

From Tradition to Politics: How the Bakar Batu Shapes Voting Behavior in Jayawijaya, Papua's Highlands

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Abstract

Bakar Batu tradition in the Papua Highlands was originally a cultural practice representing social solidarity, togetherness, and customary reconciliation. However, over time, this tradition has been transformed into a medium for political communication and electoral mobilization. This phenomenon shows that Bakar Batu not only serves as a social identity but also shapes the political behavior of indigenous communities. This study aims to analyze the influence of the Bakar Batu tradition on voting behaviors in political contests in Jayawijaya Regency. The study used a quantitative, explanatory research design. Data were collected via questionnaires and analyzed using the Structural Equation Modeling-Partial Least Squares (SEM-PLS) method in SmartPLS. The results show that the Bakar Batu tradition has a positive and significant influence on people's voting behaviors, with an original sample value of 0.615, a T-statistic of 10.803, and a P-value of 0.000. In addition, the R-square value of 0.378 indicates that the Bakar Batu tradition has a fairly strong contribution in explaining people's voting behavior. This finding confirms that local culture plays a strategic role in the dynamics of local democracy in Papua by strengthening social legitimacy, communal solidarity, and emotional closeness between political elites and the indigenous community (voters).

Keywords: Bakar batu; Political contestation; Political culture; Tradition; Voting behavior.

INTRODUCTION

Bakar Batu tradition in the Central Highlands of Papua was initially known as a cultural practice that represented collective work, social solidarity, and communal rituals during various traditional occasions, such as births, weddings, and deaths (Asso et al., 2026). However, over time, this tradition has evolved beyond mere cultural expression and has become part of the political

contestation arena. *Bakar Batu* is now frequently used in electoral contexts as a means of mass mobilization and political support, with political candidates using this cultural space to build emotional closeness, strengthen social legitimacy, and foster collective participation, despite the high cost (Costa & Tambunan, 2018). This shift demonstrates that local culture is not external to the political arena but has instead become an integral part of electoral practices at the local level (Pamungkas, 2017).

This phenomenon is important to understand within the broader framework of local democracy in Papua.

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Democracy in Papua cannot be reduced to a procedural electoral process, as in the liberal democratic tradition, but rather is the result of the interaction between formal state institutions and the sociocultural structures of indigenous communities, which still exert a strong influence on political behavior (Faiz et al., 2023). In this context, it is understandable that political practices are inseparable from the values, social relations, and customary authority that exist within the community (Kaneko et al., 2024), including through the *Bakar Batu* tradition, which holds a central place in Papuan social life.

Several previous studies have shown that the *Bakar Batu* ritual has undergone a significant functional transformation. Muslim (2019) emphasized that this tradition serves as a mechanism for social integration, strengthening cohesion and solidarity through the practice of sharing food as a symbol of harmony and reconciliation. Wenda & Purwanti (2023) found that the *Bakar Batu* ritual also serves as a space for conflict resolution through dialogue and customary consensus, thereby maintaining social stability in the community. Meanwhile, research by Ahmad et al. (2026) shows that this tradition has evolved into an instrument of political diplomacy used to build emotional closeness, strengthen social legitimacy, and expand political support between elites and indigenous communities in Jayawijaya. These findings indicate that the *Bakar Batu* ritual has evolved from a cultural ritual into a complex socio-political mechanism encompassing social integration, conflict resolution, and political communication.

However, existing studies remain dominated by qualitative approaches that emphasize phenomenological descriptions, and their influence on electoral behavior has not been empirically measured. Furthermore, studies on voting behavior in Papua have focused more on the *Noken* system, the role of tribal chiefs (Big Man), and political clientelism (Faiz et al., 2023; Muksin et al., 2022), resulting in local cultural dimensions such as the *Bakar Batu* ritual not being empirically explored as factors influencing voters' political decisions. This situation indicates a significant research gap, as the *Bakar Batu* ritual involves not only symbolic aspects but also resource distribution, mass mobilization, and strengthening social loyalties, all of which have the potential to influence people's political choices.

Furthermore, this study uses a voting behavior approach within the sociological school, which is based on the assumption that political preferences are not formed solely through individual rationality but are instead a product of the social structure surrounding the individual, including social identity, cultural values, and the social environment in which individuals interact (Bornschieer et al., 2021). In Papua's communal indigenous society, sociocultural factors tend to be more dominant than rational individual considerations (Senis et al., 2024). Thus, the *Bakar Batu* ceremony can be understood as a sociocultural institution that shapes the community's political orientation through social interaction and customary legitimacy.

This study aims to determine the influence of the *Bakar Batu* tradition on

voting behaviors in political contests in Jayawijaya Regency. The novelty of this research lies in its quantitative approach to measuring the influence of local culture (*Bakar Batu*) on voting behaviors. Meanwhile, the urgency of this research lies in enriching local political studies and explaining how local culture functions as a determinant of electoral politics in indigenous communities. This research is expected not only to enrich studies of local democracy and political culture in Papua but also to provide an empirical contribution in explaining the role of local culture as a determinant of electoral behavior in indigenous communities.

METHODS

This study employed a quantitative, explanatory approach. This approach aimed to examine the influence of the *Bakar Batu* tradition on people's voting behaviors in political contests in Jayawijaya Regency. Explanatory research, meanwhile, aimed to explain the influence of independent variables on the dependent variable based on previously formulated hypothesis testing. The quantitative approach is considered relevant for objectively measuring people's political behavior and voting tendencies through statistically measurable indicators (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

The population in this study comprised all eligible voters in Jayawijaya Regency, totaling 227,556 voters (KPU Jayawijaya, 2023). However, due to the relatively large population, spread across various districts, limited time, and difficult terrain, the sample was selected using a non-probability sampling technique, namely accidental

sampling. This technique involved selecting respondents encountered by the researcher by chance and willing to provide answers to the research needs (Subhaktiyasa, 2024). Furthermore, the sample size was determined using the Slovin formula, with a sampling error of 10%. The calculation is as follows:

$$\begin{aligned} n &= \frac{N}{1 + N e^2} \\ n &= \frac{227556}{1 + 227556 (0,1)^2} \\ n &= \frac{227556}{1 + 227556 (0,01)} \\ n &= \frac{227556}{1 + 2275,56} \\ n &= \frac{227556}{2276,56} = 99.956 \\ &\approx \mathbf{100} \text{ (Rounded up)} \end{aligned}$$

Notes:

n = Sample size

N = Population size (Total voters in Jayawijaya)

e = Margin of Error

1 = Constant

The primary data in this study were collected through questionnaires distributed to respondents to obtain empirical information relevant to the study's variables and objectives. Meanwhile, secondary data were obtained through a literature review of scientific journals, books, online news, and other academic sources relevant to the research problem.

This study used the Structural Equation Modeling–Partial Least Squares (SEM-PLS) method, implemented in SmartPLS, to analyze the relationships among latent variables simultaneously through a measurement model (outer

model) and a structural model (inner model). The SEM-PLS method was chosen because it is considered appropriate for social and political research that uses reflective indicators, has a moderate sample size, and does not require a strict normal data distribution. Data analysis was carried out in several stages: average score testing, outer-model testing to assess construct validity and reliability, inner-model testing to analyze structural relationships among variables, and hypothesis testing to determine the effect of independent variables on the dependent variable (Hair & Alamer, 2022).

This study consists of two variables: *Bakar Batu* as the independent variable (X) and the decision to vote as the dependent variable (Y). The statement in the *Bakar*

Batu variable (X) is compiled based on the theory of political communication, political marketing, and voter behavior, which emphasizes that local cultural activities can be a medium for conveying political information, forming emotional closeness between candidates and the community, and a means of mobilizing political support (Priambodo, 2024; Cahyani, 2025; Agustiani et al., 2025). Meanwhile, the indicators in the Decision to Vote variable (Y) are developed from the theory of voter behavior, which states that the intensity of political communication, cultural symbols, candidate image, and community influence can influence people's political preferences and decisions (Nasir & Asis, 2026; Cahyani, 2025; Agustiani et al., 2025) (Tabel 1).

Table 1. Questionnaire Design

Variables	Indicators	Code
<i>Bakar Batu</i> (X)	<i>Bakar batu</i> held by regional head candidates provides information about the vision, mission, programs, and political promises of the candidates concerned.	BB1
	<i>Bakar batu</i> became a place to seek and exchange political information about which regional head candidates should be elected.	BB2
	<i>Bakar batu</i> becomes a link between the community (voters) and regional head candidates.	BB3
	<i>Bakar batu</i> became a place to attract voters' sympathy.	BB4
	<i>Bakar batu</i> became a way to gain votes.	BB5
Voting Behavior (Y)	I decided to vote for the regional head candidate whose <i>Bakar Batu</i> ceremony was more luxurious/bigger.	VB1
	I decided to vote for the regional head candidate who held more <i>Bakar Batu</i> ceremonies.	VB2
	I decided to find out more about the regional head candidates who held <i>Bakar Batu</i> in the run-up to the regional elections.	VB3
	I decided to make regional head candidates who held <i>Bakar Batu</i> as the main choice rather than those who did not.	VB4
	I decided to recommend the regional head candidate whose <i>Bakar Batu</i> ceremony was more lively to my friends and others.	VB5
Notes: The research instrument used a five-level Likert scale, namely; 1 = Strongly Disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Neither Agree nor Disagree, 4 = Agree, 5 = Strongly Agree.		

Source: Author processed (2026)

Based on the overall explanation above, the hypothesis that can be proposed in this research is:

H₀: Bakar Batu does not have a significant influence on voting behaviors in political contests in Jayawijaya Regency.

H₁: Bakar Batu has a significant influence on voting behaviors in political contests in Jayawijaya Regency.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Demographic Profile of Respondents

This section describes the general characteristics of the research respondents, including gender, age, and

education level. Respondent demographic profiles are important to analyze because they can provide insight into the social characteristics of the communities involved in the research. In studies of voting behavior, demographic factors are often associated with political orientation, patterns of political participation, and levels of community involvement in local social and cultural activities (Yustiningrum & Ichwanuddin, 2015). Therefore, identifying respondent characteristics is crucial for understanding the social context of the research location.

Table 2. Respondents' demographics profile (n = 100)

Respondents' Characteristics		Percent (%)
Gender	Male	70
	Female	30
Age	18-22 years	39
	23-27 years	42
	28-32 years	5
	33-37 years	4
	38-42 years	5
	43-47 years	2
	48-52 years	3
Educational level	Senior High School	72
	Diploma	2
	Bachelor's Degree	21
	Master's Degree	5

Source: Author processed (2026)

Table 2 shows that the majority of respondents (70%) were male, while the remainder were female (30%). The predominance of male respondents indicates that male participation in local social and political activities in Jayawijaya Regency remains relatively high, particularly in traditional and communal activities such as the *Bakar Batu* tradition. In highland Papuan

communities, men generally play a more dominant role in social and political decision-making in traditional settings (Manoby et al., 2023).

In terms of age, the majority of respondents were in the productive age range and young voters. The 23–27 age group was the largest, accounting for 42%, followed by the 18–22 age group at 39%. These findings indicate that the

younger generation is actively involved in local political dynamics and socio-cultural activities in Papuan society. This phenomenon aligns with research by Ida et al. (2025), which explains that young people tend to have high levels of political participation when there is strong social closeness and group identity within their political environment.

Meanwhile, based on educational level, the majority of respondents (72%) had a high school diploma, followed by a bachelor's degree (21%), a master's degree (5%), and a diploma (2%). This indicates that the respondents' social characteristics are still closely aligned with communal and local cultures. In Papuan indigenous communities, increased formal education does not necessarily shift the influence of local cultural values, which remain the basis for shaping people's political orientation and behavior (Qomarrullah et al., 2024). This aligns with research by

Saglie et al. (2020), which shows that indigenous communities in local political systems still tend to maintain political orientations grounded in social identity and collective values.

Respondent Data Analysis: Descriptive-Quantitative

Descriptive statistics were used to analyze the tendency of respondents' responses to each research variable indicator (Yazid et al., 2023). This analysis aimed to illustrate public perceptions regarding the relationship between the *Bakar Batu* tradition and voting behaviors in political contests in Jayawijaya Regency. The mean value was used to interpret respondents' level of agreement with each research indicator (Tjiptabudi, 2022). The higher the mean, the greater respondents' acceptance or agreement with the statements in the research instrument.

Table 3. Survey responses on *bakar batu* and voting behavior

Variables	Indicators	Survey Responses (%)					Means
		Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	
<i>Bakar Batu</i> (X)	BB1	32	65	2	1	-	4.28
	BB2	27	67	5	1	-	4.20
	BB3	31	56	12	1	-	4.17
	BB4	35	54	9	2	-	4.22
	BB5	31	53	14	2	-	4.13
Voting Behavior (Y)	VB1	17	59	22	2	-	3.91
	VB2	27	58	12	3	-	4.09
	VB3	32	51	17	-	-	4.15
	VB4	32	53	15	-	-	4.17
	VB5	31	55	14	-	-	4.17

Source: Author processed (2026)

Based on Table 3, all indicators in the *Bakar Batu* variable show high mean values, ranging from 4.13 to 4.28. These results indicate that the majority of respondents have a positive perception of

the connection between the *Bakar Batu* tradition and local political activities in Jayawijaya Regency.

In the *Bakar Batu* variable, the indicator with the highest mean is BB1 at

4.28, indicating that the *Bakar Batu* held by the regional head candidate provides information about the candidate's vision, mission, programs, and political promises. This finding indicates that in the dynamics of local politics in Highland Papua, the *Bakar Batu* tradition is no longer interpreted merely as a cultural ritual and symbol of social solidarity but has also developed into a political communication medium that brings together political elites with indigenous communities in a space for dialogue, social legitimacy, and the consolidation of collective interests (Ahmad et al., 2026). This condition shows how the function of local culture is transformed into an arena for informal political communication in Papuan local democracy.

Furthermore, indicator BB4 had a mean of 4.22, indicating that the public views *Bakar Batu* as a means to attract voter sympathy. Meanwhile, indicators BB2 and BB3 had mean values of 4.20 and 4.17, respectively, indicating that the *Bakar Batu* tradition serves as a space for exchanging political information and connecting the public with regional head candidates. This finding is also in line with research by Ahmad et al. (2026), which explains that the *Bakar Batu* tradition has developed into an instrument of local political diplomacy to build emotional closeness and social legitimacy among political elites in Jayawijaya Regency.

The BB5 indicator obtained a mean score of 4.13, indicating that the community also considers *Bakar Batu* as a strategy to gain political support and votes. This finding demonstrates that local cultural practices have significant political implications in shaping the

political preferences of the Papuan people. In the context of Papuan local democracy, social relations, communal solidarity, customary legitimacy, and proximity to traditional leadership structures remain important factors influencing community voting behavior (Yasin & Kadji, 2025).

Meanwhile, for the voting behavior variable, all indicators also showed relatively high mean values, ranging from 3.91 to 4.17. These results indicate that the *Bakar Batu* tradition influences the formation of community political decisions in local political contests.

Indicators VB4 and VB5 achieved the highest mean scores of 4.17. This indicates that the public tends to prioritize regional head candidates who hold *Bakar Batu* ceremonies and recommend them to others. These findings demonstrate that the *Bakar Batu* tradition not only influences individuals personally but also shapes collective social influence within indigenous communities (Kasenda, 2024).

Furthermore, the VB3 indicator had a mean of 4.15, indicating that the public is encouraged to seek further information about regional head candidates who hold *Bakar Batu*. Meanwhile, the VB2 indicator obtained a mean value of 4.09, indicating that the frequency of *Bakar Batu* also influences people's voting behaviors. The VB1 indicator obtained a mean value of 3.91, indicating that the luxury or scale of *Bakar Batu* also influences people's political preferences.

These findings align with research by Carty (2020) and McDermott (2018), which explains that group identity and

emotional closeness to political leaders can shape a society's collective political orientation. In the Papuan context, cultural closeness and the involvement of regional head candidates in traditional activities are crucial in building social legitimacy and community political support.

Validated Research Model, Data Validity, and Data Reliability

Validated research model testing was conducted to analyze the relationships among latent variables and to evaluate the strength of indicators in representing the research constructs. This analysis used the Partial Least Squares–Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) approach in SmartPLS, testing the measurement and structural models to assess the validity of the relationships between indicators and latent variables (Febryaningrum et al., 2024).

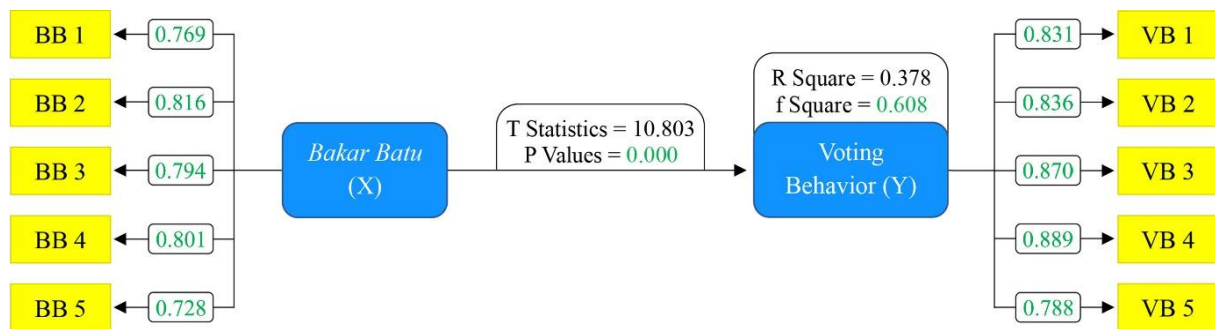


Figure 1. Validated Research Model
Source: Author processed from SmartPLS (2026)

Based on SmartPLS data processing, the research model shows that all indicators have strong relationships with their respective variable constructs. The model's relationship between variables also shows a positive association between the *Bakar Batu* variable and voting behaviors. This indicates that the *Bakar Batu* tradition has contributed to shaping the community's political orientation during political contestation in Jayawijaya Regency (Ahmad et al., 2026). The validated research model shows that local culture cannot be separated from the dynamics of local Papuan democracy. In their research, Nugraha et al. (2025) explained that the political practices of

indigenous communities are still influenced by social relations, communal solidarity, and cultural legitimacy that exist within the community, so that the political process is not entirely based on rational-instrumental considerations but also on collective values and customary authority inherited socially and culturally.

Furthermore, the authors conducted validity testing to determine the extent to which the research indicators measured the constructs of the studied variables. In this study, validity testing used outer loading and Average Variance Extracted (AVE) values. An indicator is considered valid if its outer loading value is above 0.70 and its AVE is

above 0.50 (Rasyid & Pribadi, 2021). instrument's ability to accurately and consistently represent latent variables (Yarsasi et al., 2025).

Table 4. Data Validity

Variables	Indicators	Outer Loadings	Average Variance Extracted (AVE)	Notes
<i>Bakar Batu</i> (X)	BB1	0.769	0.612	Valid
	BB2	0.816		Valid
	BB3	0.794		Valid
	BB4	0.801		Valid
	BB5	0.728		Valid
Voting Behavior (Y)	VB1	0.831	0.712	Valid
	VB2	0.836		Valid
	VB3	0.870		Valid
	VB4	0.889		Valid
	VB5	0.788		Valid

Source: Author processed (2026)

Based on Table 4, all indicators in the *Bakar Batu* and Voting behavior variables have outer loading values above 0.70. These results indicate that all indicators meet the requirements for convergent validity and adequately explain the research variable constructs. For the *Bakar Batu* variable, indicator BB2 has the highest outer loading value of 0.816. This indicates that the function of *Bakar Batu* as a medium for exchanging political information has the strongest contribution in representing the *Bakar Batu* variable.

Meanwhile, for the voting behavior variable, the VB4 indicator has the highest outer loading value of 0.889. This finding indicates that the public's tendency to choose regional head candidates who hold *Bakar Batu* ceremonies as their primary choice is the most dominant indicator in shaping their

voting behaviors. This condition demonstrates that social legitimacy and emotional closeness built through cultural activities significantly shape the political preferences of the Papuan people. Local cultural activities not only function as symbols of collective identity but also serve as a medium for social consolidation, strengthening public trust in political actors perceived as close to customary values and communal solidarity (Lensru, 2025; Yasin & Kadji, 2025). In the context of local Papuan politics, emotional relationships built through cultural practices and customary communication tend to confer greater social legitimacy than purely formal political approaches (Kadir et al., 2025).

Furthermore, the AVE value for the *Bakar Batu* variable was 0.612, and the decision variable had an AVE of 0.712. These values indicate that all research

constructs meet the requirements for convergent validity, as they have AVEs above 0.50. Thus, the research instrument is deemed valid and suitable for testing the structural model. This finding aligns with research by Henseler et al., (2016), which explains that convergent validity in SEM-PLS is an important indicator in ensuring the quality of social and behavioral research instruments.

In addition to validity testing, this study conducted reliability testing to

assess the consistency of the research instrument in measuring the variables under study. Reliability testing was conducted using Cronbach's Alpha, rho_A, and Composite Reliability. A research construct is considered reliable if it has a value above 0.70 (Rasyid & Pribadi, 2021). Reliability testing is essential to ensure the research instrument produces stable, consistent data.

Table 5. Data Reliability

Variables	Cronbach's Alpha	rho_A	Composite Reliability	Notes
<i>Bakar Batu</i> (X)	0.842	0.847	0.887	Reliabel
Voting Behavior (Y)	0.898	0.907	0.925	Reliabel

Source: Author processed (2026)

Based on Table 5, all research variables have Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability values above 0.70. The *Bakar Batu* variable has a Cronbach's alpha of 0.842 and a composite reliability of 0.887, while the decision-to-choose variable has a Cronbach's alpha of 0.898 and a composite reliability of 0.925.

These results indicate that all research constructs exhibit high internal consistency and are reliable in measuring the research variables. Thus, the research instrument is deemed capable of producing stable and consistent data to explain the relationship between the *Bakar Batu* tradition and community voting behaviors in Jayawijaya Regency.

The high reliability values in this study indicate that the indicators used consistently represent the social and political behavior of indigenous communities. This is important because

political behavior in communal societies is often influenced by cultural factors, social solidarity, and customary legitimacy, which are relatively stable in Papuan society. This finding also supports the research by Sarstedt et al. (2019), which explains that high reliability in the SEM-PLS model indicates good construct quality and is suitable for testing causal relationships between variables.

Inner Model Testing

Inner-model testing assesses the research model's ability to explain the structural relationships among latent variables. This testing is performed by examining the R-square and F-statistic values. The R-squared value is used to determine the contribution of the independent variable to the dependent variable. In contrast, the f-square value is

used to determine the effect size between the independent and dependent variables in the research model ((Jacky) et al., 2024).

Table 6. R Square and f Square

Variables	R Square	f Square
<i>Bakar Batu</i> > Voting behavior	0.378	0.608

Source: Author processed (2026)

Based on Table 6, the R-squared value of 0.378 indicates that the *Bakar Batu* variable explains 37.8% of the voting behavior variable. In comparison, the remaining 62.2% is accounted for by variables outside the research model. This value indicates that the *Bakar Batu* tradition significantly shapes people's voting behaviors in local political contests in Jayawijaya Regency.

These results demonstrate that local culture continues to significantly influence Papuans' political behavior. Although voting behaviors are also influenced by other factors such as political identity, personal closeness, social affiliation, and economic factors, the *Bakar Batu* tradition remains a crucial factor in shaping the political orientation of indigenous communities. Furthermore, the f-square value of 0.608 indicates that the *Bakar Batu* variable has a strong effect size on voting behaviors. This value indicates that the influence of local culture on people's voting behavior is in

the large category. This finding indicates that communal cultural activities have substantial power in building social legitimacy and community political support. Furthermore, the findings of this study also align with Hooghe & Stiers (2016), who argue that social relations and collective trust in the community have an important influence on the formation of political behavior and the legitimacy of community political participation.

Hypothesis Testing

Hypothesis testing was conducted to determine whether the *Bakar Batu* variable significantly influenced voting behaviors in the political contestation in Jayawijaya Regency. This study used SEM-PLS analysis to test the hypothesis, examining the original sample values, T-statistics, and P-values. The research hypothesis was accepted if the T-statistic was greater than 1.96 and the P-value was less than 0.05 (Rasyid & Pribadi, 2021).

Table 7. Hypothesis Testing

Variables	Original Sample (O)	Sample Mean (M)	Standard Deviations (STDEV)	T Statistics (O/STDEV)	P Values	Notes
<i>Bakar Batu</i> > Voting Behavior	0.615	0.616	0.057	10.803	0.000	Accepted

Source: Author processed (2026)

Based on Table 7, the results of the hypothesis test indicate that the *Bakar Batu* variable has a positive and significant effect on the decision to vote. This is indicated by the original sample value of 0.615 with a T-statistic value of 10.803 and a P-value of 0.000. A T-statistic value greater than 1.96 and a P-value less than 0.05 indicate that H1 is accepted. The results of this study indicate that the stronger the community's involvement in the *Bakar Batu* tradition, the greater its tendency to support a regional head candidate involved in the tradition. This finding confirms that local culture significantly shapes voting behavior in Jayawijaya Regency.

The results of this study support the sociological approach to voting behavior, which holds that voting behaviors are influenced by social identity, cultural values, reference groups, and the social environment (Stubager et al., 2026). In the context of Papuan indigenous communities, communal social structures and collectivistic culture are more influential than individualistic political orientations. This situation suggests that communities base political decisions on social legitimacy and cultural proximity to political elites.

The findings of this study reinforce those of Wenda & Purwanti (2023) who demonstrated that the *Bakar Batu* tradition plays a crucial role in fostering social solidarity, group loyalty, and cohesion within Papuan indigenous communities. This communal solidarity in local political practice develops into collective political solidarity, shaping community orientation and voting behaviors. These findings align with

those of Muslim (2019), who explained that the *Bakar Batu* tradition has evolved from a mere cultural ritual into a medium for social reconciliation and the strengthening of harmony within Papuan society. In the context of local politics, this cultural legitimacy and social harmony are often exploited by political elites to build public trust and gain political support. Furthermore, this study supports the findings of Ahmad et al. (2026), who explained that the *Bakar Batu* tradition has evolved into a medium for local political diplomacy, building relationships among the government, political elites, and indigenous communities in Jayawijaya Regency. The *Bakar Batu* tradition serves as an effective platform for political communication because it creates emotional closeness, strengthens social legitimacy, and builds collective attachments among indigenous communities to specific political actors.

Substantively, this study's results demonstrate that local democracy in Papua cannot be understood solely through a modern procedural democratic approach. Papuan local politics operates within a hybrid democracy pattern, a combination of formal democratic mechanisms and the socio-cultural structures of indigenous communities. The *Bakar Batu* tradition serves as an important medium demonstrating how local culture functions as a political instrument in shaping people's voting behavior. Thus, this study contributes academically to the development of studies on voting behavior, political culture, and local democracy in Papua. It also demonstrates that local culture is not merely a traditional heritage but has evolved into a determinant factor in the

electoral dynamics of indigenous communities in Jayawijaya Regency.

Furthermore, although this study successfully demonstrated that the *Bakar Batu* tradition has a positive and significant influence on voting behaviors in political contests in Jayawijaya Regency, it still has several limitations that require attention. First, the relatively small sample size and the use of accidental sampling techniques mean the results cannot be generalized to all Jayawijaya societies. Second, this study focused only on the *Bakar Batu* tradition; thus, other factors, such as the influence of tribal chiefs (Big Man), the *Noken* system, political identity, and economic factors, were not analyzed in depth. Third, the quantitative SEM-PLS approach was not fully able to explain the sociocultural meanings and dynamics of customary politics underlying the *Bakar Batu* practice in local political contests. Therefore, further research is recommended to use a larger sample, add other socio-political variables, and mixed-methods approaches to obtain a more comprehensive understanding of the relationship between local culture and electoral behavior in political contests.

CONCLUSIONS

This study aims to determine the influence of the *Bakar Batu* tradition on voting behaviors in political contests in Jayawijaya Regency. Based on the SEM-PLS analysis, the study shows that the *Bakar Batu* tradition has a positive and significant effect on people's voting behaviors, as indicated by the original sample value of 0.615, the T statistic of 10.803, and the P value of 0.000. These

findings indicate that the involvement of regional head candidates in the *Bakar Batu* tradition can influence people's political preferences.

The research also shows that the *Bakar Batu* tradition has undergone a functional transformation, not only as a cultural ritual and symbol of social solidarity, but also as a medium for political communication, a means of building social legitimacy, and an instrument for mobilizing political support. The public tends to pay more attention to and support candidates who actively participate in these cultural activities. These findings reinforce the sociological approach to voting behavior, which emphasizes cultural values, social solidarity, and collective identity as important factors in shaping voting behavior among indigenous communities.

In practice, this study demonstrates that political actors and local governments need to understand *Bakar Batu* as part of the context of political communication, without eliminating the traditional values it embodies. As a recommendation, local governments, election organizers (KPU, Bawaslu, and DKPP), and traditional leaders can strengthen political education grounded in local culture so that the public considers not only cultural proximity but also candidates' capacity and programs when making political choices. Furthermore, further research is recommended to expand the scope of the study by adding other socio-political variables to obtain a more comprehensive understanding of the relationship between local culture and electoral behavior in political contests.

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