

Traditional Lampung marriage from the perspective of local democracy: A study of the *Megow Pak* community

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Article Info

Article History

Submitted:

30 March 2026

Revised:

23 June 2026

Accepted:

11 August 2026

Keywords

cultural democracy; customary marriage; deliberative democracy; local democracy; *Megow Pak*

Abstract

Marriage is both divine law and a socio-cultural mechanism for the *Megow Pak* community of Lampung to transmit local values between generations. This tradition serves as a deliberative space that generates social legitimacy and represents cultural democracy within the community. This study aims to describe the traditional marriage mechanism of *Megow Pak* Lampung and its contribution to local democracy. This study uses a qualitative method with a narrative approach to explore and describe the results of the researcher's understanding as an academic in civic education and having experience with the traditional *Megow Pak* Lampung wedding. Data were obtained from participants through interviews, field notes, reflection journals, and literature. The research results show that *Metagh* and *Sebambangan* are voluntary marriage mechanisms, while *Ramot* and *Nakad* are the opposite. These various mechanisms open up space for deliberative democratic dialogue with cultural democracy in the practices of information transparency, respect for differing opinions, deliberation, equal social participation, the inheritance of democratic values, and respect for human dignity.

Article Link: <https://journal.uny.ac.id/index.php/civics/article/view/96566>

Introduction

National resilience is multidimensional, comprising tangible and intangible factors (Kesuma & Ciciria, 2021), which is one of the strategic foundations that shape the identity (attitudes, values, behaviour, and life orientation) of the Indonesian people (Mauta et al., 2025). Democracy is a crucial pillar of national resilience, rooted in local traditions in Indonesian society (Alfaqi, 2016; Hill, 2024; Rahmi et al., 2025). Contemporary democratic theory increasingly recognises that democratic values are also produced and reproduced through everyday social and cultural practices. From this perspective, deliberative democracy views democracy as a communicative process in which legitimacy emerges through inclusive dialogue, reasoned argumentation, and consensus among community members, rather than solely through voting or state authority (Habermas, 2017, 2018). Consequently, the quality of democracy can also be assessed in informal social institutions whenever collective decisions



are reached through deliberation, mutual recognition, and public justification. Complementing this perspective, the concept of cultural democracy states that democracy cannot be separated from the cultural context in which citizens construct meaning, identity, and social obligations (Taylor, 2007; Taylor et al., 2020). Therefore, democratic values are not only derived from constitutional arrangements but are embedded in local traditions, customs, and shared moral frameworks that govern daily interactions, particularly within the family.

The family is a crucial arena where democratic norms are transmitted, negotiated, and legitimised across generations, one of which is through marriage (Muddiman et al., 2020; Villanueva, 2025). This makes it a culturally embedded deliberative arena that allows democratic values to be practised, legitimised, and passed down through generations (Dryzek, 2017; Habermas, 2018; Hammond, 2020). This perspective is particularly relevant in a pluralistic society like Indonesia, where traditional institutions continue to play a crucial role in governing community life.

Democracy in Indonesia is not an instantaneous event, but rather a long process rooted in local wisdom values preserved by traditional institutions. It is both a knowledge system and a social space where democratic values are lived, practised, and reproduced in the lives of local communities (Davidson, 2019; Fatah et al., 2023). This demonstrates that communities are the primary actors in building democracy and wisely pass it down from generation to generation through the establishment of its smallest institution, the family. As a collective social institution, family formation not only legitimises the biological relationship between men and women, generating rights and obligations within a kinship structure, but also serves as an important arena for social practices that reflect democratic principles such as deliberation, equality, community participation, and social justice (De Munck, 2024; Habermas, 2017; Stone & King, 2025).

Megow Pak are one of the four ethnic groups of the Lampung *Pepadun* Tribe that have a unique marriage mechanism (*Abung Siwo Megow, Megow Pak, Pubian Telu Suku, and Sungkai Way Kanan Buay Lima*), which results in systematic and sustainable local democracy in the Tulang Bawang region (Ciciria, 2015; Isnaeni & Hakiki, 2016; Nurhalisa & Suyato, 2026; Sabaruddin, 2012; Sujadi & Saibani, 2012). The uniqueness of the *Megow Pak* traditional marriage mechanism lies not only in its procedures but also in its socio-cultural function as a manifestation of democratic principles (Purwanti & Natalis, 2026; Rozak et al., 2015). This tradition shows that democracy is not always present in the form of formal state institutions, but can also grow and develop through local cultural practices that emphasise deliberation, collective participation, and social legitimacy in decision-making. Based on the researcher's observations, there are various *Mulei-Mekhanai* mechanisms in marriage, as shown in the following table:

Table 1.

Marriage mechanisms in the Megow Pak community

No	Marriage Mechanisms	Basic Meaning	Background
1	<i>Mettagh</i>	Propose to a girl	Voluntary/ matchmaking
2	<i>Sebambangan/ Larian/ Ngelakei/ Ngakuk Majeu</i>	Took the girl away/ escape	Voluntary
3	<i>Ramot</i>	Forcing (from a male perspective)	Coercion
4	<i>Nakad</i>	forcing (from a female perspective)	Coercion

Source: Research observation (2025).

The traditional marriage mechanisms of Lampung demonstrate a diversity of patterns and social backgrounds that reflect the dynamics of values, power relations, and normative systems existing within the *Megow Pak* community. This diversity of mechanisms emphasises that traditional marriage is not a single entity, but rather contextual and rich in the meaning of

local wisdom, with implications for different structural roles in reproducing social values that support democratic practices in community life (Lay et al., 2023; Saiin & Armita, 2019).

This proves that the traditional marriage mechanism of *Megow Pak* Lampung is an arena for learning democracy based on local wisdom. Several indicators are: First, this marriage mechanism embodies the concept of deliberative democracy that is practised not only in the formal political realm, but also in the socio-cultural practices of society. Second, individuals in society do not only play a role as family members, but also as members of society who have the right to express opinions and participate in the deliberation process (Habermas, 2017; Sunstein, 2017; Valadez, 2018). Third, the traditional marriage mechanism of *Megow Pak* Lampung strengthens the culture of citizenship in society because it emphasises the importance of passing on values in supporting democratic stability (Gorodnichenko & Roland, 2021; Kim, 2020; Taylor, 2007).

However, the traditional Lampung marriage system often gives rise to conflicts arising from differences in interests, values, and interpretations of social and cultural norms within a community. However, paradoxically, these conflicts can actually serve as catalysts for dialogue, negotiation, and consensus-building, which are fundamental elements in democratic practices (Breakfast et al., 2024; Coser, 1957; Gulmaliyeva, 2025). *Mettagh* is considered the most ideal marriage mechanism because it upholds family honour and customary order. However, in reality, this method is not entirely free from conflict. Problems often arise in families due to economic and social inequality. Although based on love between the bride and groom, customary demands, ceremonial costs, and symbolic expectations for family honour often create a heavy economic burden, ultimately causing latent tensions that trigger normative disputes.

Sebambangan/ Larian/ Ngelakei/ Ngakuk Majeu is chosen when economic and social status hinder *Mettagh* because this marriage mechanism is the most flexible. However, there are potential conflicts arising from the tension between individual desires and family authority. Although based on mutual love, running away with a girl is considered a disgrace to the family's honour. Ethical issues, religious norms, and legal norms are becoming a flashpoint for conflict between clans/communities amidst the increasing development of human rights, guardianship rights, and women's protection.

As a patriarchal society, the *Ramot* marriage mechanism legitimises men to enforce their will within certain conditions and boundaries. This situation inevitably gives rise to open conflict as a result of the symbolic violation of women's familial honour. Conversely, the *Megow Pak* indigenous community also employs the *Nakad* marriage mechanism, which grants women the right to enforce their will and demand rights with compelling reasons.

Surprisingly, researchers have observed that all of these mechanisms largely foster the strengthening of local democracy, which tends to be harmonious, stable, and fosters strong community ties between clans. First, the continued harmony of household relationships across various marriage mechanisms (Nawawi & Sa'diyah, 2025; Palyanti et al., 2025). Second, in each *Megow Pak* marriage mechanism, almost no important decisions are made directly without communication between families. Even in the *Sebambangan* mechanism, there is the practice of *Ngantak Salah* (a visit by the groom's family to apologise for running away with his daughter as a sign of good faith to gain the marriage's blessing) (Faiz, 2026; Nadriana & Maulidiana, 2025), and Third, the willingness of all parties to accept the results of customary deliberations, even if they do not always benefit their personal interests, is demonstrated through *Pepung* (customary deliberation to reach agreement on traditional ceremonies and the granting of titles before the wedding vows) (Sutanti et al., 2025; Wahyuni & Nurhayati, 2020). Fourth, the *Megow Pak* marriage practice demonstrates that women still have the space to determine their fate. In the *Ramot* mechanism, the final decision remains with the girl after the deliberation process. If the girl refuses, the marriage cannot proceed. Conversely, in the *Nakad* mechanism, women are the primary actors who initiate problem resolution to restore their honour (Arfaat,

2024; Heiss & Mokre, 2023; Kesuma & Cicilia, 2017). These are the results of local democratic practices formed through paradoxical processes.

Marriage customs rooted in traditional values and local wisdom are important social and cultural assets that form the foundation of local democracy as a whole. Most studies on traditional Lampung marriage are still descriptive of anthropology, law and religion (Baihaqi et al., 2022; Kesuma et al., 2022; Sainula & Jafar, 2025; Suhairi, 2021), while studies analysing them from a local democracy perspective are still limited. Yet, local wisdom is a crucial instrument in strengthening socio-cultural and ideological resilience. Furthermore, current democratic life is largely studied in terms of structural forces and state policies (macro and meso-level aspects) (Nasiwan et al., 2023; Rafni & Suryanef, 2017; Ukasah, 2024), while studies emphasising micro-level aspects are very limited. This research confirms that micro-level aspects are a crucial foundation for building democracy at the macro level.

This research also fills an important gap in civic studies, which have tended to focus on formal institutions of citizenship such as political education, electoral participation, and public policy, while the practices of citizenship that develop within local cultural traditions have received relatively little attention. Most research on citizenship still positions democracy as a procedural practice oriented toward the state (Escobar & Bua, 2026; Maulana & Milanti, 2023; Mulyono, 2017; Simon, 2018), thus neglecting democratic practices that grow organically within local communities. However, in the *Megow Pak* Tulang Bawang community, citizenship values are often inherited through sociocultural practices, including customary marriage mechanisms. The novelty of this study lies in positioning customary marriage mechanisms of the *Megow Pak* community as an empirical site for examining local and cultural democracy, an angle largely absent from existing anthropological, legal, and state-centred citizenship literature.

Method

This research uses a narrative qualitative approach that positions the researcher as the primary instrument for collecting, interpreting, and constructing meaning from data (Dimaculangan et al., 2022). In this context, the author recognises that her position as an academic in the field of Civic Education and an individual who has long interacted and lived with the indigenous people of Lampung (particularly the *Megow Pak* community) provides an advantage in the form of a deep understanding of the language, cultural values, traditional symbols, and social dynamics underlying traditional marriage practices. Her position as an insider researcher allows the researcher to gain broader access to informants, build relationships based on trust (*rapport*), and understand cultural meanings that may be difficult for external researchers to grasp (Liu & Burnett, 2022; Milligan, 2016; Ntinda, 2019).

However, the researcher also recognises that this closeness has the potential to create interpretive biases, such as the tendency to accept cultural practices as taken-for-granted, ignore conflicting perspectives, or interpret data based on personal experience. Therefore, this research does not view the insider's position as a source of objectivity, but rather as an epistemological position that requires ongoing critical reflection. Throughout the research process, the researcher consciously distinguished between personal experience and empirical evidence obtained in the field, ensuring that each interpretation was based on data emerging from informants' narratives, not solely on the researcher's knowledge or experience.

To minimise this potential, this study employed several reflexive strategies. First, the researcher conducted continuous reflexive self-examination by documenting initial assumptions, personal experiences, and changes in understanding throughout the research process through reflexive field notes. Second, data interpretation was constructed through source triangulation, comparing information obtained from traditional leaders, community leaders, couples undergoing different marriage mechanisms, and relevant traditional documents. Third, the researcher actively sought out negative cases or narratives that did not

fully support the initial research assumptions, ensuring that the resulting interpretations did not simply represent dominant views within the community. Fourth, the interpretations were discussed again with several key informants (member checking) to ensure that the meanings constructed by the researcher remained consistent with the understanding of the *Megow Pak* community (Carless & Douglas, 2017; De Smet et al., 2026; Karatsareas, 2022; Thomas, 2017).

Participants in this study were traditional figures and actors involved in various marriage mechanisms within the *Megow Pak* Lampung tradition in Tulang Bawang, Lampung Province. Participant recruitment was conducted directly using a snowball technique. Participant selection was voluntary and without coercion. A total of 4 Traditional Figures (PA1, PA2, PA3, PA4) and 4 pairs of traditional Lampung *Megow Pak* marriage actors (PP1, PP2, PP3, PP4) agreed to participate. Participants representing 4 clans within the *Megow Pak* community (*Buay Tegamoan*, *Buay Aji*, *Buay Bulan*, and *Suway Umpu*) completed a consent form before the interview. To maintain privacy, participants' names were recorded with initials, an ethical principle in research.

Data collection used semi-structured interviews focused on participants' experiences navigating the marriage process. To build trust and maintain ethical data collection, traditional leaders and participants were allowed to member-check the interview data before analysis (Candela, 2019). The collected data were analysed using thematic content analysis (Ferdiansyah & Angin, 2020). The interview transcription process included: repeatedly recording the interview data to identify key themes, transcribing the interview data for coding purposes, sorting and categorising key data, interpreting the interview data, and involving participants in providing feedback on the interpretation of the data to produce reliable data.

This study also employed thematic content analysis, following the stages outlined by Clarke and Braun (2017). The analysis began with a familiarisation process through repeated readings of interview transcripts, observation notes, and customary documents to gain a comprehensive understanding of the dynamics of the *Megow Pak* marriage mechanism. Next, the analysis conducted open coding to identify units of meaning related to six indicators of local democracy: openness to information, respect for differences of opinion, deliberation, equality, the transmission of democratic values, and respect for human rights. Codes with conceptual similarities were then grouped into analytical themes and systematically compared across the four marriage mechanisms (*Mettagh*, *Sebambangan*, *Ramot*, and *Nakad*). The comparison is not intended as a quantitative measure or normative assessment of the quality of local democracy, but rather as a representation of the level of thematic evidence obtained from the data analysis. The symbol (***) is assigned if an indicator appears consistently across various stages of the marriage mechanism, is supported by the majority of informants' narratives, and is confirmed through observations and customary documents. The symbol (**) indicates that the indicator appears at several important stages, but its intensity and consistency vary with the context of the particular marriage mechanism. Meanwhile, the symbol (*) indicates that the indicator is only found at limited stages or appears sporadically in the informant's narrative, thus having a relatively lower evidential strength. Therefore, the matrix is an interpretive synthesis that represents the pattern of theme emergence in the empirical data, not a measurement instrument or statistical ranking. To increase the credibility and confirmability of the analysis, the coding process is carried out iteratively through continuous comparison between categories, informant narratives, observation results, and customary documents. Each indicator receives a certain level of evidence only if it is supported by consistent findings across data sources (data triangulation) and shows a recurring pattern across the cases analysed.

Results and Discussion

Results

The marriage mechanism of young men and women in the Lampung tribe is unique because it upholds religious values, customs, and individual and family interests (micro-meso-

macro). A bachelor and a girl (*mulei-mekhanai*) from the Lampung *Megow Pak* tribe are basically allowed to be close to/date/get acquainted with more than one person of the opposite sex, but with very strict limits. The bachelor is only allowed to meet the girl at home under strict family supervision, while the girl can receive more than one guest, so sometimes they have private conversations via letter or e-messenger to avoid being overheard. The bachelors will compete to win the girl's heart; at certain times, the bachelor will hold a *jaga damar* event (a tradition of gathering bachelors and girls sitting facing each other while lighting a *damar*/lighting a lamp. They will exchange rhymes, sing, and joke around) and or *nyeprite/ngelimun* (a tradition of a bachelor holding a party at the house of the girl he likes by serving various foods and soft drinks) to show the sincerity of his intentions by inviting friends and relatives from both sides.

Mettagh

Mettagh is the most ideal marriage mechanism in the Lampung *Megow Pak* tradition, which officially means "proposal". This mechanism positions marriage as a religious, social, and customary institution established through mutual agreement between families and individuals, thus ensuring the preservation of ethics, family honour, consideration, and social openness. The *Mettagh* marriage mechanism typically addresses not only the individual interests of the prospective bride and groom, but also the interests of other family members. *Mettagh* is the strongest institutional marriage mechanism in the *Megow Pak* community, reflecting principles of local democracy, as all stages of the marriage follow a structured process of communication, deliberation between the parties, and collective consensus.

In the initial stage, the families of the prospective bride and groom mutually verify and confirm their suitability from a moral, social, and customary perspective, including family background (clan, lineage, and social reputation) and the likelihood of accepting the proposal. This involves a comprehensive assessment of the entire extended family on both sides. This stage is informal and conducted internally within the family. In an arranged marriage, the families provide an overview of the advantages of having a partner from the intended family to encourage the prospective bride and groom to agree to the marriage.

Furthermore, the families' initial understanding serves as the basis for declaring their intention to propose (to the groom's family) or accept the proposal (to the bride's family). The spokesperson for both parties is usually a family figure or a highly respected individual, ensuring that the traditional language, both polite and symbolic, is maintained. If the families reach a mutual understanding, they may meet several times to agree on customary procedures, timing, and funding, and to signal their commitment. Finally, the traditional *Peppung* (wedding ceremony) and marriage contract are performed according to religious and state standards, followed by the *Begawi* (marriage ceremony), which is usually held at the groom's family residence.

Sebambangan/Larian/Ngelakei/Ngakuk Majeu

The *Sebambangan/Larian/Ngelakei/Ngakuk Majeu* method is chosen when a *Mettagh* marriage is impossible due to social or economic obstacles, or differing family interests, even though the prospective bride and groom love each other and desire to marry. *Sebambangan/Larian/Ngelakei/Ngakuk Majeu* officially means "to run away", so this method is purely the initiative of the bride and groom. *Sebambangan* is not an anarchic act, but rather a social strategy institutionalised by custom, accompanied by accountability mechanisms and the restoration of family honour. This mechanism begins with an agreement between the bachelor and the girl who wish to marry and have reached an understanding of their respective goals and conditions. The bachelor then informs his family of his intention and travels to pick up the girl at the agreed-upon location, usually accompanied by several close family members. Before leaving, the girl will leave a letter and cash (*penepik*) in his room informing him of her

actions (usually containing an apology, thanks, a statement of voluntary consent, and a request for blessings).

The bachelor will take the girl to a trusted relative or relative, ensuring her honour, dignity, and safety. Several hours later, the bachelor's family will send a traditional figure/family member to perform the *Ngantak Salah* ceremony, explaining their good intentions, the chronology of events, an apology, customary responsibilities, and the willingness of the girl's family to consult. This ceremony is usually accompanied by the bringing of a family heirloom as a guarantee and symbol of peace. Several meetings between the two parties can be held to discuss procedures, timing, fines, customary money, and symbolic sanctions, but this tends to be quicker than the *Mettagh* ceremony. Finally, the traditional *Peppung* and marriage contract are held, usually at the residence of the bachelor's family. Invitations to the traditional *Peppung* and marriage contract for the girl's family usually include fresh fish and *penyeruit* (a type of food made from *penyeruit*).

Ramot

Unlike the *Mettagh* and *Sebambangan* mechanisms, the *Ramot* marriage mechanism historically began with a unilateral initiative from the bachelor and/or his family when attempts to marry through more deliberative channels did not receive the consent of the girl or her family. In the *Megow Pak* tradition, *Ramot* is literally interpreted as the act of bringing or taking a girl to be resolved through customary mechanisms. Historically, this practice developed within the context of a social structure still influenced by patriarchal relations, where men had a more dominant position in initiating the marriage process. However, in *Megow Pak* customary practice, this action is not a final decision; it is the start of a resolution process that must continue through notification to the girl's family, customary deliberation, and giving the girl the opportunity to express her wishes. Thus, the legitimacy of the marriage is not determined by this initial act, but by the results of deliberations involving both families, customary leaders, and especially the girl's consent as the directly affected party. This perspective shows that the *Ramot* mechanism reflects the dynamic adaptation between local traditions and the development of values of equality, justice, and respect for human dignity in contemporary indigenous communities.

The *Ramot* mechanism begins with the bachelor bringing the girl to the residence of a trusted relative or family member as a temporary residence until the customary resolution is carried out. During her stay, the girl is supervised by the family and adult women of the bachelor's family to maintain her safety, honour, and dignity until the customary resolution is carried out. The girl is also lured with material benefits and favours from the bachelor's family to encourage her to marry. Some time later, the bachelor's family must send a messenger, usually a traditional leader or senior family member, to inform his family of the girl's whereabouts and convey the chronology of events, an apology, customary responsibilities, and a commitment to resolve the issue through deliberation. The next stage is the core of the *Ramot* resolution mechanism. The girl's family, along with the traditional leader, visits the meeting place to speak with the bachelor's family. The deliberation aims to obtain explanations from all parties, evaluate the underlying reasons for the incident, and find a mutually acceptable resolution in accordance with customary law. Based on the interviews, the girl is given the opportunity to express her wishes and position directly before her family and traditional leaders. If the girl still refuses to marry, she returns to her family, and the marriage process is discontinued. Conversely, if the girl voluntarily agrees after deliberation, the two families continue negotiations on customary resolution procedures, including agreements on the timing of the marriage, customary obligations, and how inter-family relations will be restored. Finally, the traditional *Peppung* ceremony and marriage contract are performed, usually at the bachelor's family residence.

Although *Ramot* is rooted in historical social structures that reflect unequal gender relations, its resolution practices incorporate deliberative mechanisms that prevent conflict

escalation, restore inter-family relationships, and ensure that final decisions about marriage are made through mutual agreement. In contemporary *Megow Pak* society, these mechanisms also show how customary values adapt to principles of respect for human dignity, mutual consent, and peaceful conflict resolution.

Nakad

Nakad is the opposite of the *Ramot* marriage mechanism, which originates from the girl's initiative. *Nakad* formally means coercion (from the girl's perspective). The girl voluntarily and fully aware goes to the bachelor's parents' home, firmly refuses to return to her parents' home, and demands that the marriage be conducted in the presence of the extended male family and traditional leaders. This is based on strong reasons, usually because the bachelor has violated the girl's honour, dignity, and status.

In this case, the bachelor's family is temporarily obliged to accept the girl into their home or entrust her to an adult woman or trusted relative with absolute protection for her safety, honour, dignity, and status. The bachelor's family will then send a representative from their family/traditional leader to the girl's family to inform them of their daughter's condition and whereabouts. The girl's family, accompanied by the traditional leader, will visit the bachelor's family home to deliberate and acknowledge the marriage. If the reasons are weak, the girl will be taken back by her family, accompanied by an apology and a traditional fine. However, if the reasons are strong, the marriage is mandatory, with an agreement on the procedure, time, traditional money, and symbolic sanctions. Finally, the traditional *Peppung* and marriage ceremony are carried out which are generally held at the residence of the single family.

Discussion

In local communities in Indonesia, democracy is no longer understood solely as an institutional system based on electoral procedures, but also as a social practice internalised within the cultural mechanisms of society. This perspective opens up analytical space for how democratic values are lived out in local traditional practices, including the institution of customary marriage. In the Lampung *Megow Pak* community, customary marriage mechanisms, namely *Mettagh*, *Sebambangan*, *Ramot*, and *Nakad*, function not only as mechanisms for family formation but also as social arenas where local democratic principles are practised, negotiated, and inherited. Based on the findings of this study, the relationship between local traditions and local democracy can be explained through a conceptual framework that positions customary institutions as deliberative community spaces that facilitate the exchange of information, negotiation of interests, and the formation of social consensus. This framework demonstrates that customary practices function as a medium connecting cultural values with democratic practices through six main indicators: openness to information, respect for differences of opinion, deliberation, equality, the inheritance of democratic values, and respect for human rights (Berg-Schlosser, 2017; Suhartono et al., 2025; Türk, 2024).

Table 2.

Matrix of local democratic practice in Megow Pak customary marriage

No	Marriage Mechanisms	Indicator of Local Democracy					
		A	B	C	D	E	F
1	<i>Mettagh</i>	Open communication between families from the start (***)	Family and individual opinions are valued (***)	Intensive deliberation at every stage (***)	Equal in negotiations(**)	Formal inherited customary values (***)	Maintaining dignity and consent (***)
2	<i>Sebambangan/Larian/Ngelakei</i>	Open through the <i>Ngantak</i>	Differences are resolved	Post-event	Couple initiative, but still	The value of social responsibility	There is protection of girls'

No	Marriage Mechanisms	Indicator of Local Democracy					
		A	B	C	D	E	F
3	<i>Ngakuk Majeu</i>	<i>Salah</i> mechanism (**)	through negotiation (***)	deliberation (***)	collective (**)	ity is inherited (***)	honour (***)
	<i>Ramot</i>	Limited at the beginning, increasing after the incident (*)	The girl's opinion is the final decider (**)	Deliberation determines the final decision (***)	Initial relationship is not equal, need paradoxical conflict (**)	Customary values are still inherited (**)	There is a correction through the girl's consent (**)
4	<i>Nakad</i>	Information is conveyed openly by the girl (***)	The girl's opinion is the centre of consideration (***)	Family deliberation determines legitimacy (***)	Women have a bargaining position (***)	The values of justice and responsibility are inherited (***)	Protection of women's dignity is very strong (***)

Source: Data analysis (2026).

Note: A = openness to information; B = respect for differences of opinion; C = deliberation; D = equality; E = inheritance of democratic values; F = respect for human rights. Strength of thematic evidence: (***) strong; (**) moderate; (*) weak.

This analysis sits within the debate between two major approaches to the study of democracy: deliberative democracy and cultural democracy. Deliberative democracy emphasises that the legitimacy of social decisions emerges from a rational discourse process that allows individuals to exchange arguments freely and equally before reaching a collective consensus (Habermas, 2017). Cultural democracy offers a different critical perspective: democratic practices are often rooted in local cultural values that differ from the principles of liberal rationality (Taylor, 2007). An analysis of *Megow Pak's* four marriage mechanisms demonstrates that local democratic practices cannot be reduced to the dichotomous categories of "democratic" or "undemocratic." Rather, each mechanism represents varying degrees of deliberative quality, shaped by the interaction of communicative rationality, cultural structures, power relations, and the goal of maintaining social cohesion. These findings suggest that Habermas's theory of deliberative democracy and Taylor's theory of cultural democracy should be positioned not as substitute frameworks, but as complementary perspectives in explaining how social legitimacy is generated, maintained, and negotiated within customary institutions.

From the perspective of deliberative democracy, *Mettagh's* approach most closely aligns with the ideal deliberative conditions formulated by Habermas. The entire marriage process begins with communication between families, the exchange of information, negotiation of the parties' rights and obligations, and gradual deliberation until a shared consensus is reached. The decision's legitimacy does not derive from the authority of a particular individual or social position, but is constructed through argumentation involving the extended family, traditional leaders, and the bride and groom. Although the deliberation process takes place within a social structure that still respects customary hierarchies, these hierarchies function more as facilitating mechanisms than as instruments of domination. Thus, *Mettagh* demonstrates the key characteristics of deliberative democracy: inclusive communication, a consensus-oriented approach, and legitimacy gained through mutual agreement. At the same time, these findings support Taylor's argument that deliberative practices gain social legitimacy precisely because they are institutionalised through cultural norms and symbols recognised by society.

In contrast, *Sebambangan* demonstrates a more complex relationship with deliberative democracy theory. The girl's decision to leave home without her family's consensus indicates

that this initial action fails to meet the prerequisites for deliberation, which requires communication and argumentation before decision-making. However, this study found that the *Megow Pak* community does not consider this action to be the basis for marriage legitimacy. Legitimacy is only established after the *Ngantak Salah* mechanism, customary deliberation, inter-family negotiations, and the reaching of an agreement on a customary resolution. Therefore, deliberation in *Sebambangan* is not preventive but rather restorative, serving to restore social relations disrupted by the couple's initial actions. This finding suggests that in the context of indigenous communities, deliberation does not always precede social action, as assumed in classical deliberative democracy, but can function as a reconciliation mechanism that restores social legitimacy through dialogue and consensus.

The most critical theoretical examination arises from the *Ramot* mechanism. From the perspective of deliberative democracy, this initial act, carried out without the girl's consent, does not meet the basic requirements of an ideal discourse situation because it occurs within an asymmetrical power relationship and is not entirely free from elements of domination. Therefore, this study does not interpret *Ramot* as a form of deliberative democracy in Habermas's normative sense. However, empirical data shows that this initial act is never considered a source of marital legitimacy in the *Megow Pak* customary system. Legitimacy is instead built through a series of corrective mechanisms, including notification to the girl's family, customary deliberation, inter-family negotiations, and recognition of the girl's right to accept or reject the marriage. In other words, the deliberative process does not erase the unequal power relations at the initial stage, but rather serves as an institutional instrument to correct these inequalities before a final decision is made. These findings demonstrate that local democracy in indigenous communities develops through a process of normative correction, not through the complete elimination of historically inherited social structures. Therefore, *Ramot* is more accurately understood as a mechanism reflecting deliberative transformation, namely, the process by which customary legitimacy shifts from social domination to mutual consent as the basis for community acceptance.

The analysis of *Nakad* also reveals dynamics that cannot be fully explained by the concept of formal equality. On the one hand, *Nakad* provides relatively greater space for women to initiate conflict resolution and places their will at the centre of deliberations in customary deliberations. This situation demonstrates a recognition of women's agency, which aligns with Taylor's notion of the importance of recognition in cultural democracy. However, the findings of this study also indicate that the use of the *Nakad* mechanism requires women to bear significant social consequences, including risks to their personal reputation, family honour, and social acceptance within the community. Therefore, the existence of *Nakad* cannot be automatically interpreted as evidence of the achievement of substantive equality. Rather, this mechanism demonstrates that women do have access to deliberation spaces, but this access remains within the boundaries of social and cultural norms that govern women's behaviour. Therefore, the equality realised through *Nakad* is more accurately understood as contextual procedural equality, namely the opportunities available to women to influence collective decisions, even though they are still influenced by broader cultural structures.

Within this framework, the local democratic values identified in this study demonstrate how democratic values are manifested in customary marriage practices (Deveaux, 2003; Efriani et al., 2022; Lay et al., 2023). First, openness of information is reflected in the family exploration process in the *Mettagh* mechanism and in the *Ngantak Salah* procedure in the *Sebambangan* mechanism. In both processes, families are required to openly explain their social background, chronology of events, and marital intentions to others. This practice reflects the principle of transparency, which in deliberative democracy theory is considered a prerequisite for legitimate decision-making. Second, respect for differences of opinion is evident in the dialogue space that allows families or individuals to voice objections to marriage plans. In some cases, differing interests between families and couples have actually triggered the emergence of alternative mechanisms such as *Sebambangan*. This demonstrates that customary traditions do

not completely suppress individual freedom, but rather provide a social mechanism for negotiating these differences through community forums.

Third, deliberation is the most prominent principle in all *Megow Pak* customary marriage mechanisms. Whether in the proposal process, conflict resolution, or determining customary sanctions, decisions are always made through meetings of families and traditional leaders, which serve as a deliberative forum for the community. Deliberation in this context is not only a formal procedure, but also a social mechanism for maintaining the legitimacy of decisions and the stability of interfamily relationships. Fourth, equality is reflected in the recognition of the roles of various parties in the decision-making process. Although customary structures have a certain hierarchy, marriage practices demonstrate that individuals (including women) have the space to express their will and defend their position. This is particularly evident in the *Nakad* mechanism, where women can demand accountability for violations of honour they experience. Fifth, the inheritance of democratic values occurs through the participation of the younger generation in customary ceremonies and family deliberations. Through this process, the values of dialogue, compromise, and social responsibility are culturally transmitted to the next generation. Sixth, respect for human rights is reflected in customary efforts to maintain individual dignity and restore family honour through social reconciliation mechanisms.

Although the findings indicate that the *Megow Pak* marriage mechanism contains elements of deliberation and collective participation, this study does not assume that customary democracy is an inherently egalitarian system or completely free from power relations. This position aligns with feminist critiques of deliberative democracy, which emphasise that the quality of deliberation is determined not only by the existence of a deliberative forum but also by the distribution of power that shapes the opportunities for each actor to participate equally. Young argues that deliberation processes often reproduce structural inequalities because groups with weaker social positions, including women, do not always have the same capacity to influence the decision-making process (Young, 2020). Fraser adds that consensus cannot automatically be seen as an indicator of democratic legitimacy if it is achieved under conditions of unequal representation or when there are social barriers that limit the participation of certain groups (Fraser, 1990). Therefore, the existence of deliberation within a customary institution needs to be analysed not only from a procedural perspective, but also from the extent to which the process is able to create an inclusive space for participation and reduce unequal power relations. This perspective provides a more critical framework for interpreting the *Megow Pak* marriage mechanism.

Mettagh demonstrates a relatively strong deliberative character, as communication, negotiation, and consensus occur from the early stages of the marriage process. In contrast, *Seimbangan*, *Ramot*, and *Nakad* demonstrate that the deliberation process takes place under more complex social conditions. In *Ramot*, for example, the initial action not based on the girl's consent indicates an asymmetry in power relations that normatively does not meet the requirements of deliberative democracy. However, this study found that the legitimacy of the marriage was not determined by this initial action, but rather by corrective mechanisms through notification to the family, customary deliberation, negotiation between the parties, and the girl's final consent. Meanwhile, *Nakad* demonstrated the strengthening of women's agency through their ability to initiate conflict resolution, although this choice still carries relatively significant social consequences. These findings suggest that deliberative practices in indigenous communities do not occur under ideal conditions as assumed by deliberative democracy theory, but rather develop through a continuous process of negotiation of cultural norms, social structures, and gender relations.

This interpretation also draws support from studies of customary law, which demonstrate that community democracy does not always produce a uniform experience for all community members, especially women. In many indigenous communities, traditional norms can serve as social protection mechanisms while simultaneously reproducing gender-based

divisions of roles and authority (Batsleer, 2013; McKinley, 2023). Therefore, local democracy in the *Megow Pak* community is better understood as an adaptive institutional process, a social mechanism that simultaneously maintains the continuity of cultural values while opening up space for change through deliberation, negotiation, and the reinterpretation of customary norms. From this perspective, the *Sebambangan* and *Nakad* mechanisms not only reflect the diversity of conflict resolution methods within customary systems but also demonstrate the capacity of customary institutions to respond to changing values regarding women's agency, procedural justice, and respect for human dignity. Therefore, the primary contribution of this study is not to claim that customary democracy is identical to deliberative democracy in the ideal sense, but rather to demonstrate that local democracy is a process that is continually negotiated through the interaction between tradition, power relations, and the evolving normative demands of society.

Conceptually, the findings of this study propose a model of the relationship between local traditions and local democracy, in which customary institutions function as community deliberative spaces that integrate cultural values with everyday democratic practices. In this model, customary marriage traditions serve as a medium that transforms social values into democratic practices through six identified key indicators. The model demonstrates that local democracy is not only built through formal state institutions, but also through cultural practices that enable communities to manage differences, resolve conflicts, and build sustainable social consensus. Thus, the Lampung *Megow Pak* customary marriage tradition can be understood as a concrete example of how local wisdom contributes to the formation of a contextual democratic culture rooted in community values.

Conclusion

This study shows that the customary marriage mechanism in the Lampung *Megow Pak* community (*Mettagh*, *Sebambangan*, *Ramot*, and *Nakad*) not only functions as a normative system that regulates family formation, but also as a social arena where local democratic values are practised and reproduced in community life. Customary practices contain several principles that are substantively in line with democratic values, namely openness of information, respect for differences of opinion, deliberation, equality of social participation, the inheritance of democratic values to the next generation, and respect for human dignity. These principles are reflected in various stages of the marriage process, from family exploration, customary negotiations, social reconciliation mechanisms, to collective decision-making involving the extended family and traditional leaders. Thus, the *Megow Pak* customary marriage institution can be understood as a community deliberative space that allows for the exchange of views, negotiation of interests, and the achievement of social consensus within the framework of local cultural values.

These findings also enrich the theoretical debate on the relationship between deliberative democracy and cultural democracy in the context of non-Western societies. On the one hand, the practice of deliberation in *Megow Pak* traditional marriages demonstrates a deliberative process that allows for open dialogue and legitimacy of decisions through community consensus. On the other hand, this process does not fully follow the rational deliberation model assumed in liberal democratic theory, as it remains influenced by cultural symbolism, kinship structures, and honour values that are part of the social cosmology of indigenous communities. Therefore, democratic practices in the *Megow Pak* tradition are more accurately understood as a form of cultural democracy, in which democratic principles are integrated into customary norms and cultural practices that emphasise social harmony and community balance. From this perspective, local democracy is produced not only through formal political institutions but also through cultural practices that regulate social relations in everyday life.

These findings indicate that local wisdom acts as an institutional mechanism supporting the formation of a contextual democratic culture rooted in the community's social structure. However, this study does not intend to generalise that all indigenous communities in Lampung,

or indigenous communities in Indonesia, share similar local democratic patterns. Marriage mechanisms, kinship structures, the distribution of customary authority, and gender relations can differ significantly across communities, potentially shaping the form and quality of local democratic practices. Therefore, this research contribution should be understood as a context-specific explanation of the *Megow Pak* community, rather than as a universal model of customary democracy. To strengthen external validity and broaden theoretical development, further research should conduct comparative studies across various customary communities in Lampung (such as *Saibatin*, *Abung*, *Pubian*, *Sungkai*, and *Way Kanan*) and other customary communities in Indonesia. This comparative approach is crucial for identifying elements of local democracy that are contextual and possess cross-community characteristics, allowing a more comprehensive and explanatory conceptual model of the relationship between customary institutions and local democracy to be developed.

Competing interests

The authors declare that this research was conducted independently without any financial, professional, or personal conflicts of interest that could influence the results and interpretation of the research. This research did not receive any specific funding from public, commercial, or non-profit organisations. All data used were obtained through a legitimate research process and adhered to ethical research principles, including respect for informants, customary values, and local wisdom of the Lampung *Megow Pak* community. The author also declares that the use of technological assistance, including ChatGPT, was only used to support the process of compiling and refining academic language, without affecting the scientific substance or originality of the research findings.

Acknowledgements

The authors express their deepest gratitude to all parties who have contributed to this research, especially to the traditional leaders, informants, academics, and the Lampung *Megow Pak* community (*Buay Tegamoan*, *Buay Aji*, *Buay Bulan*, and *Suway Umpu*) in the Pagar Dewa, Gunung Terang, and Gunung Agung districts who have shared their knowledge and experiences as an empirical basis. We acknowledge the limitations of this research; therefore, criticism and suggestions are highly appreciated to support the development of more comprehensive future studies.

Funding Statement

This research does not receive funding.

Ethics Approval

This research was conducted in accordance with the principles of the Declaration of Helsinki. Approval was granted by the Ethics Committee of UIN Jurai Siwo Lampung, number B-0434/Un.36/L.1/KU.00.9/09/2026, dated September 29, 2026.

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