

Blater's power in local politics, village head election in Madura

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ABSTRACT

The involvement of elite groups or certain groups in winning political contests is often carried out by candidates for political office. This also happens in local political contestations, village head elections. This research was conducted to reveal the role and behavior of blater in village elections in Sumenep, Madura, East Java. This research uses a descriptive qualitative model. The data collection technique was carried out using in-depth interviews with various informants involved in the election, such as blater, village head candidates and voters. Apart from that, document searches were also carried out regarding village election activities and after the election of the village head. To obtain accurate data, the research cross-checked the data collected, between the data obtained through in-depth interviews, and the documents traced and obtained by the researcher. From the research conducted, blater has an important role in the election of village heads. This is caused by several factors. Blater has influence, blater also has a strategy for carrying out his role, blater has certain preferences when the village head election takes place, and blater's role has an impact on the village head election process. Apart from that, the blater has a network that shapes the winning process.

Keywords:

blater; madurese politics; village head election; local politics

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INTRODUCTION

Madurese society has long been known as a society that adheres to religion (Fatoni, 2020). However, at the same time, Madura is also known as an area where physical violence often occurs (Raditya, 2022). Not only physical violence such as abuse, but even murder. In the past, physical violence and murder in Madura was triggered by issues of women's honor and the struggle for water for agriculture (Afif, 2018). If seen clearly, initially there were two

things that triggered acts of violence in Madura. *First*, the issue of self-esteem. This problem is related to the presence of women, wives or fiancés who are taken by other people. This often results in a violent reaction from the victim towards the perpetrator, or if the perpetrator resists, then there is retaliation in carrying out violence which often leads to murder (Budimansyah, 2018). *Second*, economic issues. This economic problem is related to the struggle for water resources, which are limited in quantity, used to irrigate rice fields or tobacco plants. The same thing also happens in the struggle for agricultural land and salt land (Fajriani, 2020).

The trigger for physical violence and murder then increased further, namely, allegations of black magic. There were several victims who experienced physical violence and murder, because they were accused of witchcraft. This type of murder case is usually rarely revealed by security forces, because the people around the crime scene tend to be closed to the police. The police had difficulty collecting evidence and testimony in the field to reveal the perpetrators. However, in recent times, the physical violence and murders that have occurred in Madura have involved local political activities, namely the election of village heads (Muyassaroh & Dzulkarnain, 2022).

The election of village heads does have its own vulnerability to conflict and acts of violence, even murder. The strong friction between head candidates and their supporters causes conflict and violence to easily occur. To provide a sense of security for the prospective village head, and his supporters, an approach and collaboration was carried out with a group that has been considered to be able to guarantee security in the village, namely the blater group (Pradina et al., 2023). In the village election process, it turned out that the blater was not only given the task of ensuring the security of the candidate and his supporters, but went further than that. One of them is by inviting blater to take part in being part of the winnings. This research was conducted to reveal the role and behavior of blater in village elections in Sumenep, Madura, East Java.

Blater in Madura has been around since the Dutch colonial period. There are two main characteristics of blater. *First*, have martial arts skills, courage, as well as communication and influence networks. *Second*, being involved in criminal acts and violence, either directly or indirectly. With these two abilities, blater has become an elite group in local communities in Madura, especially in rural areas (Kosim, 2012). The more often the blater is said to be able to secure a village, the stronger the blater's influence. Finally, blater is not only used to secure village security conditions from criminal acts, but is also used in local political contestations. Village head candidates use blater to protect themselves when participating in village head election contests. After that, the role of the blater then developed into a group that also became a vote gatherer for village head candidates (Asmawati et al., 2020).

Blater is indirectly a political product of the Madurese community which has a strong role in local political contestation. The politics of a society can be determined by the political culture formed by a handful of political actors, then accepted and recognized by the wider society. This political culture then has a role in binding and shaping the orientation of political behavior in society in general (Asmawati et al., 2021). In several areas in Madura, like in Sampang and Bangkalan, blater is considered different from "bajing", the name of a group that also carries out security activities in villages. However, in general, blater and squirrel are interpreted as one unit. The mention of both depends on the situation and context, which can be different or the same (Gibson & Woolcock, 2008).

The election of village heads has a long history in the Indonesian government and society. Village head elections have existed since the Dutch colonial government. Just as blaters have been around since that time. After Indonesia became independent from colonialism, village head elections continued and continue to this day. The term of office of a

village head has changed from eight years to five years, then changed to six years, and finally changed to nine years, and is limited to only two terms. The criteria for selecting village heads are also manifested in various regulations, starting from laws, government regulations and ministerial regulations. In fact, specifically in Madura, each regional government makes regional regulations that regulate the implementation of village head elections, including the existence of Regent Regulations.

For the Madurese people, village head elections are not only limited to a struggle for power, but go further than that. The election of village heads is often seen as a struggle for influence, status, a symbol of honor and self-esteem. This causes village head candidates to be willing to spend whatever costs necessary to participate and win the village head election contest. There is one village head candidate who is willing to spend up to IDR 2 billion. This amount is more expensive than the cost of nominating legislative members (Baihaki, 2023). When compared with the village head's income for six years, it is not sufficient to cover the costs incurred.

METHOD

This research method is descriptive qualitative, namely describing clearly and clearly the role and behavior of blater in the election of village heads in local political contestations in Sumenep Regency, Madura, East Java. Data collection techniques were carried out using in-depth interviews. Interviews were conducted with various informants who were directly involved in local political contestations, village head elections in Sumenep Regency. The informants interviewed ranged from blater, elected village heads, village head candidates, and voters. Determining the number of informants interviewed is based on the information submitted by the informants. Researchers limited the number of informants interviewed to 11, because the information conveyed was relatively similar and had many similarities. This means that this can be called information saturation. This was conveyed by Miles et al. (2014), that qualitative data is considered sufficient when it reaches the saturation point.

Table 1. Interviewed Informants

Num	Initial	Gender	Attribution	Address
1	A-R	Male	Village head candidate	Rubaru District
2	S-Z	Male	Blater	Rubaru District
3	A-P	Male	Voter	Rubaru District
4	H-S	Male	Voter	Rubaru District
5	A-U	Male	Village head candidate	Lenteng District
6	N-W	Male	Blater	Lenteng District
7	A-H	Male	Voter	Lenteng District
8	K-R	Male	Blater	Lenteng District
9	H-A	Female	Head of Village	Batang-Batang District
10	H-N	Male	Blater	Batang-Batang District
11	A-R	Male	Voter	Batang-Batang District

Triangulation and cross-checking were carried out on data sources, namely the informants. The research location was not only carried out in one village, but in three villages from three sub-districts in the Sumenep Regency area which had completed the election of village heads. Apart from conducting interviews, data was collected through documents owned by the informants. The document is in the form of a photo that shows the truth of the data described by the informant. For example, this photo shows the presence and whereabouts of Blater during the village head election process. Apart from that, the photo also shows the relationship and interaction of the village head candidate with the blater, and the interaction of the blater with prospective voters in the village head election. This process also shows the process of triangulation of data from the research carried out, between data

collected through in-depth interviews, and data in the form of photo documents owned by the informants interviewed.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The role of local political elites in Madura can be analyzed using the theory of elite power proposed by Charles Wright Mills. According to Mills, political elites have significant control over public decisions in a political process. Apart from that, the political elite also has control over government policies, even down to the process of forming laws and regulations (Barrow, 2007). Apart from that, they also have control over the bureaucracy and government institutions (Agger, 1957). The role of the political elite is also considered to have an important influence and position in the social order. Political elites do not have to be formally, they can also be informal political elites (Mawardi, 2019). Local political elites can also be viewed as social elites who are small groups in society, but have the power to control and influence the public at large. This was stated by Gaetano Mosca. According to Mosca, a small elite group of society emerged as a result of the individual's abilities and expertise in various fields, thus becoming an elite class in society (Femia, 1993).

The role of local political elites in local political contestation, village head elections in Madura is formed in several forms. *First*, the ability to manage and control public opinion. The opinions formed are usually related to the ability and suitability to lead village head candidates who have been supported by the black political elite. At this stage the blater did not hesitate to approach the local economic elite, namely the bettors. Bettors are influenced to place bets on supported candidates. The bettors then carry out vote buying operations on potential voters, to increase the votes of the village head candidates they are betting on. *Second*, the ability to create a political atmosphere that requires a sense of security from the blater group. This is usually a dissertation with some kind of psychological intimidation to potential voters. If the candidate for village head who is supported by Blater loses, then the village will not be protected from criminal acts, especially theft of livestock belonging to residents. On the other hand, if the supported village is elected, the village will be safe from criminal acts.

This actually has relevance to the strategic elite theory put forward by Suzanne Keller. According to Keller, groups of individuals in certain areas have the power to influence mass choices and decisions because these groups have political influence. Apart from that, the group has the ability to manage certain strategies. The political preferences of the group also determine the role. Furthermore, what this elite group does has an impact on the political decisions of society in general (Keller, 2017).

In the elections in Sumenep Regency, Madura Blater, the role and political influence of the elite Blater group was very visible. This was confirmed by one of the blaters, N-W, one of the blaters in Lenteng District, Sumenep Regency, Madura. *"What is clear is that the candidate I support must win. Also maintaining security and monitoring all behavior of the opposing party, and also ensuring that the candidate I support is on a safe path."* (N-W interview at home, June 21, 2023).

This was acknowledged by another H-N blater, in Batang-Batang District, Sumenep Regency, Madura. *"We can also act as bodyguards if needed. We also play a role in winning who we support, but we also have to be able to secure who we support from before the election until the end of the term of office. The aim is to maintain village security from the village head's enemies."* (H-N interview at home, June 21, 2023).

Apart from having a role and influence, the blater group has the ability to manage strategies to win the candidate for village head they support. There are several strategies used by blater to win the village head candidate they support. Blater assigned people he

knew to read the situation and conditions in each hamlet. This was done to read the direction of community support in each hamlet. Then Blater carries out the winning process by influencing voters who do not support their candidate, either by persuasive means or by repressive means. It doesn't stop there, Blater tries to pay opposing supporters to switch support. The final step is to pay people to secure supporting votes at the polls.

This was explained by H-A, one of the village heads in Batang-Batang District, Sumenep Regency, Madura, who used the power of blater to win the contest. *"Usually, they come to people's homes to persuade people, but they also have to cover it to increase the chances of getting support. If there are still people who are nagging, they usually use threats."* (H-A Interview, at home, July 09, 2023).

A-R, a resident of Batang-Batang District, admitted that in the area there had been three generations of village heads who always won by using blater. *"The main goal of those involved is money and motivation to show how much influence they have in society. For three generations of village heads in this village, all of them have made blater one of their right-hand men."* (A-R interview at home, July 09, 2023).

The political support of local political elites in Madura is driven by economic interests. The average blater does not have a permanent job, apart from taking care of matters related to security and supporting local political contestations. This was explained by S-Z, one of the blaters in Rubaru District, Sumenep Regency, Madura. *"What my group and I choose depends on ethics and communication and the extent to which the candidate who wants to use my services pays me and my group. But I also don't forget that I pay attention to the image of the people who want to use my services in society. If a person is outgoing and has a good image, I usually don't hesitate to support that person. But it goes back to the beginning, that payment is the most important thing."* (S-Z Interview, at home, June 21, 2023).

What Blater does in local political contestation in village head elections has an impact on people's choices. This is due to the totality carried out by the blater when supporting the village head candidate. According to A-U, candidate for village head in Lenteng District, Sumenep Regency, Madura. According to him, the role of blater has had a big impact on village political flows, even since village head elections have not yet begun, they have had a significant influence, including building political issues, gaining support in various ways, and even sabotaging certain parties to carry out their goals. *"The most felt impact in the village elections was that they were able to obtain the data and support needed to win the candidate they supported."* (A-U Interview, in his office, June 23, 2023).

A-R, candidate for village head in Rubaru District, Sumenep Regency, Madura, conveyed the same thing. *"Blater is able to give victory in an unexpected way to whoever he supports. But it is also capable of causing worrying anxiety. The point is that if you collaborate with them, there must be an agreement that benefits them even though it goes against the existing rules solely for the sake of winning."* (A-R interview at home, June 21, 2023).

Another behavior of local political elites that is not included in Keller's theoretical analysis is networking behavior. This networked behavior exists in actor network theory, as proposed by Michel Callon. According to Callon, actor network theory combines two things that seem different, namely between actors and networks. Actor network theory sees both actors and networks as one part of social life. Even as in economic life, actor networks form decomposition, framing operations, carry out internalization processes and also involve externalization processes (Callon, 1999).

In carrying out their role, blaters do not work alone, they work in groups and in the same network, namely fellow blaters. Even so, blater does not have a formal organization, there is no organizational structure at any level, neither at the district level, nor at the sub-district level, nor at the village level. Blaters can form informal networks at various levels. In

carrying out his role in village head elections, blater usually invites not only fellow blater in one village, but also invites blater from other villages to get involved in winning the candidate supported by the blater in the village when the village head election is taking place. The network is then completed when the village head election contestation is complete, and the supported village head has won the local political contestation.

This was conveyed by H-N, one of the blaters in Batang-Batang District, Sumenep Regency, Madura. *"To seek votes, you have to join a network of groups, and also communicate with blaters from outside the village so that they don't interfere and take sides with opposing candidates. More or less threatening to the people who are difficult to work with in my area."* (H-N Interview at his home, July 10, 2023).

Through their networks, blater acts as a political propagandist, holding information and non-formal structural power at the village level (Handoko et al., 2020). This is possible, because during the village head election contestation, the blater holds all the data regarding the winner of the village head candidate. During the village head election, the blater can be said to have a central role, a kind of main assistant to the village head candidate to win in the local level political contest (Rizal, 2018). At that time, blater also had a role as a field propagandist or what could also be called a door-to-door vote peddler. This is possible because the blater has the freedom to move freely with the influence they have, there will be no other groups in the village who dare to prevent the blater from doing this, except for other blater groups. And indeed, fellow Blater groups usually have a spirit of mutual respect and respect for each other. If there is one group of blaters playing in one village first, then the other blater groups will not come forward and withdraw. Blater became the local political elite in Madura who had power over village security and politics.

CONCLUSION

The role of blater politics in the local political contestation of village head elections in Sumenep Regency is quite decisive. This is because the blaters are a local political elite group that has political influence. This political influence is then strengthened by the resources provided by the village head candidate, in the form of money which is used by the blater to influence voters to choose a head candidate who is supported by the blater. The blater's behavior is driven by the motivation to obtain material benefits from the prospective village head, because the blater's economic conditions are not very good. Apart from that, it is intended to demonstrate abilities in front of the community. The political role of the blater is getting stronger with the network model that occurs between them.

As a practical suggestion, village head elections need to have rules, either in the form of Government Regulations or Minister of Home Affairs Regulations that regulate the contestation process in the field without using intimidating and violent methods as well as the use of money politics. It is hoped that this can reduce the negative impacts of intimidating political practices and money politics carried out by village head candidates, including through blackmail to voters.

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