# KEBERAGAMAN, POLITIK ETNIS, DAN FORMULASI KEBIJAKAN DI LEMBAGA LEGISLATIF

# DIVERSITY, ETHNIC POLITICS, AND POLICY FORMULATION IN LEGISLATIVE INSTITUTIONS

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## Abstrak

Penelitian ini membahas bagaimana keberagaman suku bangsa atau etnis di Kota Sungai Penuh, Jambi berpengaruh terhadap lembaga legislatif dalam memainkan peran politik. Melalui pendekatan studi kasus, penelitian ini menekankan pada pola interaksi aktor-aktor legislatif dalam proses legislasi berdasarkan relasi etnisitas, serta melakukan wawancara untuk menghasilkan data deskriptif dalam mengungkapkan keberagaman suku budaya dan ekspresi politik lembaga legislatif Kota Sungai Penuh. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan adanya keberagaman suku di Sungai Penuh, seperti Suku Kerinci (79,73%), Minang (15,73%), Jawa (2,13%), Melayu (0,27%), Batak (0,27%), Tionghoa (0,13%), dan Banjar (0,07%). Selain Suku Kerinci yang merupakan mayoritas, suku lain juga terlibat dalam lembaga legislatif, seperti Suku Minang, Jawa, dan Batak. Pemilihan anggota DPRD dari etnis berbeda di Sungai Penuh didorong oleh dukungan dari kelompok yang sama sebagai pemilih dominan (pendekatan instrumental), serta peran penting mereka dalam masyarakat. Hal ini memengaruhi implementasi program prioritas DPRD yang cenderung mengakomodasi kepentingan konstituen mereka. Meskipun demikian, kombinasi etnis dominan dan minoritas memberikan variasi gagasan dan pendekatan dalam dinamika politik etnis anggota legislatif.

## *Abstract*

*This research discusses how ethnic diversity in the city of Sungai Penuh, Jambi, influences the legislative body in playing its political role. Through a case study approach, this research emphasizes the interaction patterns of legislative actors in the legislative process based on ethnic relations, and it conducts interviews to generate descriptive data to reveal the cultural diversity of ethnic groups and the political expression of the legislative institution in Sungai Penuh. The research findings indicate the presence of ethnic diversity in Sungai Penuh, including the Kerinci people (79.73%), Minang (15.73%), Javanese (2.13%), Malay (0.27%), Batak (0.27%), Chinese (0.13%), and Banjar (0.07%). In addition to the Kerinci ethnic group, which is the majority, other ethnic groups are also involved in the legislative institution, such as the Minang, Javanese, and Batak. The election of Regional House of Representatives (DPRD) members from different ethnicities in Sungai Penuh is driven by the support of the same ethnic group as the dominant voters (instrumentalist approach), as well as their significant role in the community. This affects the implementation of priority programs by DPRD, which tends to accommodate the interests of their constituents. Nevertheless, the combination of dominant and minority ethnic groups provides a variety of ideas and approaches in the dynamics of ethnic politics among legislative members.*

## INTRODUCTION

The political history of Indonesia, from the colonial era to the struggle for independence, illustrates how politics in various regions exhibit diversity and have their own unique stories. This is also true for the political dynamics in Sungai Penuh, which are inseparable from the history of Kerinci Regency. Initially, Sungai Penuh was the capital of Kerinci Regency. However, according to the Indonesian Law Number 25 of 2008, Sungai Penuh became a city as a result of the expansion of Kerinci Regency, with the official establishment dated November 8, 2008. Before becoming the Sungai Penuh City, the area was known simply as Kerinci, also referred to Kerinci ethnic. This is an ethnic group indigenous to Sumatra, inhabiting the Kerinci highlands and surrounding areas, and is one of the various ethnic groups in Indonesia (Zakaria, 1984).

As autonomous regions, the city of Sungai Penuh and Kerinci Regency share similarities in customs, law, and culture. The life of their communities is believed to have a unified cultural heritage which is

inseparable as the same dialect, language, customs, and laws (Jauhari & Putra, 2012). Therefore, it is not surprising that Kerinci people remains the majority ethnic group in Sungai Penuh and has left a significant historical mark in the struggle against colonialism, contributing greatly to Indonesian independence. Similarly, Kerinci is recognized as one of the crucial regions in Indonesia in terms of culture and language, climate, volcanoes, geographical location, and the ecosystem diversity of flora and fauna. However, it has not been extensively researched by experts (Watson, 1976).

The cultural and ethnic diversity in Sungai Penuh creates political dynamics within the community. One of the ethnic groups is Kerinci tribe (also called as Kerinci people), considered one of the oldest tribes in Indonesia and part of the Proto-Malay group, believed to have originated from the Yunnan plateau in Southern China (Hafifulhadi, 2013). This tribe is also associated with the Deutero-Malays, dating back from 2,000 to 3,000 BC, spanning from the Neolithic to the Bronze or Metal Age (Departemen Pendidikan dan Kebudayaan, 1984). In addition to this, according to data from the Central Statistics Agency of Jambi Province (2010), several ethnic groups reside in Sungai Penuh, such as Javanese, Minangkabau, Batak, Malay Jambi, Bugis, Chinese, Banjar, and any other tribes, in which each forming a unique identity within the community. Other literature also mentions various tribes inhabiting the city of Sungai Penuh, including Malay, Anak Dalam (Kubu tribe), Banjar, Orang Batin, and Malay Kerinci (Jauhari, 2012). Furthermore, the relationship between Kerinci community living in Sungai Penuh and their interactions with people from different tribes is inevitable in a democratic political system, where every citizen has political rights wherever they reside.

The general election in Sungai Penuh has been a platform for Kerinci ethnic to express their political aspirations, opening important discussions about community-based, ethnic, and social identity politics. In this mosaic of diversity, Sungai Penuh has also been an intriguing social laboratory, where Kerinci ethnic, as the dominant ethnic groups and several minority ethnic groups articulate their aspirations and political expressions in different ways. Additionally, as revealed in a study by Ahmad, et al. (2023), ethnic involvement in regional politics reflects the success of local governments in maintaining political inclusivity. This understanding mirrors how local governments play a pivotal role in encouraging political engagement that embraces all ethnic groups. Nevertheless, these ever-changing political dynamics are not free from cultural challenges and norms that influence the life of the Kerinci tribal community. As explained by Sativa (2012), traditional values and cultures are an inseparable part of Kerinci community and are held firmly under ancestral heritage. Fundamentally, these cultural values not only regulate community life but also play a crucial

role in influencing local government governance (Ridho, et al., 2019). Similarly, many researchers consider media to have a construction of political reality in society (Kraus and Davis, 1976), including in Kerinci itself, where media plays a significant role in influencing public perceptions regarding the political involvement of Kerinci people (Despita & Gautama, 2022).

The interpretation of identity politics as both a source and a means in the struggle for political power is increasingly evident in everyday political practice. Researchers and scholars delving into the discourse of identity politics attempt to reinterpret the concepts in a simpler logic for easier understanding, distinguishing between 'political identity' and 'politics of identity'. According to Castells et al. (2006), identity politics involves an individual's participation in social life, which is more determined by their cultural and psychological makeup. In social reality, identity politics is unavoidable, especially in societies with diverse cultures, ethnicities, religions, and so forth. Posner (2007) emphasizes that political elites tend to use identity issues due to an approach towards ethnicity to gain votes, a concept known as ethnic identity politics. This has led to an approach in political studies that highlights the role of ethnic identity in shaping political dynamics, policies, and conflicts. This concept becomes increasingly relevant in the era of globalization, where migration and demographic changes often raise questions about national identity, minority rights, and multicultural policies. In essence, identity politics delves into how various identity groups, be it based on ethnicity, culture, or religion, utilize their collective identity to influence political outcomes, policy decisions, and navigate the complexities of socio-political landscapes. This dynamic is especially pronounced in multicultural societies where the interplay of different identities shapes the overall political narrative and governance.

Despite all the challenges, the city of Sungai Penuh has been a stage for the political empowerment of Kerinci people. Inclusive regional policies have provided space for this ethnic group to play a more active role in decision-making, a phenomenon analyzed in a case study titled "Character Education and Voting Behavior of the Citizens of Sungai Penuh City" (Ahmad, 2016), illustrates how direct community involvement in political elections is greatly influenced by elements of primordialism and the use of money. Similarly, the influence of socio-cultural construction has resulted in the absence of political representation of women in the Kerinci Regency and Sungai Penuh City in legislative elections in 2019 (Elsi, et al, 2022). In addition to this, the complex social dynamics in Sungai Penuh, where inter-tribal relations and political collaboration create a unique political canvas that colors life in this region (Arzam, 2016; Ridho, et al, 2019). This condition illustrates how this unique political and cultural framework opens the way for more in-depth research on the political role of the Kerinci tribe in Sungai Penuh. This study will delve deeper into how Kerinci people

not only survive as an ethnic group but also plays a significant role in the local political context; and how the ethnic diversity of a society mobilized for political interest. Through in-depth analysis, the dynamics of ethnicity and politics can be portrayed in a broader scope, while also providing important insights into community-based, ethnic, and social identity politics at the local level. Therefore, the theory of identity politics becomes relevant as a conceptual foundation in analyzing political events, especially on the legislative stage as a policy-making institution in determining the direction of development in Sungai Penuh.

## METHODOLOGY

This research is qualitative, utilizing a case study approach to generate descriptive data related to the political dynamics of ethnic groups in Sungai Penuh and to observe interaction patterns by studying the people involved (Neuman, 2000). Research data were obtained from various sources, such as interviews with Kerinci community to understand their political history, as well as interviews with minority ethnic groups living in Sungai Penuh, such as the Minangkabau, Javanese, Batak, and Tionghoa ethnic groups, and legislative members as well. In addition to interviews, the researcher also conducted an analysis of secondary data, such as demographic and statistical data analysis from the Central Statistics Agency of Jambi Province, examining the reports of the 2014 and 2019 legislative elections to observe political participation and preferences, and various other literatures. Observations were also made both directly by observing political activities in Sungai Penuh and through participation in various community or ethnic events to gain a deeper understanding of the political expressions on legislative institutions.

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION
### Ethnic Diversity in Sungai Penuh

Indonesia has approximately 1,340 ethnic groups (BPS, 2010). Population movements have resulted in the mixing of various ethnic groups in different areas. This is also the case in Sungai Penuh, located in Jambi Province. As of mid-2023, Sungai Penuh has a population of nearly 100,851 people, covering a total area of 39,150 hectares, where 59.2% is the Kerinci Seblat National Park area and 40.8% is effective urban area. The majority ethnic group or community living in Sungai Penuh City is Kerinci people, also commonly referred to *"Uhang Kinci"* or *"Uhang Kincai"*.

Table 1. Ethnic Composition of the Population in Sungai Penuh in 2017

| No. | Ethnic groups | Percentage (%) |
|---|---|---|
| 1. | Banjar | 0.07 |
| 2. | Batak | 0.27 |
| 3. | Jawa | 2.13 |
| 4. | Kerinci | 79.73 |
| 5. | Melayu | 0.27 |
| 6. | Minang | 15.73 |
| 7. | Tionghoa | 0.13 |
| 8. | Lainnya | 1.67 |

*Source:* Idea Institute Indonesia (2017)

Based on the table above, the majority of the population in Sungai Penuh according to ethnic group is Kerinci people with 79.73%, followed by Minangkabau at 15.73%, and then Javanese at anearly 2.13%. This data indicates that Kerinci people is an indigenous ethnic group of Sumatra, inhabiting the Kerinci Highlands area. Kerinci Regency, Sungai Penuh City, Merangin Regency, and Muaro Bungo Regency are areas with a significant population of Kerinci people.

From some literatures, it is mentioned that Kerinci people is an original ethnic group that inhabited the island of Sumatra earlier than others. This group was later known as "Kecik Wok Gedang Wok," estimated to have lived in Kerinci since 10,000 years BC. (Whitteln, 1987). The term "Kecik Wok Gedang Wok" was used because this group did not have a specific name; they greeted each other using the term "wok." According to Depati H. Alimin (2012), "Kecik Wok Gedang Wok" literally means "Kecil Kita Besar Kita," a term used to refer to the ancient people of Kerinci. With the separation of the Malay (Polynesian) branch around 4000 BC, an ethnic division occurred in Kerinci (Kern & Sarasin, 1982). At that time, the more dominant number of Proto Malays led to the gradual disappearance of Kecik Wok Gedang Wok group through intermixing. However, an interesting study by Bennet Bronson and the team from the National Archaeological Institute and Heritage of Jakarta (1973) suggests that Kerinci Ethnic Group is older than INCA civilization (Indians in the United States).

The second major ethnic group residing in Sungai Penuh City is Minangkabau (15.73%). Minangkabau is a Malay ethnic group that lives and spreads across several regions such as West Sumatra, Riau, Jambi, and Riau Islands (Mansoer, 1970). According to Ajisman and Refisrul (2015), there are three reasons for the arrival of Minang people in Sungai Penuh: *first,* migration due to being invited by family or relatives who had already settled in Sungai Penuh; *second,* many Minang people engage in trade in Sungai Penuh, such as opening eateries and any other types of businesses; *third,* working as civil servants in Sungai Penuh. Additionally, the geographical proximity, and similarities in customs, accents, and dialects also contribute to the better relationship between the people of Minang and Sungai Penuh (Azwar, 2009). Refisrul, et al. (2015) in his book titled *"Minangkabau dan Kerinci: Hubungan Budaya dan Sistem Kekerabatan "* also states that the relationship between Kerinci and Minangkabau has been long-standing and is further strengthened by cultural similarities and common community practices. Furthermore, the tradition of migration *(merantau)* has been a culture or cultural mission that is increasingly recognized among the Minangkabau people (Pelly, 1994).

The third ethnic group residing in Sungai Penuh is Javanese, also known as *Wong Jawa*. The Javanese are the largest ethnic group spread across various regions in Indonesia. At the end of the 13th century, King Kertanegara from the Singasari Kingdom initiated a massive mission to spread Javanese influence throughout Indonesia, including an important expedition to Sumatra in 1275 (Spuler & Bagley, 1981). According to Huda et al. (2022), Javanese people came to Kerinci during the colonial era as contract laborers, then settled and reproduced. Some have never seen Java and do not wish to be called Javanese but feel more comfortable being referred to *Jawa Kerinci*. Before the separation of Sungai Penuh and Kerinci, Sungai Penuh was the capital of Kerinci Regency and a trade center as well. Therefore, many immigrants settled in Sungai Penuh intending to engage in trade.

Other ethnic groups in Sungai Penuh City also have their own unique stories and histories, contributing to the city's cultural, customary, linguistic, and religious diversity. This is epitomized in Sungai Penuh's motto, "*Sahalun Suhak Salatuh Bdei*" One such group is the Malay Tribe (0.27%). The presence of the Malay Tribe in Sungai Penuh can be attributed to several Malay kingdoms on the East Coast of Sumatra, such as the Siak Sri Indrapura Kingdom, The Sultanate of Deli, The Sultanate of Riau, The Sultanate of Jambi, and The Sultanate of Palembang. Similarly, Batak people (0.27%) has been in Kerinci since before Indonesia's independence for various reasons, including economic improvement through trade, education, civil service obligations, and family invitations. They generally come from North Tapanuli and South Tapanuli (Fathur, 2020). Furthermore, in a biography of an elite politic from Kerinci Regency, Major General H. A. Thalib, Indonesian army and ambassador to Malaysia in 1968, in which it is mentioned that one of Major General H. A. Thalib's childhood friends, Mochtar Lubis, was of Batak descent (Haris & Dasiba, 2002). For the Chinese or Tionghoa ethnicity, making up 0.13% of the population in Sungai Penuh, they are an integral community, especially in the economic and trading sectors (Wildan, 2010; Satria, 2022).

**Ethnic Diversity at the Legislative Level**

Ethnic group is a grouping of people bound by awareness and cultural identity, especially in language (Koentjaraningrat, 2007). He also explains that ethnicity can be determined based on similarities in origin, which is one of the factors that can create a bond. In other words, the term ethnicity is used to refer to a group, or a social category, whose differences are based on cultural criteria. According to Clifford Geertz (1973), ethnicity is a form of "primordialism." He considers ethnicity to be closely linked with primordial ties such as blood, language, religion, culture, and territory. He argues that these ties are fundamental and form the basis of an individual's ethnic identity within a group. Therefore, the bases that define an ethnic group are

known as a population that is biologically capable of developing and surviving, possessing the same cultural values, and being aware of a sense of togetherness in a cultural form, forming their network of communication and interaction, determining group characteristics that are recognized by other groups and can be distinguished from other population groups.

Discussions regarding ethnicity and bureaucracy have been a current topic alongside several other national issues. Similarly, the diversity of ethnic groups is reflected as well at the legislative level with several members of Regional House of Representative (DPRD) Sungai Penuh originating from different ethnic groups (outside of Kerinci people), including Minangkabau, Javanese, Batak, etc. The presence of ethnic diversity at the legislative level colors the thinking in various discussions among the members so that every decision made is the result of a multitude of views, ideas, and inputs. This condition aligns with a study conducted by Widiastuti (2013) revealing that differences arising from cultural diversity have the potential as a strength in nation-building due to the abundance of views and ideas provided. A characteristic inherent to an ethnic group is the growth of a sense of community among its members, thus generating an awareness of strong relationships. Essentially, an ethnic group has the same feelings about the ethnicity they possess, leading to the emergence of consciousness, a sense of kinship, and strong relationships among them.

This factor becomes a determinant for some legislative members in Sungai Penuh when occupying a position in DPRD. The dominant constituency in electing them usually comes from the same ethnic or tribal group, such as Minangkabau. In Sungai Penuh, people of Minang constitute the second-largest majority at approximately 15.73%, after Kerinci people. Minangkabau communities are widespread in various areas of Sungai Penuh. This ethnic similarity leads the Minang people living in Kerinci to unite in electing legislative members. Similarly, for Javanese, a strong sense of kinship and connection becomes a unified voice in legislative elections. In the theory of ethnic identity politics, Fukuyama (2018) explains that the search for recognition is one of the factors in the emergence of ethnic identity politics, where the human desire for recognition is crucial. This desire includes not just legal and political recognition but also a wish to have one's identity and dignity acknowledged by the broader society. In this context, certain ethnic groups might feel that their identity and existence are not adequately valued or recognized, prompting them to form political movements to change this condition. Additionally, the leadership qualities possessed by legislative members within their community or group also play a pivotal role in their election. Moreover, each elected legislative member generally held a social status in community organizations, such as head of a community association, or village official, and held several strategic positions in the middle of society.

**Ethnicity and Political Policy in DPRD**

In the theory of ethnicity, Abdillah (2002) divides it into three approaches to understanding how tendencies in ethnicity and bureaucracy work. These approaches are primordialism, constructivism, and instrumentalism. Among these, instrumentalism positions ethnicity as a force in social, political, and cultural realms. In competing, the instrumentalist approach leads political elites to seek mass support as a resource (Brass, 1991; Cohen, 1974). Additionally, some political elites gain power by aligning with certain ethnic communities to achieve desired goals (Banton, 1994 & Hecter 1992). The practiced instrumentalist approach has an effect on the direction of priority program implementation among some members of Sungai Penuh legislature. For instance, some programs are directed towards their ethnic group or constituents, which is also commonly known by the term 'clientelism', referring to the reciprocal relationship between the giver (politician or political party) and the receiver (voter or group of voters). In this relationship, the giver promises or provides resources or benefits, while the receiver offers political support. This situation resulted in a slight disruption of unsustainable regional development programs. Ethnic groups aim to acknowledge the existence and progress of their groups (Abdillah, 2002). The development of ethnic identity politics not only presents itself in cultural-political discourse but has also begun to lean towards efforts in recognizing and controlling political, social, and economic resources as indigenous people. However, the dominance of Kerinci people in the political dynamics at the legislative level in Sungai Penuh provided a unique color in offering a variety of ideas and thoughts that can impact on positive programs within the community.

Ethnic politics to a certain extent can normalize imbalances in the distribution of power. The stronger emotional bonds in ethnic politics open up space for nepotism and clientelism (Kocu, 2022). Injustice in the distribution of power leads to social problems in society, even inter-ethnic conflicts. The politicization of ethnic identity in the legislative process creates complex sentiments in the community that are prone to triggering broader conflicts. However, the sentiments that occurred more often were within Kerinci people community, rather than across different ethnic groups. This circumstance explained that the imbalance in power distribution was more often caused by fragmentation within Kerinci people community, rather than by minority ethnicities. In addition to this, Kerinci people are divided into several clans or hamlets, so it couldn't be understood monolithically. Therefore, clan (unilineal) interests outweigh the ethnic interests in the political process and activism.

The output of legislative policy is greatly determined by the particular interests of each ethnicity. Political activism that emphasizes such differences, as mentioned by Agnes Heller (1995), indicates the phenomenon of identity politics. Ethnic identity is massively and openly used as a political instrument. Although ethnic identity provides a space for the activation of identity politics, it is not always a key factor in the legislative process (Muhtadi, 2017). In other words, ethnic identity is only utilized in the process of competing for votes, but it is not significantly used in the legislative process. Many factors cause this situation, including party interests, intervention by capital owners, and the consequences of money politics.

In traditional societies like Kerinci and Sungai Penuh, ethnicity is a crucial variable in practical politics. The election of a legislative member often relies more on clientelistic relations, which have the consequence of creating continuous reciprocal relationships (Hicken, 2011). These consequences are implicitly accommodated in the policy-making process. Although ethnic interests in the political policies of DPRD Sungai Penuh had the potential to create regulations biased particularly against ethnic minorities, the presence of politicians from minority ethnicities could act as a balance to protect their rights. In other words, ethnic interests did not always have a negative impact, but could also be a positive force in the policy-making process by considering the needs and aspirations of different ethnic groups.

**CONCLUSION**

Apparently, cooperation and synergy between majority and minority ethnic groups create a unique dynamic for political activities in the legislative institution of Sungai Penuh. The election of DPRD members from minority ethnicities adds diversity of perspectives to the decision-making process. This study finds that the instrumentalist approach practiced by some legislators influences the direction of priority program implementation, leading ethnic groups to acknowledge the existence and progress of their communities. The use of ethnic politics is not only manifested in cultural solidarity but also utilized to control political, social, and economic resources. Although it has the potential to cause polarization and conflict, a dialogic and inclusive approach to managing ethnic diversity can unite society and strengthen democracy. The importance of dialogue, education, and rights-oriented policies is key in navigating the complexities associated with ethnic identity. Thus, differences arising from cultural and ethnic diversity have the potential as a force in nation-building.

Lastly, practically, this research implies the strengthening of principles of justice and equality in the policy-making process in representative institutions. Fair policies can undoubtedly mitigate social conflicts and other issues in society.

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