021)

The existence of a strong customary system in Huta Toruan 1 is interesting to study further because it can provide an overview of how customs function in the leadership of the village government in Huta Toruan 1. Therefore, based on the background explanation above, the researcher is interested in researching the Customary System on the Leadership of the Village Head in Huta Toruan 1.

2. METHOD

The type of research used in this study is qualitative research with an ethnographic approach. Qualitative research was chosen because this study aims to understand in depth the social phenomena that occur in the life of the community, especially regarding the influence of the customary system on the leadership of the Village Head in Huta Toruan 1. Through a qualitative approach, researchers can gain a comprehensive

understanding of the meaning, values, norms, and social practices that develop in society based on the perspectives of the social actors directly involved (Purba, 2025)

An ethnographic approach was used because this research focuses on the cultural and social life of a community that still maintains customary systems as part of its identity and way of life. According to Spradley (2007), ethnography is a research method that aims to describe and interpret the cultural patterns of a community group through direct observation of the activities, behaviors, values, and social interactions that occur in everyday life.

This research was conducted in Huta Toruan 1 Village, in North Tapanuli Regency, North Sumatra Province (Sitompul, 2023). The location was chosen based on the fact that the majority of the village's residents are from the Toba Batak tribe, who still maintain and apply traditional values in their daily lives. Furthermore, traditional systems still play a significant role in various aspects of social life, including leadership and decision-making at the village level (Daulay, 2021).

In qualitative ethnographic research, informants are individuals with knowledge, experience, and direct involvement in the phenomenon being studied. The informants in this study consisted of (Zhou et al., 2026):

Head of Huta Toruan Village 1

The village head was chosen as an informant because he is a formal leader who plays a crucial role in village governance. The village head is considered to have direct knowledge of how customary values influence leadership processes, decision-making, conflict resolution, and the relationship between the village government and the community and customary leaders (Muda et al., 2022).

Huta Toruan Village Community 1

The community was chosen as informants because they directly experience and benefit from the implementation of customary systems and the leadership of the Village Head in their daily lives. They were also considered capable of providing insights into the effectiveness of the Village Head's leadership in accommodating customary values prevailing in their community.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Traditional Values That Influence the Leadership Style of Village Heads in Huta Toruan 1

A customary system is a set of values, norms, and rules passed down through generations within a society. In the Toba Batak community, customary law serves not only as a guideline for social and cultural life but also as a basis for decision-making, conflict resolution, and leadership practices. As the formal leader of the village government, the village head is obligated to carry out administrative duties in accordance with state regulations. However, the village head must also consider the long-established customary norms and values that serve as guidelines for the community (Butarbutar et al., 2020).

This condition will create a close relationship between formal leadership and traditional leadership so that the leadership style of the village head is often influenced by the local cultural values adopted by the community (Harianja & Sudrajat, 2021).

The leadership of a village head in the Toba Batak community extends beyond formal administration, but also through social and cultural legitimacy derived from custom. Custom in Toba Batak society is not merely a series of traditional festivities, but rather a system of values that governs social relations, respect for others, social procedures, and mechanisms for resolving problems that arise in daily life. Custom serves as a normative order that regulates all aspects of community behavior. Therefore, Batak people who act and behave inconsistently with custom are referred to as *na so maradat* (people without custom), and there will be social sanctions against those who violate custom. Violations of custom can take the form of forbidden marriages, for example, marriage within the same clan, theft, defamation, and other things believed to be inviolable social norms (cf. Bruner 1961: 510).

The leadership of the Village Head in Huta Toruan 1 cannot be understood solely through a governmental administrative approach. Rather, it is evident that his leadership practices are strongly influenced by the Toba Batak traditional values still practiced in community life. These traditional values not only guide social relations but also shape the village head's decision-making, conflict resolution, communication, and village development. The Village Head explicitly stated that in carrying out his duties, he remains guided by the principle of mutual respect, especially for elders and traditional figures who hold important positions in the community. He stated that despite his formal authority as village head, traditional values dictate that respect for elders and community figures should be prioritized (Al Suwaidi et al., 2025).

This respect for parental guidance is in line with the articulation of customs in the form of *proverbs*, a piece of advice in the form of a proverb that is arranged in a concise, clear, and meaningful way. One of the texts *of the proverb* that is understood denotatively reads: "*Ompu Raja Ijolo martungkot Siala Gundi, Pinungka ni Ompunta si jolo tubu, Si Ihuthonon ni Na Parpudi*". This expression contains the mandate that all instructions and traditions that have been outlined by the ancestors must be carried out and continued by the next generation (cf. TM Sihombing in Jambar Hata, Dongan tu Ulaon Adat. 1989: 8).

In the Toba Batak community, the customary system known as the Dalihan Na Tolu concept serves as a primary foundation for social life. Dalihan Na Tolu is a social institution that integrates various clans (*marga*) into a broader kinship network. This inter-clan relationship structure was formed as a logical consequence of exogamous marriages (marriages between clans) practiced by its members. Dalihan Na Tolu consists of three elements of kinship: *Hula-Hula*, *Dongan Tubu*, and *Boru*. These three elements create a balance in social relations that emphasize respect, solidarity, and shared responsibility. They also form clan organizations (*punguan marga*) whose activities revolve around daily social life, including traditional ceremonies related to the cycle of life. This is the case with the Lumbantobing clan, descendants of Ompung Sumurung in Huta Dame II village, whose organization is called Pomparan Ompung Sumurung (POS).

The influence of customary values on the leadership style of the Village Head in Huta Toruan 1 is evident in the decision-making process. The Village Head explained that every meeting and decision-making process always involves customary leaders and customary institutions within the village. There is even a customary institution officially incorporated into the village government structure, the Dalihan Na Tolu Customary Institution (LADN). The presence of this institution demonstrates that the customary system is not only a cultural symbol but also an integral part of village governance.

In addition to influencing the decision-making process, customary values can also influence the communication patterns used by village heads. Village heads not only communicate with the community through a formal forum at the village office, but also engage in daily social interactions such as traditional festivals, community meetings (at *the palm wine stall*), and other social activities. This approach demonstrates that communication within customary leadership prioritizes social closeness over bureaucratic relationships. Communities often express complaints or aspirations when meeting at traditional festivals or community gathering places. This situation demonstrates that customary communication spaces still play an important role in the lives of the Huta Toruan 1 community. In daily life, customs are manifested in many forms or practices: patterns of community life, from daily social interactions, house construction, marriage ceremonies, to funeral ceremonies, are all maintained, implemented, and regulated according to customary provisions (Schreiner, 1994:20).

The influence of customary values is also evident in the mechanisms used to resolve conflicts. The village head explained that any issues arising in the local community can be resolved through customary mediation before the matter is brought to formal legal proceedings. In various cases of violations or community disputes, the village government will first hold meetings with respected customary leaders and elders to seek a peaceful solution. This approach clearly demonstrates that customary law remains an effective social control mechanism within the community.

The village head demonstrated that in some situations, the community will respect traditional leaders more than the village government. When the village government wants to implement a policy or resolve a problem, the first step is to approach the elders in each hamlet (Cheah & Ooi, 2024). These leaders naturally wield strong influence because they are considered successful socially, economically, educationally, and in family life. Therefore, the community is more likely to accept a policy if it has the prior support of these traditional leaders. This situation certainly demonstrates a collaborative leadership style. The village head not only acts as the sole source of power but is also able to share roles with traditional leaders and the community (Erawadi & Setiadi, 2024).

Traditional values also influence the village head's approach to village development. Disagreements often arise between the community and the village government regarding development priorities. Communities tend to prefer development within their respective areas, while the village government must adhere to all regulations and development plans stipulated in the RPJMDes and RKPDDes. In this context, the village head does not simply enforce government decisions but also chooses to conduct

deliberations and provide the community with an understanding of the applicable regulations (Welch & Hodge, 2018). The principle of deliberation used by the village head reflects Batak traditional values, which uphold consensus. Deliberation in Batak culture is not only a means for decision-making but also a mechanism for maintaining social harmony. Therefore, the deliberation process is often considered more important than the outcome of the decision itself because it allows the community to feel valued and involved.

Supporting and Inhibiting Factors in the Implementation of Traditional Values in Leadership

Leadership always lies at the intersection of administrative power and cultural legitimacy derived from tradition. The leadership practices of the village head of Huta Toruan 1 are always carried out through negotiations between village regulations and the customary values that still exist in the community's social structure. In the Huta Toruan 1 village community, the legitimacy of a village head is not only determined by victory in the village head election, but also by his ability to implement customary values considered important by the community. Formally, the village head obtains his authority from the state, but socially, a village head must also obtain recognition from customary leaders and kinship groups that have strong influence in community life. This condition is clearly evident in that in conveying policies to the community, the village government often approaches the older figures first because they have greater influence over the community than the village government apparatus (Siregar, 2022).

In reality, the Toba Batak people's attitudes toward their customs are quite varied. Over time, particularly following the spread of Christianity and Western modernization, many traditions within the customary order have begun to lose their dominance. Some groups practice customs by aligning them with Christian theology, others eliminate their mystical elements, and still others remain uncertain about the proper procedures for their implementation. This dynamic is also evident in their view of the existence of customs. Some consider customs to be flexible and constantly evolving, while others insist that customary rules remain constant and reject any form of change (Virgana & Suradika, 2022).

These findings indicate that the primary supporting factor in the application of customary values in leadership is the continued strong social authority of customary leaders within the community structure. In Toba Batak society, someone who is considered economically successful, has successful descendants, and demonstrates good social behavior will gain status. This status is not achieved formally, but through long-term social recognition.

Koentjaraningrat (1995) stated that the social stratification of the Batak people in everyday life can be divided into four principles, namely: 1) Differences in age levels. Namely, the social stratification system of the Toba Batak people based on differences in age levels can be seen in the customary system. In traditional celebrations, older people who are older will speak more or are called customary kings.

2) Differences in rank and position are a social stratification system based on differences in rank and position. This can also be seen in differences in wealth and expertise, such as among descendants of kings, shamans, musicians (pargonsi), and also craftsmen such as blacksmiths, weavers, carvers, and others. 3) Differences in authentic character are a social stratification system based on differences in character and authenticity, which can be seen in positions and leadership. In this system, hereditary traits apply, for example, in the Muara area, which is the origin of the Simatupang clan. Therefore, descendants of the Simatupang clan automatically have more rights to leadership positions in the area, such as Village Head or those outside of government positions. The same is true for customary rights in land ownership. And 4) Marital status is a social stratification system based on marital status, which can be seen in everyday life, namely among Batak people who are married. They already have the authority to participate in traditional events or speak within their family circle. And usually Batak people who are married will maintain their authority in tradition and in everyday life. Therefore, marriage is very important in the Toba Batak community (Harahap, 2016).

Besides the presence of traditional leaders, another supporting factor is the strong culture of deliberation rooted in the Dalihan Na Tolu system. Every important policy is discussed jointly with traditional leaders and the community before a decision is made. This demonstrates that decision-making is not done unilaterally but through a process of mutual agreement. This culture of deliberation strengthens the legitimacy of village government policies because the community must be involved. Therefore, the village head does not position himself as a sole actor but also as a facilitator bridging social interests.

Another supporting factor is the existence of traditional institutions integrated into the village government structure. LADN (Dalihan Na Tolu Traditional Institution) serves to provide input in every village meeting and decision-making process. The presence of this traditional institution demonstrates that custom is not merely a separate institution from the government but also an integral part of the village governance mechanism. The existence of traditional institutions allows for more effective and efficient communication between the village government and the community. Every policy is discussed in advance with traditional leaders, thus minimizing the potential for conflict.

However, the implementation of customary values in village leadership also faces obstacles. Many customary elements are no longer practiced as dominantly as they are considered contradictory or inconsistent with Christian values. In the village areas, the changing attitudes of the Toba Batak people towards their ancestral customs are clearly visible in their daily lives. For the people of Hutatoruan I Village, traditional ceremonies serve a vital role in maintaining kinship ties and the value of mutual cooperation. However, modernization has made some old norms no longer fully applicable. Traditions of agricultural cooperation, such as marsiadap ari, are being abandoned as the community shifts to modern technology and adopts a capital-based economic system. The most prominent obstacle is a transformation in the understanding of customary customs among the younger generation. The Village Head of Huta Toruan 1 expressed

concern that the younger generation today tends to understand customary customs only as part of parties, weddings, or funerals, with the true meaning of customary customs increasingly being forgotten (Pasaribu, 2020).

The statement above indicates a process of diminishing the meaning of custom. Custom, which previously served as a customary system governing all aspects of life, has now been reduced to a limited function within cultural rituals. Meanwhile, custom has divine origins and is a set of norms passed down from ancestors, which are repeated or regularly revisited, then become a habit or commonplace (Schreiner, 1994). In the context of spiritual relationships with ancestors, for the Batak people, custom emphasizes its role as a religious system. Through these customary institutions, metaphysical bonds are forged that connect the life paths and destinies of individuals, their ancestors, and their descendants in a continuous manner (Ibid, 1994). The younger generation receives more information from the rapidly developing digital media than from traditional institutions. As a result, the process of inheriting traditional values, which previously took place through direct interaction with parents and traditional leaders, is diminishing. If this condition continues, the cultural legitimacy that has long served as the foundation of local leadership will potentially erode.

Another obvious obstacle is the public's lack of understanding of government mechanisms. For example, in the case of social assistance, people often assume that the village head has full authority to determine who receives aid. When aid is not received, people tend to blame the village head, even though the decision actually came from a higher level.

These various obstacles require village heads to possess strong mediation skills. They must be able to explain government regulations to the community while upholding the traditional values that define the Toba Batak people. Thus, the leadership style that develops is not authoritarian but rather collaborative, combining formal and customary legitimacy (Hutajulu, 2021).

4. CONCLUSION

Based on the results of the research and discussion conducted, it can be concluded that:

- a. Toba Batak customary values have a significant influence on the leadership style of the Village Head in Huta Toruan 1. The leadership exercised is not only based on formal administrative authority granted by the state, but is also strongly influenced by social and cultural legitimacy that is sourced from local customary values that are still alive and preserved. Customary values not only serve as guidelines in social relations in the community, but also shape the village head in making decisions, resolving conflicts, building communication and implementing village development.
- b. The main supporting factor in the application of customary values in leadership is the continued strong social authority of customary leaders within the community structure. In addition to the existence of customary leaders, another supporting factor is the continued strength of the deliberation culture that has been rooted in the Dalihan Na Tolu system. Every important policy is discussed together with customary

leaders and the community that has not yet been decided. The Dalihan Na Tolu system as the main foundation in the social life of the Toba Batak community has been proven to contribute to shaping the decision-making patterns of village heads that are collaborative and deliberative. Every village policy always involves customary leaders and the Dalihan Na Tolu Customary Institution (LADN) which has officially been included in the village government structure.

- c. The most prominent obstacle is a transformation in the understanding of customs among the younger generation. The village head of Huta Toruan 1 expressed concern that the current generation tends to understand customs only as part of parties, weddings, or funerals, with the true meaning of customs increasingly being forgotten. Another obvious obstacle is the community's lack of understanding of government mechanisms. For example, in the case of social assistance, the community often assumes the village head has full authority to determine who receives assistance.

Suggestion

The following are the suggestions that the author can provide regarding this research:

- a. The Huta Toruan 1 village government needs to strengthen the role of the Dalihan Na Tolu Traditional Institution (LADN) in village governance processes. The integration of traditional institutions into the formal government structure should not be merely symbolic but should also be given space in the village's strategic policy-making process, thus creating synergy between formal governance and local wisdom that can be maintained.
- b. For traditional leaders and community leaders, active efforts are needed to revitalize the transmission of traditional values to the younger generation. This can be done through community-based education programs, regular meetings of indigenous youth, and involvement of young people in traditional activities so that their understanding of tradition extends beyond ritual ceremonies.
- c. For further researchers, this research can be further developed with a more comparative method between villages and Toba Batak communities in different regions, to obtain a more comprehensive picture of the variations in the influence of traditional values on leadership styles.
- d. For local governments, it is crucial to formulate policies to protect and recognize the role of customary institutions in village governance, in accordance with regional autonomy and recognition of local cultural diversity. Adequate regulatory support will help maintain the continuity of customary law, thus creating more effective social control mechanisms amidst the tide of modernization.
- e. For the Huta Toruan 1 Village community, collective awareness is needed to preserve traditional values as a source of community identity and social power. Active community participation in various traditional deliberation forums and mutual cooperation activities must be continuously encouraged to ensure that traditions remain alive, not only in rituals but also in daily practice.

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