



# Client Transformation for Access to Public Resources: Neo-Clientelism between the Prosperous National Party and the Laskar Nusantara Rider

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## Abstract

*This study analyses the neo-clientelist relationship between largest laskar group in the Purwoboyo region, the Laskar Nusantara Rider, and the party and elites of Prosperous National Party in the Purwoboyo region. Data were collected through in-depth interviews and non-participatory observation as primary sources. In addition, secondary data were gathered from online media literature. Using Hopkin's (2014) framework, this study finds that the clientelist relationship was established due to a convergence of interests between both sides. The party and elites of the Prosperous National Party in the Purwoboyo region regard the Laskar Nusantara Rider as a vote bank in elections. Conversely, the Laskar Nusantara Rider group perceives clientelism relationship as means of gaining access to public and formal resources via government programmes and social assistance. Furthermore, this study finds that the Laskar Nusantara Rider play a role in distributing public resources, aligning with Torquist (1990) notion of a state-backed client theory.*

**Keywords:** Neo-clientelism; Laskar Nusantara Rider; Political party; Vote; Purwoboyo

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## Introduction

Clientelist relationships between political parties, politicians, and thug groups represent a persistent feature of Indonesia's political dynamics. Thug groups are typically defined as non-state groups, such as mafias or party wing organisations, that utilise violence to provide security services and engage in illicit economic activities. Within such clientelist arrangements, politicians provide protection from legal prosecution for these illegal business activities, while thug group, in return, mobilise electoral support, intimidate political rivals, and deliver security services to protect the interests of political elites and parties who employ their services (Tajima, 2018, p. 2).

This article addresses to analyse the clientelist relationship between one of the largest *laskar* groups in the Purwoboyo region,

the Laskar Nusantara Rider, and the party and elites of the Prosperous National Party (PNP) in the Purwoboyo region<sup>2</sup>. This clientelist relationship is formed with the aim of gaining access to public and formal resources, particularly government programmes such as social assistance and scholarships. Access to these resources became possible through the organisational transformation of the Laskar Nusantara Rider. The tranformation involved registering the group as a legal entity with the Ministry of Law and Human Rights and establishing a business enterprise in the form a *Commanditaire Vennootschap* (CV).

This research is significant because previous studies have portrayed thug organisations as illegal organisations that

<sup>2</sup> All names of political party, organisations, sources, and regions in this article have been changed or anonymised in accordance with the research ethics standards in DPP Fisipol UGM



commit violence and acquire tangible resources through illegal clientelist relationships with politicians and political parties (Aspinall and van Klinken, 2011; I. D. Wilson, 2015) However, previous studies have not examined the transformation of client actors from illegal to legal status as a strategy to gain access to public and formal resources. Therefore, this study focuses on the Laskar Nusantara Rider as a client that has undergone organisational transformation into a legal organisation in order to gain public resources through clientelist relationship with the party and elites of the PNP in the Purwoboyo region. Furthermore, this research is of interest because the Laskar Nusantara Rider functions not only as a client, but also as an intermediary in the distribution of public resources. Due to the sensitive nature of certain information,

the identities of interviewees and specific details have been anonymised in accordance with privacy considerations and research ethics.

## **Theoretical Framework**

### **State-Backed Client**

The state-backed client framework defines the state as a supra-patron, the village head as the local patron or state-backed client, and the village community as the client. State-backed client emerged alongside the expansion of the state's role in efforts to capitalise agriculture within rural areas. Rather than viewing the process of agricultural capitalisation as a class struggle between landlords and farm labourers, this theory highlights the emergence of a new minority class that

benefits from state-sponsored agricultural capitalisation as the state-backed clients (Tornquist, 1990, p. 426).

To maintain their power, state-backed clients utilise state instruments such as *tanah bengkok* (land incentives), development programmes, administrative tools, and, in some cases, repressive measures. State-backed client not only control the instruments funded by the state budget but also control a significant portion of the surplus generated by agricultural production (Tornquist, 1990, p. 426). In return, the clients or the rural community who establish relationships with state-backed client receive both economic and political benefits such as access to credit loans, fertiliser subsidies, high-grade rice seeds, and farm labour allocations. Additionally, state-backed clients organise large groups

of people who indirectly benefit from agricultural capitalisation, such as casual labourers (Tornquist, 1990, p. 426).

## Neo-Clientelism

The concept of neo-clientelism interprets patrons as actors who contest elections and clients as those who support and vote for them. The clientelist relationship becomes increasingly 'democratic', allowing for patron turnover. As a result, patrons must compete with one another to secure client votes to win elections (Hopkin, 2014, p. 3). Neo-clientelism cannot be separated from the expansion of the state's role in both economic and social fields. The state has the capacity to define detailed economic policies and to implement financially beneficial programmes such as social assistance, pension schemes, subsidies, housing support, and



public services. This expanded role is often utilised by political parties and ruling party cadres to manipulate state resources and link them to citizen in exchanges for electoral support (Hopkin, 2014, p. 9).

On the other hand, clients tend to enjoy a higher standard of living and weaker honour-based obligations. They increasingly demand material benefits in return for their political support. In addition, neo-clientelism in the modern era is more market-oriented, whereby clients seek to maximise personal gains. As a result, clients tend to be less idealistic, more calculating, less reliant on a single option, often refusing to form long-term political loyalties. Thus, a client may switch allegiance if their material gains are no longer fulfilled (Hopkin, 2014, p. 4).

Neo-clientelism cannot be separated from the exchange of material resources between

patrons and clients. The resources offered by patrons may take the form of either public goods or private goods. Public goods include economic policies, foreign policy decisions, industrial strategies that favour particular sectors, and public investment in certain territories. In contrast, private goods may consist of job opportunities, facilitated access to welfare benefits, allocations for public sector employment, and preferential treatment in administrative processes (Hopkin, 2014, p. 5). Conversely, clients contribute resources such as votes for certain parties and candidates, assistance with campaign activities, and organised vote packages gathered from friends or work colleagues (Hopkin, 2014, p. 5).



## **Neo-Clientelism, Elections, and the Thug Mobilization**

Within the specific context of neo-clientelism, elections, and thug involvement in Southeast Asia, illegal groups often act as protectors of people experiencing economic hardships and insecurity. Over time, impoverished indebted clients develop loyalty towards local bosses and mafias. This loyalty strengthens the local power foundation of these illegal groups. Illegal groups exercise coercive clientelism through violence, vote buying, electoral frauds, and control over strategic economic resources (Sidel, 2005, p. 16).

Specific to the Indonesian context, the clientelist relationships between political parties and thug organisations can be traced back to the New Order era. During 1970 elections,

The Party of Functional Groups (Golongan Karya or Golkar) utilised thugs and underground figures as part of its winning machinery. Golkar eventually secured the minimum threshold required to enter the Parliament (I. Wilson, 2010, p. 202). This success was closely linked to the involvement of the Pancasila Youth Organisation, widely recognized as the largest official thug organisation, which frequently engaged in acts of violence to achieve political goals (I. Wilson, 2010, p. 202).

However, following the fall of the New Order regime, the patron-client relationship between the state and thug organisations became fragmented. As a result, the state's monopoly over the violent capacities of these groups was disrupted. This fragmentation led to an increase in the use of violence and transformed the pursuit of power into more diffuse channels,



including engagement through political parties. Consequently, thugs and other violent entrepreneurs gained a stronger bargaining position and became more capable of negotiating their interests. Although political support remains important for these groups, it is no longer the primary determinant of their existence (I. Wilson, 2011, p. 245). The fall of Soeharto's authoritarian regime also led to an increase in the number of politically affiliated thug groups involved in political mobilisation and illegal activities. Politician would provide protection from law enforcement for such illegal activities while thug groups mobilized support, intimidated political opponents, and offered security services to safeguard political parties and their elites (Tajima, 2018, p. 2 ; I. D. Wilson, 2015, p. 24)

In the 1999 elections, Indonesian Democratic Party of Struggle (Partai Demokrasi Indonesia Perjuangan or PDIP) adopted a strategy that centred on Soekarno's populist narrative and the concept of *wong cilik* (common people). This approach aimed to attract marginalised groups, including thugs, unemployed men aged 18 to 40 years, and the urban poor. PDIP's efforts to recruit members of the lower class, including thugs, were intended to establish a strong connection with the *wong cilik* and to demonstrate that PDIP genuinely represented their interest (I. Wilson, 2010, p. 204). Moreover, the 1999 election witnessed the emergence of a new form of thug group known as the *satgas* (*satuan tugas partai* or party task force) which adopted a military-inspired structure, resulting in uniforms that closely resembled those of the national army.



For political party, *satgas* played a practical role in maintaining security, managing traffic, and mobilising the masses in campaign activities. For the *satgas* themselves, the election period presented an opportunity to gain access to economic resources, such as collecting security fees for small businesses, monopolising security services for entertainment venues, and controlling parking fees (I. Wilson, 2010, p. 203).

Overall, the literature reviewed above has provided overviews into case studies concerning illegal activities conducted by illegal groups, as well as clientelist relationships involving political parties, political elites, and thug groups. However, previous studies have not examined the transformation of clients from illegal actors into legal actors in their effort to access public/formal resources.

This study seeks to contribute to the existing discourse by exploring the transformation of a client namely the Laskar Nusantara Rider through a legalisation process involving registration with the Ministry of Law and Human Rights. This transformation enabled the group to access public and formal resources such as government programmes, the creation of business entities, and the receipt and distribution of social assistance. Furthermore, this research is significant as the Laskar Nusantara Rider not only acts as a client, but also serves as an intermediary in the distribution of public resources to the wider community.

## Research Method

This research employs a qualitative approach. The selection of this method is based on the characteristics of qualitative research, which





involves the analysis of non-numerical data, the exploration of social phenomena within society, and the description of reality based on participants' lived experiences (Sarantakos, 1998, p. 6). Specifically, this study adopts a case study method. This selection is informed by the defining features of case study research, which is qualitative in nature, aims to provide a comprehensive explanation of a phenomenon, relies on context-specific, collects data within real-life settings, and acknowledges the inseparability of cases from their contexts. Moreover, case study research requires data triangulation and focuses on a single object of one phenomenon (Gerring, 2007, p. 2).

In this research, two types of data were utilised: primary data and secondary data. The primary data comprised

information obtained through in-depth interviews. This technique was chosen due to its ability to facilitate open-ended questioning, allowing interviewees to respond freely to thematic prompts and to elaborate on both brief and complex questions. It also enables the researcher to guide the discussion, reflect on the interviewee's experiences, pose follow-up questions, and actively engage as a listener throughout the interview process (Broneus, 2011, p. 1). In order to obtain in-depth information, the researcher conducted interviews with four interviewees whose identities have been anonymised in accordance with research ethics. These interviewees were either directly involved with, or had significant interaction with the Laskar Nusantara Rider organisation.



The in-depth interviews were conducted between May and September 2023 in the Purwoboyo region.

The researcher also employed a non-participatory observation technique, which was used as a source of primary data. This technique was selected due to the defining characteristic of non-participatory observation, whereby the researcher is positioned as a separate entity from the object of the research (Sarantakos, 1998, p. 229). In the context of this research, the researcher observed two campaign activities conducted by the Laskar Nusantara Rider on 21 January 2024 and 28 January 2024 in the Purwoboyo region. The researcher also employed literature data from online media as secondary data to complement the primary findings. Online media was chosen due to its accessibility and its relevance to the specific theme addressed

in this research. After all data had been collected, the researcher triangulated the various data sources to enhance the validity of the research findings (Guion et al., 2011, p. 1).

## Laskar Nusantara Rider Organisational Profile

The history of the relationship between gangs and political parties in the Purwoboyo region began during New Order era. During the 1982-1983 period, the *petrus* (*penembakan misterius* or mysterious shootings) targeted groups of thug that were perceived as disturbing public order. The *petrus* signalled that the gangs were no longer being utilised as extensions of the state's interests. This led to thug groups seeking alternative *bekingan* (protection) from opposition parties, namely the Prosperous National Party (PNP) and the Indonesian Islamic Party (IIP) (Kennedy, 2018).



In its development, two major thug groups emerged namely Qezer affiliated with the PNP and carrying a nationalist ideology and Sozin affiliated with the IIP and promoting an Islamist ideology (Interview N3, 3/6/2023; Kennedy, 2018).

One of the interviewees (Interview N2, 21/05/2023) explained that in the early 2000s, as the influence of the IIP grew stronger in the Purwoboyo region, the Islamic Youth Movement (IYM) became the most dominant *laskar* group. The dominance of the IYM allowed them to seize 'land of fortune' controlled by sympathisers of the PNP. These included parking lots, night club, security contracts, and other sources of livelihood successfully were forcibly taken by the IYM. Realising the severity of their situation, the sympathisers of the PNP decided to form a rival *laskar* group. The group was

named Barisan Rahmatan Lil Alamin to convey an Islamic impression and to serve a camouflage to deceive the IYM. At the beginning of its establishment, Barisan Rahmatan Lil Alamin avoided direct clash with the IYM because of the disparity in power. However, after successfully building their strength to the IYM, Barisan Rahmatan Lil Alamin moved to reclaim the 'land of fortune' occupied by the IYM. As a result, Barisan Rahmatan Lil Alamin became the largest thug organisation affiliated with the PNP and its political elites (Interview N2, 21/05/2023).

The Interviewee (Interview N2, 21/05/2023) explained that during the third leadership period, the succession process within the Barisan Rahmatan Lil Alamin did not proceed smoothly. This was caused by the previous chairman of the Barisan Rahmatan Lil Alamin



who refuse to step down his position at the end of his term. Dissatisfied with the organisation's stagnant condition, lack of direction, and the absence of clear activities, several members of Barisan Rahmatan Lil Alamin decided to separate themselves from the parent organisation and establish a new *laskar* organisation called the 'Nusantara Rider' (Interview N2, 21/05/2023).

Another interviewee (Interview N4, 03/08/2023) stated that the Laskar Nusantara Rider was officially established on 30 August 2008. Currently, the Laskar Nusantara Rider has approximately 8,000 members and operates primarily in the central region of Java Island. Its organisational structure consists of a chairman, vice chairman, secretary, treasurer, and several division heads. The Laskar Nusantara Rider also comprises

several divisions, including Public Relations, Social Outreach, Social Media, Legal, and Fundraising (Interview N4, 03/08/2023).

There are currently around 200 *laskar* groups in the Purwoboyo region affiliated with the PNP (Interview N2, 21/05/2023). However, the Laskar Nusantara Rider holds the greatest influence and boast the largest membership (Interview N4, 03/08/2023). In addition, the Laskar Nusantara Rider has undergone a significant transformation, from an organisation initially formed by street youth known for causing troubles on the streets to a nationalist organisation that explicitly againsts radicalism (Oda, 2017). What further distinguishes the Laskar Nusantara Rider is its formal legal status. It holds an official organisation permit from the Ministry of Law and Human Rights, operates a business entity



in the form of a CV, and has access to government programmes and social assistance schemes (Interview N4, 03/08/2023).

## Findings

### Consolidation and Organisation of Thug Groups in the Post-New Order Local Domain.

The clientelist relationship between the Laskar Nusantara Rider and the party elites of the PNP Purwoboyo region cannot be separated from ideological factors. In selecting a patron, one of the key determinants is ideological preference. For example, in the context of the Purwoboyo region, *laskar* groups with Islamist ideological preferences such as the IYM, Sozin, and Ahmad Marwis tend to align with the PII. Conversely, *laskar* groups with nationalist ideological orientations such as the Laskar Nusantara Rider,

Barisan Rahmatan Lil Alamin, and Laskar Bledak affiliate with the PNP. The cultivation of these ideological affiliations occurs organically through socialisation within families and close-knit communities. Therefore, ideological transmission often takes place intergenerationally, from grandfather to father, and then to child (Winedar, 2019).

Not only that, the influencing factors also include the electoral context and material factors. Elections, as a competition for the highest number of votes, encourage parties to use to use various means to secure voter support. The *laskar* groups are seen as a potential vote bank in every election. The potential votes that can be gained through the support of *laskar* groups can reach thousands. The party, in this case the PNP in the Purwoboyo region, did not hesitate to take this golden opportunity, considering that

the vote bank might otherwise be captured by rival parties (Interview N2, 21/05/2023). On the other hand, the *laskar* groups view clientelism as an opportunity to gain concrete resources and improve their standard of living. This is because *laskar* members are predominantly poorly educated, lack marketable skills, and are generally reluctant to work under strict rules (Interview N1, 23/05/2023). It is this convergence of interests that forms the foundation of the clientelist relationship between Laskar Nusantara Rider and the PNP is built.

In order to support this clientelist relationship, an organisational scheme was established, which has evolved over time. Initially, *laskar* groups (including Laskar Nusantara Rider) were incorporated into the organisational structure of the PNP in the Purwoboyo region.

This arrangement was reinforced by the creation of the *satgas* and *Laskar Partai* division within the PNP's organisational framework, tasked with providing security during various party activities. The rationalisation of *laskar* groups into the PNP Purwoboyo's organisational structure was intended to facilitate coordination and supervision of these groups within the Purwoboyo region. However, over time, *laskar* groups were formally separated from the PNP Purwoboyo's organisational structure. This separation was motivated by the lack of a clear operational accountability mechanism and the party's internal regulations (*Anggaran Dasar dan Anggaran Rumah Tangga* or AD/ART), which stipulated that only the *Satgas Partai* is officially recognised as a part of the party's organisational structure, while *laskar* groups are not



(Interview N2, 21/05/2023). This is evidenced in the 2019-2024 AD/ART) of the PNP Purwoboyo region, Article 55, paragraph 2, concerning the *Satgas Partai*, which states “*The Satuan Tugas (Satgas) Partai*, in carrying out its security and protocol duties, is responsible to the Party Leadership Council at its respective level.” (AD/ART PNP Purwoboyo region 2019-2024, 2019, p. 31).

Currently, *Satgas Partai* and the *laskar* groups operate as two separate entities. *Satgas Partai* is a structural part of the PNP responsible for maintaining authority and security during party activities, while the *laskar* groups are organisations outside the formal structure of the PNP Purwoboyo region, serving as a forum for cadres and militant sympathisers affiliated with the party (Interview N2, 21/05/2023). The coaching and supervision of *laskar* groups are

carried out by senior figures of the PNP Purwoboyo and PNP cadres who are members of the DPR and DPRD. In addition, some members of Laskar Nusantara Rider have been appointed by the board of the PNP Purwoboyo to occupy party structural positions within the party, such as serving as chairmen of Branch Committees (Interview N3, 03/06/2023). This means that although Laskar Nusantara Rider and the PNP in the Purwoboyo region are currently separate organisational entities, they continue to maintain strong ties of affiliation with each other (Interview N3, 03/06/2023).

## Organisational Transformation

One of the interviewees (Interview N4, 30/07/2023) explained that the Laskar Nusantara Rider initially operated without clear legal status, as the organisation had not yet



registered with any official institution. However, in 2019, the Laskar Nusantara Rider formally registered itself as a community organisation by obtaining legal recognition from the Ministry of Law and Human Rights (Interview N4, 30/07/2023).

The reason behind registering as a community organisation was to gain official recognised from the government (Interview N4, 30/07/2023). Furthermore, this legal status enabled the Laskar Nusantara Rider to access various government programmes across various agencies, such as the Department of Culture, Department of Defence, Department of Industry, and Department of Trade (Interview N4, 30/07/2023). The change in name and organisational status helped the Laskar Nusantara Rider appear distinct from its strong affiliation with the PNP

Purwoboyo. This distinction was crucial, considering that political parties are generally restricted from directly accessing initiatives launched by government agencies (Interview N4, 30/07/2023).

Upon closer examination, the transformation of the Laskar Nusantara Rider was a strategic move aimed to opening access to previously inaccessible resources. By transitioning from an unregistered *laskar* group to a legally recognised community organisation, the Laskar Nusantara Rider gained access to public and formal resources. This transformation allows the Laskar Nusantara Rider not only to access government programmes and receive social assistance but also to establish business entities and engage in business legally.





## **Clientilist Relationship Patron-Intermediary- Mass Relationship**

### **Liaison Between Patron and Masses**

The election period is a busy time for the Laskar Nusantara Rider. *Laskar* groups, especially the Laskar Nusantara Rider, are frequently requested to provide assistance in supporting the election campaigns of political candidates. These candidates include those running for seats in the House of Representative, Regional People's Representative Council, and for regional regent positions, all of whom are affiliated with the PNP (Interview N4, 30/07/2023). The forms of assistance provided by the Laskar Nusantara Rider include serving as part of the candidates' success teams, promoting candidates among grassroots supporters of the PNP, mobilisation masses

for grand campaign events, securing campaign venues, and mobilising votes on election day (Non-Participatory Observation, 28/01/2024).

*"Everything depends on their own wishes, we never offer ourselves, they come to us, [saying] 'please help me, I want to compete'. When they come, we meet [them] to discuss how we might support them. We then socialise [the information] that there are candidates seeking support. Yes, like that, we socialise [that] there are candidates for the legislative [election] who ask for support, there are candidates for the regent [election] who ask for support, yes, just like that. If you force [our members] to vote [for a candidate], you cannot [guarantee the result], right in the voting booth, they just vote for whoever we do not know. It will depend [on whether]*



*they can convince my friends or not. If they can convince my friends, then my friends will vote [for them] in the voting booth, if not, they will say yes that they will vote, but in reality they won't vote [for the candidate] in the election. But if there are members who do not vote for legislative candidates supported by Laskar Nusantara Rider, there are no sanctions.” (Interview N4, 30/07/2023).*

The above statement shows that the Laskar Nusantara Rider is appealing to politicians. With 8,000 members, it is undoubtedly an ideal vote bank in the effort to secure electoral victory. Moreover, this statement illustrates that the Laskar Nusantara Rider holds a bargaining position when dealing with politicians, considering it can decide whether or not to support them. Furthermore, the Laskar Nusantara Rider board

does not impose sanctions on its members if they choose not to support and vote for the regent and legislative candidates officially endorsed by the Laskar Nusantara Rider.

Therefore, the clientelist relationship between the Laskar Nusantara Rider and the legislative and regent candidates is asymmetrical. The Laskar Nusantara Rider remains loyal to one party, namely the PNP, but may change its support for regent candidates and legislative candidates nominated by the PNP Purwoboyo. This shows that the Laskar Nusantara Rider as a client, has the power to withdraw its support from patrons, specifically, regent and legislative candidates who are considered as unable to accommodate the interest of the Laskar Nusantara Rider. This is particularly notable, as it is typically expected that a client supporting a party will also support its candidates.



However, the Laskar Nusantara Rider shows it has the power to also withdraw support from party-nominated candidates.

## Programatic Access

The Laskar Nusantara Rider assumes a dual role in relation to access to public resources, acting as both as a distributor and a recipient of public resources in the form of government programmes. The Laskar Nusantara Rider is often mobilised to distribute resources owned by patrons to the masses (Interview N4, 13/08/2023). The Laskar Nusantara Rider is deployed to support the implementation of programmes initiated by their patrons, who are legislative members. The success of the programme, in this case, involves assisting in its execution on the ground, by acting as a field coordinators and identifying participants for the programme

proposed by the legislators (Interview N4, 13/08/2023). One example of such a programme in which the Laskar Nusantara Rider acts as an intermediary in distributing resources is the 'Gemar Makan Ikan' programme. This programme was initiated to promote fish consumption within the community and to preserve river ecosystems. As part of its implementation, the programme involved distributing thousands of fish seeds into the river (Sekretariat DPRD Puwoboyo, 2021). The Laskar Nusantara Rider was tasked with assisting in the technical implementation of this programme on the ground (Interview N3, 03/06/2023).

*"For example, in the 'Gemar Makan Ikan' Programme, the field coordinator or regional field coordinator of the Laskar Nusantara Rider will be entrusted with handling the programme in their area." (Interview N3, 03/06/2023).*

On the other hand, the Laskar Nusantara Rider can also act as recipients of public resources in the form of government programmes. One of the government programmes received by the Laskar Nusantara Rider is the 'Indonesia Pintar' programme (PIP). This programme provides social assistance in the form of cash, expanded access, and learning opportunities to students from poor or vulnerable families to support their education (Kemendikbud, 2020). In its implementation, this programme is often channelled through the network of aspirations of members of the House of Representatives to their constituents (Juniato, 2022). The Laskar Nusantara Rider are then mobilised to search for participants who meet the eligibility criteria for the PIP (Interview N4, 13/08/2023). The recipient of the programme

can include family members, relatives, friends and neighbours of the Laskar Nusantara Rider members who meet the requirements of the PIP.

*"Government programmes are usually [channelled] through members of the House of Representatives. For example, the PIP has been promoted, and the government already works with members of the House of Representatives to reach a wider community. The members of the House of Representatives must have a PIP scholarship quota. For example, a member contacted the board, and said 'I have a PIP quota, I assign the Laskar Nusantara Rider to find 50 participants.'" (Interview N4, 13/08/2023).*

Based on the information in the previous paragraph, it can be interpreted that the Laskar Nusantara Rider plays a dual role both as an intermediary linking



patrons with the masses and as a recipient of public and formal resources. The intermediary role involves assisting in the distribution of public resources from patrons (members of House Representative) to the mass base of the PNP Purwoboyo, as exemplified by the 'Gemar Makan Ikan' programme. On the other hand, Laskar Nusantara Rider also acts as a recipient of public resources, as seen in the case of the PIP, whose benefits are felt either directly or indirectly by members of Laskar Nusantara Rider. A deeper examination reveals that this difference in roles arises due to the characteristics of the public resources accessed. The intermediary role is primarily associated with government programmes initiated directly by government agencies, whereas the client role emerges in relation

to government programmes distributed through the aspiration network of members of the House of Representatives.

## **Access Material Resources Through Business Entities**

Another method used by the Laskar Nusantara Rider to raise fund and gain concrete resources is the establishment of a business entity in the form of a CV. The business entity owned by the Laskar Nusantara Rider is known as CV Putra Nusantara Rider. This entity operates in the services sector, especially in parking and security services. The selection to focus on the services sector is based on the capabilities of the human resources available within the Laskar Nusantara Rider and on the potential of the areas in which the organisation operates (Interview N4, 03/09/2023). Furthermore, the decision to



specialise in these two types of services cannot be separated from the reality that the majority of the Laskar Nusantara Rider members are high school graduates with limited professional skills (Interview N2, 26/09/2023). By owning a business entity in the form of CV, the Laskar Nusantara Rider is able to engage in business collaborations and enter into memoranda of understanding (MOU) with other business entities (Interview N1, 23/05/2023).

The security services offered by CV Putra Nusantara Rider are usually utilised by event organisers. The types of events that require security services vary and including weddings, cultural events, *tabligh akbar* (mass Islamic preaching events), and other occasions (Interview N2, 26/09/2023). In addition, Laskar Nusantara Rider also manages parking lots at several locations.

One of the largest parking sites managed by CV Putra Nusantara Rider is located in the area of one of the largest markets in the Purwoboyo region (Interview N4, 03/09/2023).

### **The Patron's Role as Protector and Provider to Cliens Legal Asssistance/ Advocacy for Laskar Members Facing Legal Problems**

The campaign period is a volatile time, prone to friction between rival political parties. In the context of the Purwoboyo region, tensions between *laskar* group are inevitable. The most common confrontations occur between *laskar* affiliated with the PII, such as the IYM, Sozin, and Ahmad Marwis and those aligned with the PNP, including Barisan Rahmatan Lil Alamin, Laskar Nusantara Rider, and Laskar Ganas (Winedar, 2019).



One interviewee (Interview N4, 13/08/2023) explained that these frictions between *laskar* groups often arise during the campaign period, when large rallies and motorbike convoys pass along the main roads of the Purwoboyo region. These convoys, locally referred to as *blombongan*, frequently end up in the chaos due to provocations from rival groups, the convoys entering opposition territory, or deliberate infiltration by members of opposing factions (Interview N4, 13/08/2023).

*"In the Purwoboyo region, the classic rivalry, is between the PNP and the PII. It is ingrained. It has been there even before we were born, since the time of Mr Soeharto. The PNP and the PII have always clashed." (Interview N4, 13/08/2023).*

One of the interviewees (Interview N1, 23/05/2023) explained that clashes between

the *laskar* from the PNP and those from the PII often result in both immaterial losses, such as casualties and injuries, and material losses, such as damage to buildings and vehicles. As a result, it is not uncommon for members of the Laskar Nusantara Rider to be arrested by the police for their involvement in these clashes and for causing both immaterial and material losses. In such cases, the Laskar Nusantara Rider often seek assistance in the form of legal advocacy from the elite figures of the PNP Purwoboyo to help resolve their legal problems (Interview N1, 23/05/2023).

*'Yes, it is just like this, participating in the campaign is the party's responsibility. Based on our past experiences, for example, when there are clashes, especially during blombongan convoys, [and someone gets into trouble], say, their motorbike is*

*confiscated by the police, the party will cover the fines. They will also help those who are arrested. So, when talk about advocacy, it does not just mean legal assistance, but also financial assistance.” (Interview N1, 23/05/2023).*

The above statement illustrates that the PNP board in the Purwoboyo region acts as a protector for the Laskar Nusantara Rider. This is evident in the form of advocacy efforts aimed at supporting and resolving legal issues faced by the Laskar Nusantara Rider members. However, the protection provided by the PNP Purwoboyo region is not absolute. In certain cases, particularly when members cause significant material damage or casualties, legal consequences are unavoidable. In such situations, the PNP Purwoboyo board can only negotiate to

ensure that the members of the Laskar Nusantara Rider receive reduced penalties (Interview N1, 23/05/2023).

## Other Forms of Assistance to Laskar Groups

One of the interviewees (Interview N3, 03/06/2023) explained that *laskar* organisations generally have a supervisor who is either a member of the House of Representatives or a member of the local parliament. More specifically, the Laskar Nusantara Rider is guided by both a member of the House of Representatives and a member of the local parliament in the Purwoboyo region. Broadly speaking, the role of the patron is to provide guidance to the members of the Laskar Nusantara Rider. However, in practice, this guidance can take





various forms, such as financial assistance and the provision of an ambulance (Interview N3, 03/06/2023).

*"Yes, definitely. Sponsoring the funding of laskar organisation, helping to resolve legal issues, producing membership t-shirts, and providing social assistance according to the needs of laskar are also forms of support provided." (Interview N3, 03/06/2023).*

The above statement shows that the patron acts as a resource provider for the Laskar Nusantara Rider. The provision of funds and other material support is an effort by the patron to maintain the loyalty of the Laskar Nusantara Rider members. In addition, the supervisor acts as a protector when members become involved in legal issues. The patron also serves as a provider of social assistance, such as offering

ambulance service for *laskar* members in need (Interview N3, 03/06/2023). Interestingly, the patron's role towards the Laskar Nusantara Rider members extends beyond organisational matters and into the personal lives of the members (Interview N3, 03/06/2023).

## Discussions

Based on the empirical findings presented in the previous chapter, the neo-clientelist relationship in this case study is an asymmetrical one between patrons who possess resources and clients who offer loyalty. However, clients may switch patrons if the latter are no longer to provide both material and immaterial resources. These findings align with Hasrul Hanif's findings in *New Clientelism Politics and the Dilemma of Democratisation in Indonesia*, which argue that clients do not always support the party or



candidates offering resources. A clients may change patrons if an agreement between the two sides cannot be reached (Hanif, 2009, p. 348). However, this case study diverges in one key respect: the neo-clientelist relationship established between the PNP and the Laskar Nusantara Rider, in which the Laskar Nusantara Rider remains loyal to the PNP, it retains the flexibility to switch allegiance between different candidates, depending on which offers the most favourable deal.

In addition, this neo-clientelist relationship was established with the aim of distributing concrete resources. The PNP elite in the Purwoboyo region facilitated access to public resource through legal channels. As a result, the Laskar Nusantara Rider underwent a transformation from an informal organisation to one with legal status, registering with the Ministry of Law and

Human Rights and establishing a business entity, CV Putra Nusantara Rider, which engages in security and parking services.

In addition, the Laskar Nusantara Rider acts as an intermediary, helping to distribute public resources to grassroots constituents. This can be seen by the role in facilitating the equitable distribution of recipients for the PIP and facilitating equitable distribution of fish seeds for the 'Gemar Makan Ikan' programme. This case study aligns with Olle Torquist's theory of the state-backed client, though the context and the political actors differ. While Torquist places the state as patron, the village head as intermediary, and farmers as clients (Torquist, 1990, p. 426), this case study situates the PNP Purwoboyo elites as patrons, the Laskar Nusantara



Rider as intermediaries, and the grassroots masses of the PNP as clients within the electoral context.

Finally, the neo-clientelist relationship between the PNP Purwoboyo elites and the Laskar Nusantara Rider is formed by two key factors: ideology and material resources. Ideological alignment is based on nationalist ideology between the PNP Purwoboyo and the Laskar Nusantara Rider. Material factors include access to social assistance programmes, financial support, and protection in the form of legal advocacy for members facing legal issues. These material benefits intensify and perpetuate the clientelist relationship between the PNP elites and the Laskar Nusantara Rider members.

## Conclusion

This article has contributed to the discussion on asymmetrical relationship by illustrating how

the party and elites of the PNP in Purwoboyo region act as patrons who offer resources, while the Laskar Nusantara Rider function as clients who offer loyalty. This form of neo-clientelism is flexible in the sense that the Laskar Nusantara Rider remain loyal to the party, their allegiance is not necessarily fixed to any one candidate promoted by the party. The neo-clientelist relationship between the PNP Purwoboyo elites and the Laskar Nusantara Rider is aimed at facilitating access to public and formal resources, particularly government programmes and social assistance. This access was made possible by transforming the organisation from an informal organisation into a legally recognised entity, registered with the Ministry of Law and Human Rights.



The findings of this research echo Olle Torquist's theory of the state-backed client (Torquist, 1990, p. 426), although there are clear differences in both the actors and the context. Whereas Torquist describes a relationship involving the state, village heads, and farmers, this study situates the PNP elites in Purwoboyo as patrons, the Laskar Nusantara Rider as intermediaries, and the grassroots masses of the PNP as clients in an electoral context. In addition, the finding of this research demonstrates that ideological alignment and material incentives strengthen the intensity and continuity of neo-clientelist relationships between the PNP elites and the Laskar Nusantara Rider.

However, this study is not without its limitations. It has not examined the regulatory framework or the bureaucratic perspective on the neo-clientelist relationships between the PNP

elite in the Purwoboyo region and the Laskar Nusantara Rider. Future research should address these dimensions by exploring how legal regulations and bureaucratic institutions view and respond to such relationships. It is hoped that future studies on clientelism will adopt more varied research foci and examine a broader range of political actors.



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