

# The Role of Traditional Opinion Leaders in Political Decision-Making: A Case Study of Coastal Communities in Eastern Indonesia

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Received: 20/12/2022	Revised: 24/05/2023	Accepted: 30/06/2023
<b>Abstract</b>	This research examines the dynamics of opinion leadership in political decision-making within the coastal community of Lembar Selatan Village, Indonesia. The study specifically investigates the characteristics of opinion leaders, their communication patterns, and their influence on community political choices. Using a qualitative descriptive approach, data were collected through in-depth interviews and participant observations involving key community leaders and residents. The findings reveal that opinion leadership is primarily concentrated in formal and informal community figures, notably a former Village Head who also served as a member of the Regional People's Representative Council (DPRD). These leaders employ interpersonal communication strategies to disseminate political information and shape public opinion regarding candidates and policies. The study demonstrates that opinion leaders serve as crucial intermediaries in political communication, functioning as both motivators and guides in the community's political decision-making process. This research contributes to understanding the role of traditional leadership structures in local political communication within coastal communities of developing regions.	
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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Geographically, coastal communities grow and develop in coastal areas, and transition areas between land and marine life. The welfare of coastal communities is highly dependent on their fishery resources, both capture fisheries at sea and those cultivated by the community (Syatori, 2014). Some facts about coastal communities are their slum conditions, economic level, low education, vulnerability to social, political, and economic modernization that afflict society, and their helplessness against capital intervention and rulers who come. Hefner, R. W. (2001). In addition to the above, the poverty of coastal communities is also caused by the problem of damage to the coastal ecosystem, which has a serious impact on the depletion of fishery resources due to coastal development and waste pollution that threatens life in the sea (Syatori, 2014).

Ordinary people who need help understanding the political game and who are passionate about politics will be in a dilemma because of the lack of political education for people in remote villages, including coastal communities. Political education is very important and very necessary to be done. Political education is not only for political purposes; he said legislative candidates need support from the community (Aryanti, 2008).



Political education is an effort to increase people's political knowledge on the influence of development implementation. Political empowerment in rural communities or coastal communities is carried out by placing the community as the focus and attention as the main actor of development, which will be carried out in several stages, namely: 1) Creating opportunities for people to develop themselves according to the conditions of their environment; 2) Strengthening the potential of resources in the community that are supported by opening public access to take advantage of available opportunities; and 3) Maximising community empowerment can be spearheaded by the existence of development cadres in villages, including on the coast (Aryanti, 2008).

In a village where the people still have ordinary thoughts, which can be said to be not fully developed like those of people living in urban areas, there are many places and purposes to ask for opinions or advice in solving many diverse life problems. Namely, by looking for and visiting an opinion leader figure in his village, the opinion leader is more listened to for his suggestions and ideas by the villagers who ask and listen.

The community often becomes the main object in every direct election of regional heads. The election of honest and fair leaders will tend to pay attention to and attach importance to the interests of their people rather than their interests so that the people's happiness can be realized. On the contrary, corrupt leaders will harm the people and make them miserable. Most Indonesians are still classified as poor; most are educated in high school (SMA) and below because they are suspected of not voting based on their political consciousness (Jaya & Silviani, 2020).

Based on the limited access to people's information and economic limitations to finance their lives, including school fees, information has not become a primary need for maintaining one's life. It is also suspected that the information received is related to various information, the person to be chosen who is disseminated by the community who has influence or has a high position in society.

These community figures are generally people who are always in the midst of society and have become part of it. Community leaders are considered to have a level of intelligence and an economic level above the average of the surrounding community. They can access information, education, and knowledge or be a place for people to ask questions and look for certain information (Jaya & Silviani, 2020). With this ability, a societal figure is often seen as an organizational leader or an "opinion leader" (Esposito et al., 2016).

The term opinion leader is a theory unfamiliar to public relations activities. This concept refers to opinion leaders or those who formally influence people. An opinion leader is an individual in an organization who is an expert in an industry, is considered to have a high level of intellect, and is trusted by society at large.

Figures who can become opinion leaders include Village Heads, Teachers, Traditional Leaders, Community Leaders, and other important statistics. Various figures from prospective leaders attract the public's attention, so they want to choose him to be a leader (Sariyono, 2017) or be seen by the community as someone with enough capacity to become an opinion leader in community life.

Opinion leaders or opinion leaders have a fairly important role in the development of society because these figures have their influence and are trusted by the community. Opinion leaders and leadership are inseparable because they have the same meaning and meaning. However, along with globalization, many people use opinion leaders to call influential societal figures.

Opinion leaders function as a source of information for the community. Lagerfeld first initiated the theory, which used a two-stage communication model. Previously, in communication literature, the word opinion leader was often used; this word has a close relationship with the condition of rural

communities. Because the level of information media in terms of equity is still low, access to the press is more possible for those with a high level of understanding and a low need for media; it is through this opinion leader that the public can know information (Ghannouchi, 2022).

An opinion leader has a very important role in the social life of the community in his village, namely as a leader who can act as an opinion leader for the community in his village. This cannot be separated from the role of Alim Ulama, Community Leaders, Traditional Leaders, and Youth Leaders in the town, so opinion leaders are very important. The role of opinion leaders can motivate the community to actively participate in receiving new ideas or new things related to the concept of political choices and village development; therefore, in Lembar Selatan Village, Lembar District, opinion leaders are needed as information to the community in Lembar Selatan Village, because in that village the community is still not exposed to mass media, especially for elderly parents.

In the practice of social communication, these opinion leaders are the parties who are often used in their role to influence the behavior and attitude of the community so that they are willing to voluntarily accept and support the goals that the communicator or opinion leader wants to achieve, (Ulla, 2019). Although opinion leaders are recognized as important figures in society, they are also ordinary people who do not necessarily know everything. Still, the advantage is that they are considered people who have a high level of humility towards the community or in groups, know the customs and what is needed by the community, and have a high social spirit that helps social changes that occur at all times. Based on the description above, this article is interested in exploring it further about this phenomenon in more depth.

## 2. METHODS

This research is a qualitative research, because the data to be obtained are in the form of words or explanations from primary data sources. This is relevant where the qualitative research method itself departs from empirical reality and is able to explore abstract meanings. In addition, in terms of specifications, this research uses a descriptive analytical approach that aims to collect information that is compiled, explained and analyzed by providing predicates to the variables studied according to actual conditions. Thus, this research is expected to provide a valid interpretation of the phenomena that occur according to what happens in the field. In this case, how is the role of opinion leaders in the political choices of coastal communities in Lembar Selatan Village, Lembar District, West Lombok Regency.

This research was conducted in Lembar Selatan Village, Lembar District, West Lombok Regency, West Nusa Tenggara. In this study, the primary data is data or information directly from informants, namely directly from Amak Misdin, Inak Sakmah and Adnan who are community leaders of Lembar Selatan Village. The secondary data is obtained from research that has been conducted previously by other parties or from related sources such as books, journals and other documents. In this study itself, secondary data was obtained from articles, journals, theses, final assignments and books related to this study.

Data collection techniques are part of research activities, in data collection techniques it does not have to be a researcher himself, but involves friends or other people as data collectors. In the research conducted, there are several data collection techniques carried out by the author, including: Interview: in-depth interviews are one of the techniques for collecting data and information in qualitative research by meeting face to face in order to obtain complete information or data regarding the research being conducted. In this study, the sources to be interviewed by the researcher were Amak Misdin, Inak

Sakmah and Pak Adnan who are community leaders in Lembar Selatan Village. Observation: observation is an activity that is carried out at all times, with the completeness of the researcher's five senses. Observation itself is an activity to understand the environment where the research is conducted directly, meaning that the researcher goes directly to the field to see the phenomena that occur in the objects of study obtained, whether the researcher becomes a direct participant or just a spectator. In this study, the observation conducted by the researcher was to go directly to the field to see how the phenomena and responses from the community and directly from key informants, namely in the village of Lembar Selatan.

In general, there are three qualitative data analysis techniques, namely data reduction, data presentation and drawing conclusions. This process continues throughout the research. Data reduction is an activity of researchers who are compiling the information obtained. In this data reduction itself, it is a process of simplifying research data through editing, grouping and summarizing data. In data reduction itself, researchers sharpen, direct, remove unnecessary and organize data from interviews conducted by researchers with respondents who are the subjects of the research obtained. Data presentation is an activity when a set of data or information has been compiled, so as to provide the probability/possibility of drawing conclusions. In this data presentation itself, the researcher presents data that has been previously reduced, then added with important data such as observation data and documentation. Drawing conclusions, in this conclusion drawing analysis technique, looks for patterns, themes, relationships, similarities, things that often arise in research, the strongest hypotheses, and so on using data that has been collected by researchers since the beginning of the research. After all the processes have been carried out, the last thing that the researcher needs to do is draw conclusions regarding the final results of the research that has been carried out, and include them in his final assignment.

### **3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

#### **Profile of Lembar Selatan Village**

The history of the formation of Lembar Selatan Village began with the desire of the community who expected to improve the quality of public services, considering the center of government of Lembar Village (Induk), which is quite far away, about 3 km from the Dusuns of Lembar, Puyahan, Padak, Cemare, Pesanggaran, Sepakat Segenter, and Batu Samba. In addition, Lembar Village currently consists of 11 Dusuns with a fairly wide area that hinders the equitable distribution of development in various sectors and the lack of facilities and infrastructure, especially transportation facilities leading to the Main Village.

On this basis, together with community leaders, religious leaders, youth leaders, and other communities from Lembar, Puyahan, Padak, Cemare, and Batu Sumban Dusuns, together carried out joint deliberations and struggles and processes that were quite long and took a long time. Together with several community figures, they collectively proposed the expansion of Lembar Selatan Village. However, many obstacles must be faced in the process. However, thanks to the cooperation and support from the community, the village head (Drs. Lalu Wiratakariadi) of Lembar Village finally approved the expansion of the village.

On March 10, 2010, a large-scale meeting of residents was held at the Lembar Village Office Hall. From the results of the meeting, the Lembar Selatan was formed complete with its apparatus and the formation of members of the Village BPD on August 18, 2010, as a follow-up to the response from the local government, based on the Decree of the Regent of West Lombok No. 815/31/BPMPD/2010.

Lembar Selatan Village is located 2 kilometers from the capital city of Lembar District and 6 kilometers from the capital city of West Lombok Regency, with the administrative boundaries of the village: The north is bordered by the Main Village (Lembar Village), Labuan Tereng Village borders the south, the west is bordered by the Lombok Strait and the north is bordered by Jembatan Kembar Village with an area of Lembar Selatan Village as follows: 789,875 Ha. Lembar Selatan Village has various religious tribes, including Islam, Hinduism, and Christianity, with the following details:

No.	Religion	Man	Woman
1	Islam	5.457 people	5.412 people
2	Hinduism	32 people	29 people
3	Christianity	15 people	11 people
Total		97. 869 People	

Lembar Selatan Village has an area of  $\pm 43335$  m<sup>2</sup>, where most of the area is a residential area with a total residential area of 150 m<sup>2</sup>, a total number of households of 3,432, and a population of 10,566 people. The boundaries of the region are as follows:

No.	Regional Boundaries	Village
1	North	Lembar Village
2	East	Jembatan Kembar Village
3	South	Labuan Tereng Village
4	West	Lombok Strait Village

Lembar Selatan consists of 11 Dusuns, namely: Cemare Dusun, East Lembar Dusun, Padak Dusun, Segenter Dusun, West Lembar Dusun, Puyahan Dusun, Ujat Ngering Dusun, Pesanggaran Dusun, Sepakat Dusun and Batu Samban Dusun, Lawang Kute Dusun with an area of 799 Ha. Meanwhile, the population of Lembar Village is 13.1794 people, with details of 6,691 men and 7,103 women, with a sex ratio of 0.942. The climate of Lembar Selatan Village like other villages in the region, has a dry and rainy environment this directly influences fishermen's activities in Lembar Selatan.

The livelihood of the people of Lembar Selatan is mostly as many as 700 people: 275 farm workers, 254 farmers, 250 breeders, 215 private workers, 50 civil servants, 10 craftsmen, and 500 people who work as fishermen. The average income obtained by the fishing community of Lembar Selatan Village is between 20-25 thousand rupiah.

No	Work	Amount
1	Merchant	700 people
2	Labor/farmers	275 people
3	Farmer	254 people
4	Breeder	250 people
5	Labor/Private Sector	215 people
6	Civil Servants	50 people
7	Craftsmen	10 people
8	Fisherman	500 people
Amount		2.250 people

In terms of customs, Lembar Selatan Village is one of the villages that adheres to the Sasak customs, which are so thick. This is one of them that can be seen from the rampant celebration of *nyongkolan* (marriage) events accompanied by the accompaniment of Gendang Belek music. In addition to this, there is also a tradition of Eid Topat, which is celebrated every seven days after Eid al-Fitr. This has been done for generations until now. Such as the arts that are still the passion of the people of Lembar Selatan Village, namely traditional Sasak arts such as Gendeng Belek and the verses of Sasak songs called Cilokak. These two types of entertainment are the favorite choices of the local community because they have their artistic value.

Meanwhile, the economic condition of the people of Lembar Selatan Village has the largest income from trading activities and the proceeds from fishing. Where the average income obtained by the fishing community of Lembar Village ranges from 20-25 thousand rupiah. The socio-economic condition of the people of Lembar Selatan Village runs in synergy with improving existing human resources. Currently, illiteracy testing is intensively carried out. Various efforts to empower and protect the community are often carried out both by the village government and related agencies. The purpose of this activity is as a form of government effort to improve the community's mindset, which impacts improving people's welfare.

The available data shows that from 2852 heads of families, the average amount of family income reaches Rp. 1,250,000 million. As for the occupation ethnicity in Lembar Selatan Village, it is known that the Sasak Tribe occupies the largest population with a total of 4763 people, Javanese 25 people, Balinese 15 people, and Makassar Tribe 10 people. The various ethnic diversity of these tribes can coexist peacefully, help each other, and work together.

### **Opinion Leader of Coastal Communities in Lembar Selatan Village, Lembar District**

The emergence and existence of opinion leaders in social society are very important. According to Wiryanto, quoted from Putri (2021), an opinion leader is someone who normally has influence, and the actions he takes can affect the attitude and response of others. Usually, this opinion leader figure is often referred to as a source of information or a place where people look for certain information or opinions. In contrast, people who seek and receive information from these opinions are followers or recipients of information.

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Opinion leaders in this context as leaders in society. Leadership, according to Handoko (2020), is a skill or ability possessed by a person to influence others to be willing to work to achieve common goals and targets. Meanwhile, Soewarno Handoyo Ningrat stated that leadership is a process in which a leader is described as giving commands, directions, guidance, or suggestions/opinions to influence others in choosing and doing something to achieve a predetermined goal (Kusnadi & Iskandar, 2017).

In a sociocultural context, especially in rural or coastal areas, a community leader has a very important influence on decision-making. Several types of elites can be chosen as community leaders, including government elites (Village Heads, Dusuns, Village Secretaries, etc.), religious elites (Ulama, Kiyai, Ustadz, Pastors, Fathers, and other religious leaders), economic elites (money, have wide power, and connections everywhere), mass organization elites (figures who exist in community or politics in the village), intellectual elites (educated, intelligent/smart/have certain skills) and customary elites as stakeholders with different roles and functions (Rosidin et al., 2020).

Many people in Indonesia use opinion leaders as a reference in daily social problems ranging from religious issues and work problems to detailed problems such as domestic relationships; even people will ask for their opinions or just suggestions from the opinion leaders to solve their problems. In a village, there will always be several community figures whose ideas of opinion or ideas of thought are accepted and followed by the people living in the village. However, in some of the many existing figures, one figure will dominate and have strong relationships with the community. So, people prefer it as a place to just ask for opinions or solutions to solve their problems.

In finding opinion leaders in the Lembar Selatan Village, Lembar District community, the researcher uses the method proposed by Rogers (1994) (Sociometric Method, Rating Information and Self Designing Method). As the researcher explained earlier, the researcher asks the public about who they ask for advice, advice, opinions, or information about political choices. The researcher asked the people in Lembar Selatan Village, namely Amak Misdin and Inak Sakmak, and they explained that it is the same thing that community leaders are opinion leaders in Lembar Selatan Village.

"... The opinion leaders here are the elder figures in the community here." (Interview with Inak Sakamah, 2022).

"... This influential figure in Lembar Village is a community leader because we (the community) often go to his house to ask for his opinion regarding development or social problems here, (Interview with Amak Misdin, 2022)

The researcher also asked his community leaders directly about his response to the expressions of the community who considered him an opinion leader in Lembar Selatan Village. The community leader who was interviewed was Mr. Adnan, who was appointed by the local community as an opinion leader; he explained that:

"If we talk about figures in this coastal area to the response of the community who said so, we thank the community for the positive response. We are nobody here, but if the community or other people say that we are part of an important figure, it is solely their assessment of that. And I feel grateful when it becomes their assessment of us." (Interview with Mr. Adnan, 2022)

The researcher concluded that the relationship between the community and community leaders and those who act as opinion leaders in Lembar Selatan Village is good because the community's response and assessment of the opinion leader in Lembar Village is positive.

### **Factors Causing Coastal Communities to Consider Community Leaders as Opinion Leaders of Coastal Communities**

In finding the figure of an opinion leader in the Lembar Selatan community, the researcher tried to analyze some of the characteristics that the researcher has explained above. And the researchers found the same characteristics as those previously mentioned where the figure of an opinion leader is an individual who is in the middle of society and has formal and informal positions in society.

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The formal position held by this opinion leader of Lembar Selatan Village is that he served as a member of the DPRD (Regional People's Representative Council) from 2014 to 2019 and is now a member of the PDI-P (Indonesian Democratic Party of Struggle) party. He also served as the Head of Central Sekotong Village before moving and settling in Lembar Selatan Village. So, from his experiences, the community appointed him as a leader with a great role and influence on social and political issues. As Amak Misdin said, he revealed that:

"... As far as I know, he has served as a member of the Regency DPRD. Before moving here (Lembar Selatan Village), he (Mr. Adnan) was also the Head of Central Sekotong Village. So we (the public) do not doubt his (Mr. Adnan's) knowledge of politics." (Interview with Amak Misdin, 2022)

Many people of Lembar Selatan consider that the figure of the opinion leader in Lembar Selatan Village is a person from their circle because they believe that opinion leaders who come from the community are figures who know the conditions and circumstances of the community, as Amak Misdin said (Interview with Amak Misdin, 2022).

"... We see that Mr. Adnan's nature and behavior are very good to us (the community). Even though he is an important figure here (Lembar Selatan Village), he has never been arrogant or prestigious to help. He often assists the surrounding community by providing lights and nets for fishermen, always taking the time to participate in cooperation, and even building a kindergarten school here (Lembar Selatan Village). And we (the community) have a good relationship with him (Mr. Adnan)."

In this context, establishing good relations with the community is very important for an opinion leader or other community leaders. Behaving well/badly and behaving well/badly in daily life are indicators of public assessment of how a community leader or opinion leader works in society. Amak Misdin also added: (Interview with Amak Misdin, 2022).

"... It is only natural that we (the public) believe in opinion leaders. Because he is in the middle of the community, it is certain that he knows and is sensitive to how the social life of the coastal community here (Lembar Selatan Village)."

In this case, the researcher defines that there are several characteristics and traits possessed by an opinion leader to be recognized by the public: a) I need to have formal and informal positions in my social life; b) having broad knowledge and insight tends to be active in society to establish relationships and facilitate communication with the community, which acts as the recipient of the information; c) having wealth above average; d) it can be trusted because it has strength in the form of technical skills or special abilities and is competent in evaluating and comparing existing



information; e) have high empathy and patience for all problems that occur in society. The community that plays the role of receiving information.

Daily behavior, a leader's characteristics, and a good and effective communication model are indicators of community assessment in determining who opinion leaders and influential figures are in Lembar Selatan Village. Good relationships will give birth to harmony in community life. This proves that the relationship between opinion leaders and the community is good and interconnected. Rasaa believes that the community has a fairly important influence on the decisions of opinion leaders in Lembar Selatan Village in deciding all matters and phenomena that occur in the community as well as the political choices of the community.

Initially, the term opinion leader was only associated with influential figures in rural communities. This is understandable because, in rural communities, opinion leaders can convey information from the media to the public. Of course, the meaning of opinion leader is not only relevant in a rural context but also in a certain community or group of people. The study of the importance of opinion leaders has long been the focus of communication sociologists. Rogers and Shoemaker (2006) are two active communication researchers who see the great role of opinion leaders in influencing society. Opinion leaders can interpret mass media messages to the surrounding community, which they may be unable to digest.

### **Communication Model of Community Leaders as Opinion Leaders in Coastal Community Political Choices**

A good and effective communication model is something that opinion leaders must have in expressing their opinions. Opinion leaders are one of the elements that have a very large influence on communication flows. Especially in the countryside, changes and progress of society are highly determined by Opinion Leaders. Opinion leaders can motivate the community to actively participate in developing existing social and political activities. So the government is so concerned about the existence of this opinion leader in the community.

Communication channels are the tools used to channel or convey information from communicator to communicator. In the concept of opinion leader theory, there is one way that opinion leaders in Lembar Selatan Village convey their information, namely through interpersonal communication models and group channels. Interpersonal communication occurs between individuals where each individual directly meets face-to-face without going through an intermediary so that these individuals can see reactions and directly capture the information conveyed either verbally or non-verbally. The communication model carried out by Mr Adnan is as follows:

"... In conveying information, I am always open to all opinions from the people I talk to. Usually, we do that when there are *roah* or *begawe* events, or if neighbors come to the house there, we usually share information about village development problems." (Interview with Mr Adnan, 2022).

The *roah* and *begawe* events are traditional Sasak traditions that still exist today. Begawe in the Sasak tradition is a celebration that is carried out to celebrate something such as marriage, *aqiqah*, commemorating the day of death in the Lombok language, commonly called lung, anyway, meeting, and status. While *roah* is a form of gratitude to Allah whose essence is to pray together. Meanwhile, group channel communication is almost similar to face-to-face interpersonal communication. The feedback of this communication model is that it can be defined and responded to directly by

communicators because the goal is that individuals interact with each other to obtain a common agreement.

The form of group communication obtained from the results of this study, namely deliberations in mosques conducted by opinion leaders to convey information and suggestions related to people's political choices, is still ineffective. Mr. Adnan also said that the people of Lembar Selatan Village have not been effective in receiving information related to people's political choices; this is following the results of the researcher's interview with informants.

"....The deliberations are still ineffective because the average community worker in Lembar Village is a fisherman and trader, and some are also farmers. So they are more active in the sea during the day, afternoon, and night." (Interview with Amak Misdin, 2022).

The condition of communication as a small group can be changed into communication between people and each communicator. Simply put, there can be a question-and-answer dialogue or discussion between communicators and communicators asking questions and providing answers. As a result of the interview above, the researcher concluded that through this interpersonal communication, two individuals who are related to each other will obtain more in-depth, clear, and direct information. It can be understood that in this interpersonal communication, the sender of information conveys information directly, and the communicator gets the information directly so that, in this case, the two can respond to each other directly to reach a mutual agreement.

Then, this group communication is usually carried out on a small group scale, as is the case with *yasinan*, *roah/dhikran*, which is usually carried out in the community according to each group. For example, in a group of artisan or women's recitations. *Yasinan* group of gentlemen which is usually implemented in residents' homes in turn. A form of dissemination of information on political choices that will be carried out for the good of the community. The results of the study showed that group communication carried out between deliberation and *roah/dhikr* both used word-of-mouth intermediaries but gave an effective response to the *roah/zikiran* event.

"... If we *roah/dhikr* or *Yasin*, we will sit together after the event is over, so the question can be asked immediately without any embarrassment. The event is at night; after all, it is more relaxed, and it is more delicious for us to share." (Interview with Mr. Adnan, 2022)

This is because the *Roah/dhikr* event is attended by people who know each other in a small scope and in one environment, where a group of individuals views them as part of a community organization. *Roah/dhikran*, which is usually held in Lembar Selatan Village, is an informal activity.

### **The Role and Influence of Community Leaders as Opinion Leaders in Political Choices of Coastal Communities**

The typology of coastal communities has different criteria and characteristics from the general public. Because of these differences, the people's livelihoods and nature are also different. However, people who live in coastal areas in Lembar Selatan Village are people who have a high value of solidarity. This is evidenced by the enthusiasm of the community who participated in developing mangrove tourism in Lembar Selatan Village. Behind the fighting spirit of the community in the development, of course, there is a public figure who moves the community to participate in it.

"... In village development, we who act as opinion leaders here only give directions to the community to actively participate in development. Because after all, this is for the future

of our village (Lembar Selatan Village) as well." (Interview with Amak Misdin, 2022)

Community leaders (public figures) have a significant role and influence in the community's social life in Lembar Selatan Village. Become an example for the community because of the patterns formed from their knowledge and experience. Community leaders are individuals who have influence and are respected by the local community because of their knowledge, experience, and behavior.

"... When it comes to political issues, we (the community) here (Lembar Selatan Village) listen more to community leaders in Lembar Selatan Village. Because they know better and understand more about political problems." (Interview with Inak Sakmah, 2022).

This shows that the role of community leaders in people's political choices as motivators and guides is very important. As a motivator community leaders provide motivation that can build and shape the personality of the community. According to Azwar, a motivator is a stimulus, encouragement, or desire generator owned by every individual or group of people who has the desire to act and perform optimally in implementing something that has been designed and planned to achieve a goal that has been set (Nanda Rizkiai, 2015).

Community leaders not only have a role as social controllers/controllers in society or as guardians and enforcers of the values of applicable norms but also as problem solvers in various aspects of social problems that occur ranging from domestic and social to political problems. So, the existence of a community leader becomes very important in society. As explained by the informant:

"... The role (opinion leader) is not only a political issue of the state but also a role of opinion leaders in society. It can be a mediator, a person who can solve problems, etc." (Interview with Mr. Adnan, 2022).

In political choice known as political preference, individuals tend to make decisions from some choices, based on transactions, in the form of gifts or facilities (Rizkantomo, 2017). When choosing a candidate for a general election, the role of each individual has a very strong influence. In the context of the decision to choose, James Spradley is quoted in Rizky Ilmawan, defining that every individual takes and decides something, in general, from the cognitive side of the individual himself. It means what is embedded in a person's mind or about something that he believes in and accepts, as well as something true by a certain individual or group or society and in a certain culture (Ilmawan, 2021).

Community leaders' participation in village development can increase public awareness of it, including participation in political choices because the participation of influential figures provides an overview and understanding to the community to make changes in a more modern direction. The influence of opinion leaders in society is very large in the process of disseminating information and encouraging people to accept innovations or new ideas in political choices.

The role and influence of community leaders in the political choices of coastal communities in Lembar Selatan Village is to provide persuasive invitations in ways that have been tried to the people of Lembar Selatan so that they want to participate in politics. Community leaders provide information and motivation to the constructive community by expressing it orally (directly) and providing direct examples to achieve motivation related to political choices.

However, a phenomenon is developing today in people's lives in Lembar Selatan. The role and influence of community leaders in influencing political choices can be lost if there is money politics, not only in Lembar but also in all regions of Indonesia; money politics can occur in various situations.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that opinion leadership in political decision-making within Lembar Selatan Village's coastal community is primarily embodied by Mr. Adnan, a former Regional People's Representative Council (DPRD) member and former Village Head of Central Sekotong. Opinion leaders in this context function as influential interpreters of political messages, helping shape public opinion on policies and political candidates through their significant social impact. The research identifies several key factors that establish community leaders as opinion leaders, including their formal and informal positions, comprehensive knowledge, above-average economic status, technical competence, and high empathy for community issues.

The study reveals that these opinion leaders employ predominantly interpersonal communication models, facilitating direct and in-depth information exchange between leaders and community members. Their influence manifests through both individual interactions and group communications, particularly during community gatherings and religious events (roah/dhikr). As motivators and guides, these leaders play a crucial role in encouraging political participation, especially during presidential, vice-presidential, and village elections, through persuasive approaches that resonate with local cultural contexts. Their effectiveness stems from their ability to translate complex political information into accessible formats while maintaining strong community trust and engagement.

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