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ARTICLE

Administrative Identity Transformation and Hybrid Governance

Negotiating Bureaucratic and Indigenous Authority in Bungo Regency, Indonesia

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Abstract: These days, local governments keep running into friction between official bureaucracy and the deep-rooted customs of their communities. In Bungo Regency, Indonesia, this tension really came to the surface after Local Regulation No. 9 of 2007 swapped out the term "Village Head" for the traditional title "Rio." This study examines how that change has shaken up how local leaders see themselves and how they operate. I took a close look at Bungo through interviews with 25 key people, combed through legal documents, and even hung out (virtually) in the "Pesan Bungo" WhatsApp group to see how things play out day to day. The big questions: How do these local leaders juggle their official duties and their traditional roles? What does this new title actually change on the ground? And what should policymakers take away from all this? Here's what I found. The Rio isn't just picking a side—they're constantly switching hats, sometimes acting by the book, leaning into tradition, and often working behind the scenes through informal networks. They're like fixers, piecing together Solutions from whatever's at hand. On one hand, using the Rio title boosts their credibility with both the government and the local community. It gives them more room to maneuver and negotiate what leadership means. But there's a flip side: it can also concentrate power in a few hands and turn tradition into just another tool for influence. Bottom line? Changing administrative titles isn't just a surface-level move. It turns local government into a battleground for power and meaning. If public value and inclusivity matter, then governance needs to stay flexible and responsive—ready to adapt as these tensions play out.

Keywords: Hybrid Governance; Administrative Identity; Rio; Bungo Regency; Institutional Bricolage; Symbolic Transformation; Role Conflict.

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1. Introduction

Modern governance keeps running into these stubborn gaps between official rules and the messier realities on the ground—Social, ecological, cultural, and technological. Young (2002) describes this phenomenon as an "institutional mismatch," which becomes particularly evident at the community level. Here's where inflexible administrative frameworks attempt to integrate with well-established customs, unofficial operational methods, and longstanding power dynamics. In places with decentralized governance, this conflict not only generates tension, but frequently leads to the formation of blended systems wherein governmental authority and native administrative practices converge, cooperate, or diverge.

To make sense of all this, scholars turn to concepts such as institutional bricolage (Gebara, 2019; Glaeser, 2012) and hybrid governance (Risse et al., 2018). These approaches spotlight how local actors aren't just following orders. They actively mix and match formal rules with informal norms, piecing together new Solutions as they deal with institutional complexity. Local leaders interpret, bend, and translate these clashing logics every day. And then there's symbolic politics (Edelman, 1967) changes in names, rituals, or official symbols can quietly shift who holds power or legitimacy, even if the formal structure looks the same on paper.

There's a track record of reforms falling flat when they try to impose top-down, one-size-fits-all fixes. Looking at global resource governance—standardized models usually don't fit the local context, and Keys et al. (2017) contend that the key to success lies in how well institutions adapt to the local environment. Southeast Asia offers more evidence: formal participation channels often serve local leaders, while the majority of population depends on informal connections influenced by neo-patrimonial political practices (Pane, 2019). According to Basuki (2018) point out that rapid regulatory and technological advancements in Indonesia is creating significant challenges for local administrations, compelling them to develop more adaptable and context-are governance strategies.

Even with all this research, two blind spots remain. First, most hybrid governance studies zoom out to the big picture—macroeconomic design or broad judgments about *adat* (customary law) revival—and don't really dig into how people on the ground actually navigate these overlapping authorities in daily life. Second, when it comes to symbolic change, such as granting indigenous titles official status in government, scholars usually chalk it up to either cultural recognition or empty symbolism. They rarely get into the messy reality where these changes can both empower communities and help elites tighten their grip on power at the same time.

Indonesia's laws make room for these hybrid setups. Law No. 23 of 2014 on Regional Government and Law No. 6 of 2014 on Villages both recognize local autonomy and origin rights, which provide legal backing for integrating customary institutions into the state's administrative system. Still, the push and pull between the need for national regulatory consistency and the reality of local cultural diversity continues to create headaches for village and hamlet governance.

In the Bungo Regency of Jambi Province. The designation "Village Head" was formally changed to the traditional title "Rio" by Local Regulation No. 9 of 2007, which also re-established the hamlet as the primary unit of government. The idea was to reinforce cultural identity and boost local legitimacy. But in practice, this symbolic and administrative shift has brought real conflicts. The majority of Rios are struggling to meet bureaucratic requirements, such as stringent national reporting standards, and to fulfill their traditional duty of resolving social and cultural conflicts.

Digital ethnography from the "Pesan Bungo" WhatsApp group reveals how these tensions manifest in public discussions regarding policy contradictions, legitimacy, and the Rio's ambiguous status, which is torn between state and tradition.

This study digs into these issues by looking at how symbolic shifts in administrative identity actually work on the ground—and how local leaders deal with the fallout. It adds to the conversation in three main ways. First, it offers a detailed, real-world look at institutional bricolage, showing exactly how leaders juggle their double roles. Second, it exposes the paradox at the heart of symbolic change: bringing back indigenous titles can boost legitimacy, but it also sharpens power imbalances among local elites. Third, by drawing on digital ethnography, the study captures day-to-day governance conversations that are often overlooked in village research.

So, the research asks:

a. How does Rio understand and navigate their dual roles through institutional bricolage?

b. How does symbolic administrative change reshape power at the hamlet level?

c. What does all this mean for building governance frameworks that actually fit local cultures and can adapt?

By situating Bungo's experience within the broader conversation on hybrid governance and symbolic politics, this study pushes back against the idea that changing administrative identity is merely a surface-level tweak. Instead, these shifts open up real struggles over power, meaning, and authority. In the end, good governance here isn't about erasing institutional tensions—it's about learning to work with them.

2. Methods

This study used a qualitative method at how administrative identity is changing in Bungo Regency, Indonesia. Instead of crunching numbers or aiming for broad generalizations, the research dives deep into a single case: swapping the formal village head title for the traditional term, Rio. This isn't just a paperwork shuffle—it's a move full of local meaning, meant to revive and legitimize cultural authority in village governance.

To really get what's going on, the researcher pulled data from several directions. They started with semi-structured interviews, sitting down with 25 people they picked for their roles—Rios, indigenous institution members, government officials, and community leaders. These conversations dug into how people juggle official rules with local customs and how they navigate the push and pull between bureaucracy and tradition. Then they pored over important documents, including Bungo's Local Regulation No. 9 of 2007 and national laws on village governance, to see how formal rules shape the Rio's role. They didn't stop there—they also watched the "Pesan Bungo" WhatsApp group, which is where Rios and other folks hash things out in real time. This digital ethnography caught the daily flow of discussion, debate, and negotiation around what it means to be a Rio now.

For analysis, the team used thematic analysis, going over transcripts, documents, and group chats repeatedly to spot patterns and extract meaning. They kept their eyes on big themes: juggling roles, earning legitimacy, and everyday power plays between official governance and local tradition. To make sure their findings held up, they checked and double-checked across their different Sources, brought some

conclusions back to informants for feedback, and kept detailed notes on every analytical decision along the way.

This approach didn't just shape how they gathered data—it also set up how they told the story in the article. The Results and Discussion section moves step by step. First, it examines how Rios and others navigate the clash between formal rules and local customs in their daily work, laying out the ground-level realities. Next, it zooms out to see how these changes are shifting who holds power and how things get done in the village. Finally, the analysis links these concrete findings to bigger ideas about hybrid governance and symbolic politics, arguing that transforming administrative identity is really about managing ongoing tensions between the old and the new. This structure keeps the argument focused, making sure every piece of evidence builds toward the bigger theoretical and policy takeaways, not just a list of observations.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1. Negotiating Bureaucratic–Customary Role Duality: Institutional Bricolage in Practice

The dual role of the Rio in Bungo Regency isn't some fixed contradiction to wrestle with; it's a constant negotiation, always shifting with the ebb and flow of state–society relations. People on the ground don't see bureaucratic and customary duties as a strict checklist. They respond to situations as they come, bending their roles to fit what's needed, not what's written down on paper. This is classic institutional bricolage—actors patch together official rules and informal norms, just trying to keep governance running where the fit between systems isn't smooth (Gebara, 2019; Glaeser, 2012).

At the core of this process sits contextual compartmentalization. The Rio leans into their bureaucratic side when handling administrative work—paperwork, budgets, and following regulations. But when it comes to resolving disputes or guiding social life, they put on the customary leader's hat. This habit keeps daily governance steady, helping avoid open conflict, though it doesn't erase the inner tension. These actors still answer to clashing sets of expectations (Risse et al., 2018). Compartmentalization doesn't solve the conflict; it just helps manage it.

There's also the role of mediation and what some call "logic translation." The Rio steps in as a go-between, turning government regulations into Something locals actually understand and use, while also pushing customary expectations up the formal chain. This kind of intermediary work is common in places where official policies clash with local ways of doing things (Pane, 2019). But here in Bungo, it's mostly left to individuals, which piles on stress and responsibility since there's little institutional support or training.

Symbolic legitimation and informal negotiation round out these practices. Holding the title of Rio gives a leader symbolic weight—people trust them not just because of legal authority, but because of what the title means in the community. Symbols matter; they shape who gets listened to and whose decisions stick (Edelman, 1967). When tensions flare, people often turn to customary meetings or even digital chats to sort things out, echoing broader trends in how decentralized places actually govern themselves (Waheduzzaman & As-Saber, 2015).

In short, what keeps this dual role working isn't some tidy institutional fix. It's the ongoing management of tension and contradiction. The Rio acts as a kind of institutional bricoleur, making things work across clashing systems, not by erasing the differences, but by navigating them with whatever tools are in hand.

3.2. Symbolic Transformation and the Reconfiguration of Micro-level Power Relations

When we step back from the routine and consider the larger implications, the transition from Village Head to Rio involves much more than simply changing names or cultural symbols—it fundamentally alters the power dynamics within the community. This alteration is not merely representational; it is a strategic political maneuver that redistributes authority and control over resources at the village level.

On the one hand, this symbolic recognition strengthens Rio's legitimacy. Now, bureaucratic power is wrapped in familiar, culturally resonant stories. That extra legitimacy gives the Rio more leverage in dealings with higher-ups and lets them reinterpret central policies that don't fit local realities (Green, 2016).

But there's a flip side. This symbolic upgrade can also concentrate power. Those who hold both official authority and symbolic clout start to dominate decision-making, sidelining anyone without access to these Sources of legitimacy. Critics warn that symbolic inclusion often props up elite control, rather than opening things up for everyone (Kiwang et al., 2015).

There's also a risk that the title of Rio becomes a token—a tool for ticking administrative boxes without real backing for customary institutions. When that happens, recognition becomes ritual, all form and no substance (Kiwang et al., 2015). The lines between bureaucratic oversight and customary authority blur, creating confusion and making it harder for communities to hold leaders to account—a common headache in systems trying to adapt on the fly (Hong & Lee, 2018).

So, the paradox sits at the heart of symbolic transformation: it can boost local agency, but it also opens new doors for elite capture and weakens accountability. These gains and risks come tangled together, shaping how power actually moves in these communities.

3.3. Policy Implications: Toward Culturally Responsive Hybrid Governance

Drawing on both the data and the structural analysis, the study proposes three policy steps to make hybrid governance more culturally responsive.

First, let's talk about operational clarity in dual roles. We need clear, official guidelines rooted in institutional bricolage. These guidelines should acknowledge the Rio's dual position, which reduces personal guesswork and the hassle of constantly negotiating their role (Gebara, 2019). Other regions in Indonesia show that when hybrid roles get spelled out, legitimacy grows and conflicts shrink (Simanihuruk et al., 2023).

Second, indigenous institutions need real strengthening through genuine collaboration, not just surface-level reforms. It's not enough to make reforms look good on paper. We need inclusive forums that bring together village governments, *adat* institutions, women, youth, and marginalized groups. This way, power doesn't stay locked in the hands of elites, and there's more accountability among equals (Karya et al., 2024).

Third, regulations need to adapt. Right now, uniform national rules often clash with local realities. We need flexible frameworks, backed by bridging institutions, to help the state and communities actually talk to each other—while still keeping basic accountability intact (Hong & Lee, 2018; Polko et al., 2025).

Taking together, these directions show that transforming administrative identity isn't just about new symbols or appearances. It's about making public value more inclusive and real.

4. Conclusion

This study shows that administrative identity transformation in Bungo Regency isn't just about changing labels or political branding. It's a real shift in how authority, legitimacy, and power work day to day in local government. By looking at how Rio juggles both bureaucratic and customary roles, the research brings the idea of institutional bricolage down to earth—it's less theory, more about what actually happens on the ground.

The findings sharpen our understanding of hybrid governance. There's a built-in tension here: hybrid arrangements give local actors more room to maneuver, but they also open the door to power concentrating in the wrong places and accountability becoming patchy. On the symbolic politics front, the study makes it clear that administrative symbols aren't just cultural decoration. They're battlegrounds where people negotiate authority and fight over resources. For policy, this means we need governance frameworks that can adapt and respond to local culture. Instead of smothering tensions with blanket regulations, we should find ways to work with them.

So, administrative identity transformation isn't some final stage of reform. It's an ongoing process—constant negotiation, learning, and holding people to account.

4.1. Limitations and Future Research

This study isn't without its limits, and those open up plenty of directions for future work. First, since it's a qualitative case study, the findings are specific to Bungo Regency. They're not meant to be statistically generalized to other places. Second, most of the analysis comes from the perspective of Rio and other governance actors, so it might not fully capture the experiences of ordinary citizens.

Future research should examine similar reforms in other regions to determine whether the same patterns hold. Long-term studies could track how these institutional tensions play out—do they fade, get worse, or morph into something else? Mixed-methods research would also help us understand how administrative identity transformation actually impacts things like service delivery, democratic accountability, and public trust.

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