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Aims and Scope:

PCD Journal of South and Southeast Asia's Power, Conflict, and Democracy Studies is an international refereed journal initiated by the Power, Conflict, and Democracy (PCD) consortium, a collaborative work by the University of Colombo in Sri Lanka, Gadjah Mada University in Indonesia, and the University of Oslo in Norway. It is a journal that comprehensively examines the dynamics of power and democracy, including practices of human rights, popular representation, and public policy, particularly, in Indonesia but still giving a space for comparative studies. Invitation is extended to authors with interest in making comparison experiences in Indonesia with those of the rest of the globe. PCD Journal publishes articles, literature review, field notes, and book reviews in major sub fields of political science, human geography, and political anthropology. PCD Journal aims to address some of the most current issues of power, conflict, and democracy in Indonesia with comparative perspective. While the journal is open to all methodological approaches, all submissions are expected to be theoretically grounded. The journal can be of great value to teachers, students, researchers, experts, journalists, and social movement activist dealing with these issues and regions.



Submission

Submitted papers should be no longer than 8,000 words excluding tables and figures. Submit the manuscript via e-mail to the editor-in-chief at pcd@ugm.ac.id.

Manuscript preparation

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Every submitted article will be subject to peer review. The normal review period is three months. Most research articles in this journal have undergone rigorous peer review based on initial editorial screening and refereeing by anonymous referees. Authors should take care that the manuscript contains no clues as to identity. Nevertheless, articles published under 'Research Notes' section, aimed at setting up future research agenda, are non-peer-reviewed.

PCD Programme

The state of democracy in the Global South is marked by a striking paradox: while liberal democracy has attained an ideologically hegemonic position through two so-called waves of democracy, the qualities of such democracies is increasingly called into question. The "old" democracies in the global South like Sri Lanka are weakened. Democracy deficits have emerged within constitutional and institutional arrangements as well as in political practices. Further, the "third wave of democracy" is over. "New" democracies like in Indonesia have fostered freedoms, privatisation and decentralisation but continue to suffer from poor governance, representation and participation. Hence there are general signs of decline. Vulnerable people are frustrated with lack of actual influence and sustained elitism. Politicians winning elections often need to foster ethnic and religious loyalties, clientelism and the abuse of public resources. Powerful groups and middle classes with poor ability to win elections tend to opt for privatisation and return partially to authoritarian governance. Critical questions are therefore asked about the feasibility of democracy in developing country contexts. Some observers say it is only a problem of better crafting of institutions. Others contend that "full" democratisation was premature in the first place and that necessary preconditions need to be created beforehand. Both positions are based on a narrow and static understanding of democracy. While the core elements of democracy are universal, real world democracies develop (or decline) over time and through contextual dynamics; in processes and contexts of actors, institutions



and relations of power. Therefore, the crucial task is to analyse the problems and options of expanding the historically “early” freedoms and deficient elements of democracy that fortunately exist in spite of poor socio- economic and political conditions in counties such as Sri Lanka and Indonesia rather than giving up on these freedoms until the other have somehow improved. This is to advance towards the universally accepted aim of democracy in terms of popular control of public affairs on the basis of political equality, and to be able to use democracy to handle conflicts and alter unequal and unsustainable development.

With this in mind, researchers at the University of Oslo (Norway), Gadjah Mada (Indonesia) and Colombo (Sri Lanka) have come together in a collective research—and post- graduate programme. The idea is to pool their research projects and results, and to promote doctoral as well as master studies by way of, first, a joint framework for analysing power, conflict and democracy and, second, a basic electronic peer reviewed journal and report series (published by PCD-Press) to the benefit of students, scholars and priorities in the region. Basic resources—in addition to the participants own voluntary work and projects— are provided by their respective universities and the Norwegian Centre for International Cooperation in Higher Education (SIU).



Content

The Political Dynamics of Space
Behind the Jakarta–Bandung
High-Speed Rail (Whoosh)
Megaproject Development

233-272

Sarah Mumtaz

Contested Waters: Power,
Access, and Struggles over
the Cipasauran River in Serang
Regency, Banten

273-312

Andika Widiyanto

Shrimp Boom, Migration Boom:
An Analysis of Labour Structure
in Petanahan Sub-district,
Kebumen Regency

313-344

May Latifah

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

345-376

Rengga Akbar Danunegoro

Who Speaks for Nahdlatul
Ulama? Representation,
Legitimacy, and the Politics
of Claim-making in the 2024
Presidential Election

377-416

Jasmine Hasna Nafila Rahman

Empowering Communities from
Below: Local Leadership and
Organising in KWT Lestari

417-448

Afina Putri Kusumadewi



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The Political Dynamics of Space Behind the Jakarta–Bandung High-Speed Rail (Whoosh) Megaproject Development

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Abstract

This paper explores the Jakarta–Bandung High-Speed Rail (HSR) megaproject, which began in 2016 and was completed in 2023. Currently, the high-speed train, known as “Whoosh,” operates, connecting Jakarta and Bandung in just 30 minutes. The project highlights the competition between China and Japan in asserting their leadership in Asia’s infrastructure investments. Under China’s Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), the financing for this HSR project was sourced 75% from the China Development Bank, with the remaining 25% came from equity contributions made by Indonesian state-owned enterprises (BUMN) and the Chinese railway company Beijing Yawan HSR Co. Ltd. This study seeks to examine the impacts of the Indonesia—China HSR construction and analyze them through Henri Lefebvre’s Theory of the Production of Space (1991). The HSR requires space that it passes as well as train stations it stops. The location around train stations later transformed into a new economic zone. Thus HSR created physical and social spaces, including the process of meaning-making and control over representation of space. Using a qualitative approach, the study finds that the project has triggered significant spatial changes, transforming previously low-economic-value areas into high-value (capitalist) zones, marked by the dominance of capital owners and resource control, ultimately leading to conflicts over land rights at the community level. Global capital actors play a crucial role in the space shaping and making, and transportation technology serves as a entry point strategy.

Keywords: *Production of space, Sphere of Influence, Jakarta - Bandung High - Speed Rail, Belt and Road Initiative*

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Introduction

Many ASEAN countries, including Indonesia, are interested in the Belt & Road Initiative megaproject (hereafter “BRI”) (Sang, 2021). This is due to economic opportunities, infrastructure development, and diversification of bilateral relations. One example is the Jakarta–Bandung High-Speed Rail (hereafter as KCJB, *Kereta Cepat Jakarta Bandung*), known as “Whoosh”. This project involved competition between capital from China and Japan, with China emerging as the main investor. The interaction between these two countries reflects a political-economic, marked by power exertion and the pursuit of wealth. China is currently the most influential country in Asia. Under Xi Jinping’s leadership, the BRI policy positions ASEAN as a key foothold in the study of the sphere of influence (Kejin & Xin, 2015). The KCJB project

represents China’s initial strategic move to expand its influence in Southeast Asia. Through this program, China also exports its construction expertise to develop infrastructure in BRI partner countries (Octorifadli et al., 2021).

China’s growing influence in ASEAN has raised concerns about the dominance of China’s economic and political interests in its efforts to displace Japan’s leadership (Bajpae, 2016; Murashkin, 2018). Large-scale transportation megaprojects can create spatial control and domination that intersect with society, corporations, and the state. As argued by Harvey (2001) regarding perceived space, capitalist control transforms space into a tool of capital, turning abstract space into a means of production that ultimately creates vulnerabilities for citizens affected by such collaborations. Based on this



perspective, KCJB is not merely a milestone in railway development but also a moment of spatial production and reproduction.

From Indonesia's perspective there is a broader economic context. In recent decades, the government has focused on structural reforms, regulations, and fiscal policies to support economic growth. The BRI program has secured one of national infrastructure projects. The funding for the project, 75% comes from China Development Bank (CDB), and is complemented by contributions from the Indonesia–China consortium (KCIC, 2021). The Indonesia–China consortium itself consists of Indonesian state-owned enterprises (SOEs), namely PT Pilar Sinergi BUMN, and is led by several SOEs, including PT KAI, PT WIKA, PT Perkebunan Nusantara VIII, and PT Jasa Marga. On the Chinese side, the project

involves Beijing Yawan HSR Co. Ltd., China Railway Group Limited, Sinohydro Corporation Limited, CRRC Corporation Limited, and China Railway Signal and Communication Corporation (CNN, 2023). The rationale behind this project is that Jakarta and Bandung, two major activity centres in Java and Indonesia, have experienced high mobility across various sectors, such as industry, government, and tourism.

The KCJB project is expected to increase investment in Indonesia and strengthen economic cooperation between Indonesia and China. After intensive discussions, both parties agreed on a “business-to-business” (B2B) scheme without government guarantees. However, in practice, Indonesia utilised the state budget (APBN) due to the pandemic situation to cover the cost overruns.



The Chinese companies are responsible for the infrastructure and facilities of the high-speed railway project, while the Indonesian companies manage aspects such as land acquisition, local procurement, and project management. Additionally, this cooperation promises ease in the transfer of technology and knowledge sharing between the companies:

This paper explores how the KCJB project is not merely about constructing transportation infrastructure but also about how space is organised, controlled, and utilised by powerful entities. The production of space is not just the result of social interaction, but also a product of the political and economic dynamics involving investors, governments, and society. The development of areas around the project, such as Transit-Oriented Development (TOD) at four major station sites, where

new residential apartments have been built, illustrates how space is produced and reproduced with an economic orientation. While it appears to benefit all parties, in reality, the space tends to conceal power imbalances and disparities in access to urban infrastructure.

This study aims to answer what and how the emergence of the Jakarta–Bandung High-Speed Rail project impacts Indonesia in the context of Indonesia–China cooperation from the perspective of Henri Lefebvre’s Theory of Spatial Production. Furthermore, this paper also addresses the spatial implications of Indonesia–China cooperation and the benefits gained for Indonesia. The research adopts a qualitative approach, focusing on cause-and-effect relationships, with data collected through in-depth interviews, observation, and archival research.



Conceptual Framework

This study uses Lefebvre's (1991) Theory of Spatial Production as the primary framework. His theory consists of a trichotomy of space, which includes the representation of space, spatial practice, and representational space. The concepts of spatial experience encompass conceived, perceived, and lived space (Lefebvre, 1991). Through these concepts, Lefebvre seeks to explore the interconnections between the production of space, capital, and their impact on societal life (Lefebvre, 1974). Furthermore, through the production of space, it is possible to understand how both physical and social spaces are produced, controlled, and utilised within the context of infrastructure projects (Shields, 1999). Perceived space is referred to as spatial practice because in daily life, people constantly engage in

activities across various spaces. Spatial practice refers to social processes that reproduce space, acting as both a tool and a result of human activity (Mansvelt, 2005: 57). In the context of the KCJB, spatial practices include activities and interactions within the infrastructure, leading to how local communities interact with the KCJB and shaping complex dynamics that become indistinguishable from social practices (Wilson, 2013: 367). By combining these two practices, Lefebvre emphasises that only through a socio-historical relationship can new space be formed.

The second concept is conceived space. Although normative and ideal space is shaped by various factors such as architects, planners, technocrats, engineers, builders, and governments, Lefebvre argues that for many societies, space is both a system and



a symbol. For him, representational space is the “real space” that functions as a tool to seek and maintain dominance (Merrifield, 2006). For example, the urban renewal program initiated by architects and urban planners was originally designed to replace slums (occupied by the poor) with modern houses. As a result, marginalised communities were further displaced and neglected. Lefebvre notes that there is an intrinsic form of violence—not in a physical sense, but in the form of social and structural pressures that create injustice and inequality in society.

Lastly, the concept of is the lived space is associated with visual symbols and human interaction through practice (Lefebvre, 1991). This concept emerges from real experience and involves a dialectical relationship between space and the reality of spatial expression.

Lefebvre divides space into three components: absolute space (natural space), abstract space, and differential space. Absolute space refers to space that has not been influenced by economic or political forces (Lefebvre, 1974). Abstract space closely resembles the overall physical design created by urban planners. However, it is more than just idealistic, and it is not always marked by the absence of elements related to absolute space. It can also be occupied, dominated, and controlled. Differential space, on the other hand, emphasises freedom from control and domination (Lefebvre in Setiawan, 2017). Although space is predominantly produced, its actualisation is never static, as it is constantly contested by marginalised groups who lack power. Consequently, space remains in a state of ongoing tension.



KCJB Project and Belt and Road Initiative (BRI)

The Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) is not merely a physical infrastructure development project. It has a profound impact on the dynamics of global power (Zhang, 2017). This initiative is an ambitious geo-economic project, which, as of October 2023, involves 151 countries with a combined GDP of approximately \$41 trillion (CSIS, 2023), targeting a positive impact in achieving connectivity goals (Putri & Ma'arif, 2019). Another goal is to encourage global cooperation, enhance trade relations, develop infrastructure, and facilitate international market integration (Putri & Maarif, 2019).

The diplomatic relationship between Indonesia and China began when President Jokowi attended the 2014 APEC Summit. China caught

Indonesia's attention in building bilateral relations. In the same year, during the Asian-African Conference (KAA) held in Indonesia, the two countries signed several cooperation agreements, including the KCJB project. This collaboration became part of the celebration of 65 years of diplomatic relations between Indonesia and China (Adam, 2018). The established relationship between the two countries demonstrates a high level of cooperation, particularly in cultural exchanges and economic development. In recent years, Chinese products have dominated major distribution networks, particularly within supply chains and marketing across various industrial sectors. In addition to collaborating economically, both countries are members of the G-20, ASEAN+3, and the WTO (Ministry of Industry of the Republic of Indonesia, 2012).

The BRI not only serves as an ambition for China to become a global power, but also aims to strengthen cross-border infrastructure development and enhance connectivity (Anam & Ristiyanti, 2018). President Joko Widodo's proactive stance on cooperation is driven by a shared vision and strategic interests (Widhiyoga et al., 2024). Internal factors, such as the need for significant investment in infrastructure, as well as external factors, such as strengthening bilateral economic ties, have influenced Indonesia's foreign policy towards China.

a. China's Proposal is More Beneficial

The KCJB or Whoosh was preferred by Indonesian government due to technology offered by China, which was more affordable compared to that of other developed countries. Rini Soemarno,

Minister of State Owned Enterprises (SOEs) between 2014 to 2019, viewed China as a strategic partner in the development of the high-speed railway due to its commitment to providing 100% full technology transfer, which would enhance Indonesia's technological independence and drive sustainable economic growth. On the other hand, Japan did not offer a business-to-business (B2B) scheme or concessional loans to foreign companies, instead relying on the state budget (APBN), which could potentially burden the country's finances. Moreover, Japan's feasibility study indicated that the cost of building the high-speed railway was more expensive than what China offered, amounting to US\$6.2 billion. The technology offered by Japan was also considered



less supportive of independence due to the limited technology transfer and low local content, which reached only about 40%.

Additionally, China did not impose land acquisition costs, unlike Japan, which proposed a less optimal route passing through densely populated areas, such as Manggarai in Jakarta. The aerodynamic design of the KCJB is inspired by the Komodo dragon, while the seat interiors feature the Mega Mendung batik motif in red and yellow, reflecting local culture. KCJB also prioritises comfort and safety by using Electric Multiple Unit (EMU) trains in red for passenger transport and yellow inspection trains (CIT) to ensure the readiness of the tracks and supporting systems. To reduce noise, a 60-kilometre sound barrier has been installed, capable of reducing noise levels by 19-39 dB.

With these various advantages, the KCJB has become a symbol of progress in mass transportation in Indonesia.

Additionally, the reasons behind Indonesia's decision to choose China were outlined in an interview documented by CNN In-Depth: *The Debate on the High-Speed Railway*, featuring the Deputy for Investment and Mining Coordination at the Coordinating Ministry for Maritime and Investment Affairs (Kemenkomarves) as follows:

"Therefore, the most significant development in this transportation project lies in its infrastructure and facilities. According to the proposal, China offers to include the entire financing in a joint venture, meaning the debt will be shared by KCIC, while Japan only covers the operation of the facilities. This implies that the debt for



the development of both facilities and infrastructure is borne by the Indonesian government, which does not reflect the spirit of business-to-business (B2B) cooperation,” (Based on the interview documentation by CNN In-Depth: “The Debate on the High-Speed Railway” with Septian Hario Seto, Deputy for Investment and Mining Coordination at the Coordinating Ministry for Maritime and Investment Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia, on 29 May 2023).

The victory of China in shifting Japan’s proposal for the KCJB project reflects the country’s great ambition to expand its influence. Once known as one of the poorest countries in the world (Garnaut et al., 2018), China has now risen as an economic giant. Many experts predict that China’s Gross Domestic Product (GDP) will continue to grow and could

rival that of the United States by 2029-2030 (Scott & Sam, 2016; Kennedy, 2018). Through the BRI, China is further strengthening its role in the development of participating countries, including Indonesia. One of the impacts is the growing use of the Renminbi in global financing, gradually diminishing the dominance of the US dollar. While the BRI presents significant opportunities, projects such as the KCJB are not without criticism, particularly concerning their impact on local employment and the extent to which their economic benefits are genuinely felt by the public.

b. China’s Strategy Behind the High-Speed Rail: Financial Dominance, Spatial Control, and Investment

China Development Bank (CDB) has become an alternative to the dominance of major



financial institutions such as the World Bank and the Asian Development Bank (ADB). Frustrated with the limitations of these institutions, China uses CDB to finance projects within the BRI, with a focus on infrastructure, particularly railways. ADB's 2016-2030 report shows that the investment need for this project is US\$22.6 trillion, with more than US\$14 trillion required for railway infrastructure (ADB, 2017). Since 2017, CDB has funded projects in partner countries amounting to US\$160 billion, with 8.1% allocated to railways (CDB, 2017). The IMF also noted that China has implemented financial reforms that have positioned the Renminbi as one of the main currencies in international trade (IMF, 2016).

This investment strategy, particularly in the development of high-speed rail technology and infrastructure, enables

China to dominate the global market, including linking the economic corridor between Jakarta and Bandung. With extensive experience in operating high-speed trains, China has successfully expanded its reach. According to the Statistics of the International Union of Railways, by the end of 2013, China's high-speed rail operations spanned 11,028 km, and to date, this has grown to 25,000 km worldwide (Lanjan & Wei, 2015).

The KCJB project has sparked diverse opinions among the public and local governments. It involves privatisation with state capital participation, which ideally should be a shared asset. Tensions have emerged, especially concerning land claims between the military and KCIC (Indonesia China High-Speed Rail) at Halim Station, which is a central area for the development of Transit-Oriented Development (TOD).

Furthermore, the dominance of Chinese companies in the Engineering, Procurement, and Construction (EPC) sector, along with the use of foreign labor, has increased dependency on foreign technology. The influx of cheaper Chinese products, particularly following the devaluation of the Yuan in 2019, has threatened the stability of the local economy, as Chinese goods flood the Indonesian market. In this context, the project also includes provisions requiring Indonesia to purchase 70% of its raw materials from China, further exacerbating economic imbalances.

The shift in land use from non-capitalist to capitalist systems has led to social inequalities by commodifying urban land for economic gain. The financing for this project is predominantly sourced from the CDB, which controls 75% of the funding scheme, while Indonesia contributes through

the involvement of state-owned enterprise (SOE) assets. This aligns with Lefebvre's concept of fixed capital, where land that was previously of little value becomes a significant source of profit for stakeholders. Despite an environmental impact assessment (AMDAL) having been conducted to mitigate environmental damage, the project still faces challenges in the development of the TOD area (Prasetiawan, 2016). According to PT Terra Lumen Indonesia, approximately 62.5% of the planned TOD area will provide economic benefits for political elites and developers, making KCJB not just a transportation project, but also a part of the political, economic, and social dynamics that affect community welfare (Terra Lumen, 2016).

This illustrates how space, initially abstract, evolves into a uniform and structured area, a process leveraged for financial



gain through global connectivity. In other words, investments are continually directed toward strategic locations with high market value and advantageous geographical positioning. According to China's financial magazine, *Cixin*, the US\$567 billion investment in high-speed rail infrastructure during 2016-2020 was greater than the US\$522 billion invested in 2010-2015 (Lanjian & Wei, 2015). The investment report from CRRC Corporation Limited, a leading Chinese railway company, highlighted that by 2020, the company had secured contracts totaling US\$150 billion. Despite this, the growth of domestic manufacturing remained relatively low at 0.9%, indicating market saturation. In contrast, foreign investments through joint venture schemes increased by

61% between 2015 and 2020, reflecting CRRC's strategic shift towards global expansion (Jian, 2016; CRRC, 2020).

c. Contested Spaces and Indonesia's Interests in the KCJB Project

The Whoosh high-speed rail project has led to a contestation of space, involving both Indonesian and Chinese interests. The four main stations being constructed are not only transportation hubs, but also integral parts of a modern economic zone expected to boost the surrounding area's economy. While the central government holds the authority to regulate spatial planning, China, as the primary funder, holds significant control over the project. This aligns with Government Regulation No. 26 of 2008, which permits adjustments to the National Spatial Plan (RTRW, *Rencana Tata*



Ruang dan Wilayah), ultimately granting China the power to modify strategic spaces within Indonesia.

This contestation is also linked to crucial economic aspects, as Indonesia holds significant bargaining power in its negotiations with China. In 2019, the Indonesian government announced 28 projects worth US\$91 billion, reflecting the country's immense need for investment to support national economic progress. On the other hand, China requires Indonesia to meet its economic objectives abroad. Reports by Moody's indicate that with the BRI, Indonesia's economy could grow faster, at a rate of 5.8% to 6% per year, compared to only 4.6% without BRI involvement (Kong et al., 2019). However, this project faces significant financing challenges. China imports high-speed rail technology, develops it into domestic products,

and subsequently dominates the global market through companies like CSR and CNR. In 2024, China will need to invest an additional US\$217 million to cover the project's costs, as loan interest rates are higher than Indonesia had anticipated. Meanwhile, as the train operator, PT KAI faces risks in debt repayment. The Indonesian government, through PT PII, has been designated as the state guarantor, showing the country's reliance on the national budget (APBN) to bear the project's debt risks (Media Indonesia, 2023). The discrepancies in this cooperation reflect how China's influence in investment could reshape Indonesia's industry, illustrating the power dynamics that alter both space and Indonesia's economy.

The deliberative space gives rise to contestation, framed as a class struggle. Lefebvre (1991) calls for urban planning



that considers various values to address dissociation issues, ensuring that no space is marginalised. The shift from Presidential Regulation No. 107 of 2015 to Presidential Regulation No. 93 of 2021 has made space control a commodity that impacts the agendas of various stakeholders. The KCJB route is being used by developers and the government to create spaces that are economically beneficial, while the community seeks the social function of those spaces. When the mode of production is controlled by the state and capitalists, it can be detrimental to local communities. Complaints have arisen regarding the expedited environmental licensing process, as the AMDAL document does not align with the KCJB Spatial Plan (Nugraha, 2016). China's investment in ASEAN, promoted by Xi Jinping through the concept of "community of shared future,"

establishes a hegemony of large capital with the potential to reshape space. Indonesia faces a similar threat, with its debt reaching Rp 315.1 trillion in 2022. The case of Sri Lanka, where 70% of governance was transferred to China under a 99-year lease, heightens concerns over debt traps. In Indonesia, the cost of the high-speed rail project alone has surged to US\$7.27 billion (Rp 106.2 trillion) in 2022 (Setiaji, 2022).

d. Mega Project of BRI: Between Politics, Economics, and China's Hegemony

Lefebvre emphasised that the state plays a more dominant role than economic power in controlling abstract space, although this power is often concealed. Abstract space functions as a tool of power that can be fully controlled, in which subtle politics and the dialogue



between spaces impose common objectives while neglecting concrete spaces, thereby creating differential spaces. This process encourages the emergence of neo-capitalism, in which property transforms into a commodity reliant on the state's capital interests. In this context, various parties compete to achieve the highest value in order to sustain the capital circuit. China's interest in the KCJB is a tangible example of the reciprocal relationship between politics and economics, in line with Indonesia's consistent free and non-aligned foreign policy. China's dominance is clearly evident, with 70% of the Engineering Procurement Construction (EPC) contractors controlled by Chinese state-owned enterprises (SOEs), while Indonesian SOEs control only 30%.

This project becomes an arena for negotiations that influence each other, resulting in increased costs and the loss of potential revenue from TOD, which leads to proposals for concessions of up to 80 years. Indonesia's dependence on China has increased, facilitating China's ability to influence the country's politics and economy. An Indonesian environmental NGO, WALHI in West Java, criticised the project as a form of government service to property investors, which could potentially strip the people's right to live. The costs borne by investors have led to an increased debt ratio and asset losses, making space a transformative entity both historically, socially, politically, and economically. In this context, space not only reflects habits but also the social tensions arising from conflicts of interest among various parties seeking to control and exploit the space.



Reproduction of Space in the KCJB

The impact of the development of the KCJB illustrates the dominance of the perspective on modernisation and infrastructure development created by the Indonesia–China Consortium. This perspective forms a new hegemonic understanding that the KCJB is not just a transportation route, but also a symbol of progress in Indonesia. According to Lefebvre (1991), the practices behind space are no longer viewed as something neutral, but as objects that can be controlled and optimised, significantly impacting the social and economic structure of society, including the increase in property values, job creation, and the transformation of areas into investment hubs. As a result,

those with economic power gain greater control over the functions and utilisation of ecological resources and spatial rights.

The exploitation of investment is evident in the four planned stations: Halim, Karawang, Padalarang, and Tegalluar, with only three stations (Halim, Padalarang, and Tegalluar) operational at the time of the study. Despite aiming to boost regional economies, the project worsens social and economic disparities. This project exemplifies the dominance of elites who prioritise profit over the interests of the public, in line with the neoliberal narrative, where development serves the accumulation of capital rather than the needs of citizens (Harvey, 2005). Since November 2023, although the KCJB has been operating with 48 schedules, the high fares make it more suitable for business travel than public transportation.



Furthermore, the TOD projects by KCIC and the government exacerbate this gap, resulting in a discrepancy between the policies implemented by the government and the expectations of the public.

a. High-Speed Rail, TOD, and Spatial Planning Changes

In general, economic pressures affect abstract spaces and exacerbate disparities. The dominant groups control the system in such a way that differences appear subtle and their agenda seems neutral. For planners, the KCJB project is seen as a sustainable transportation solution to reduce congestion and air pollution (Lefebvre, 1974; Schmid, 2008). The implementation of Transit-Oriented Development (TOD) aims to reduce dependence on private vehicles by providing various urban amenities, such as residential areas, recreational

spaces, offices, and shopping centres. According to Investor.id, the demand for housing around the KCJB route is expected to rise in the first half of 2023 with the operation of the mass transit system. Improved connectivity and easier access to various modes of public transport will attract public interest. Data from 99 Group shows that the demand for housing in the sub-districts surrounding the three operational KCJB stations has significantly increased compared to the second half of 2022, especially in the Halim (26.2%), Padalarang (26.3%), and Tegalluar (34.4%) areas. Behind this development, each party has an interest in gaining profit. State-owned enterprises (SOEs) and KCIC Indonesia organise these spaces in such a way as to maximise capital accumulation. Additionally, the development



process is often accompanied by campaigns promoting an ideal lifestyle by capital owners to attract urban public attention.

Halim Station is expected to increase trip generation, supported by the presence of transport modes such as LRT, bus stops, airports, and bus terminals (Arum, 2018). Furthermore, the spatial approach to Halim Station can introduce business competitors and business markets, as regulated in the RDTR (spatial plan) of Jakarta, Zone K-2 (Service Trade) and Zone K-3 (Mixed-use Office and Trade/ Services). This development needs to be evenly distributed, but according to the GEO MAPID Study, the western Halim area is denser and offers more options than the eastern side (Christomo, 2023). Access to the Halim LRT (Light Rail Transit) from Jabodebek can be facilitated via a sky bridge, with the public able to use Transjakarta route

7W, connecting Cawang to the KCJB Halim Station. Meanwhile, the Karawang Station is not yet operational due to the unprepared access roads to and from the station, and KCIC has now passed its target and rescheduled for 2025.

The Tegalluar Station is a less popular option due to its remote location, resulting in limited surrounding transportation options. Furthermore, there are plans for BRT (Bus Rapid Transit) infrastructure preparation due to the increased number of tourist visits to Bandung, with a total of 2,252,966 visitors recorded until June 2023, up from 1,422,673 in the first quarter, according to the Department of Culture and Tourism of Bandung (Aurellia, 2023). Economic growth in 2022 reached 5.41% compared to 2020, while on the expenditure side, the GRDP (Gross Regional Domestic Product) for 2022 grew by 5.73% (BPS, 2022).



This concept further supports the importance of the High-Speed Rail passing through Bandung City, and KCIC has also actively partnered with other transportation providers such as the GoTo Group as a characteristic of modern urban mobility supported by commercial activities (Suryanto, 2023).

b. The TOD from Lefebvre's Spatial Agenda Perspective

The transformation of spatial planning due to the high-speed rail project through TOD is not merely an effort to integrate transportation and urban areas, but also reflects the dominance of the neoliberal spatial agenda. From Lefebvre's perspective, TOD, as a representation of space operates not only at the physical level but also shapes people's life experiences through representational spaces. With the dominance of

investors, land-use decisions are increasingly determined by capital interests rather than local community needs, potentially triggering gentrification and the displacement of low-income groups. Mass media plays a role in reinforcing the development narrative that favours capitalism by presenting TOD as a solution for modernisation without addressing its social impacts. As a result, spaces that should be collectively owned are experiencing covert privatisation, where access to urban space becomes increasingly exclusive and unequal.

The TOD logic between China and Indonesia is supported by the Indonesia Property Market Index, which recorded a 5% increase in property prices in Bekasi at the onset of the pandemic (Ridwan, 2020). The southern region is dominated by the Depok-Bogor residential area, while the western region includes



industrial and residential areas such as Meikarta, Deltamas, BSD, and Summarecon. Meikarta, covering 500 hectares, offers 250,000 housing units, 1.5 million square meters of commercial space, and 100 hectares of Central Park, evolving into a Central Business District with an investment of IDR 7.1 trillion in 2017 (Lippo Cikarang, 2017). Deltamas City, located southwest of the Karawang TOD area under Sinarmas Land, has also developed with support from investors, the private sector, and the government. According to Presidential Regulation No. 60 of 2020, the focus of this area is to provide raw water and reduce traffic congestion. Rail-based transportation networks have become key, with 24 regional city TOD development plans. Thus, the Bekasi and Karawang areas have become strategic hubs connecting movement towards West Bandung.

In the Bandung Corridor, an analysis of the Gross Regional Domestic Product (GRDP) was conducted by comparing the contribution of each district and city to West Java's total GRDP. This calculation is based on a proportional distribution, using trends from the previous five years as a reference. The analysis shows that GRDP has been increasing in various areas, regardless of the presence of the Whoosh Project. However, with TOD support, GRDP growth is projected to be approximately 1.08 times higher than without it. According to the Feasibility Study and Bappeda West Java, the KCJB project is expected to absorb 39,000 workers during the 3-year construction phase, 28,000 workers during 25 years of operation, and 20,000 workers during 15 years of station and surrounding construction (Pratiwi et al., 2022). The West Bandung region needs to focus

on land users in the area, as TOD is generally meant to provide 'convenience'. However, investors often misuse this concept, focusing on property sales instead (Simbolon, 2023). The impact of capitalism on space is evident in the phenomenon of gentrification, where middle- and upper-class groups move into areas previously inhabited by low-income communities. According to Lefebvre's Spatial Triad Theory (1991), gentrification occurs due to inequalities in the production of space. As a result, lower-income communities are forced to relocate to other areas, often facing negative stigma. This process triggers tension, especially when land acquisition occurs, where privatisation of assets by SOEs often leads to a monopoly of public assets by the state.

Sustainable transportation is expected to raise awareness of technology and environmental

impact (AMDAL), despite initial setbacks. Presidential Regulation No. 107 of 2015, Article 14, initially accommodated only three regions: Purwakarta, West Bandung, and Bandung City, while Bekasi, Karawang, and Cimahi were excluded. This created challenges for local governments in adjusting spatial planning. However, Presidential Regulation No. 3 of 2016 established a new legal foundation to accelerate the development of these areas and harmonise the Regional Spatial Plans (RTRW) across different regions. The Minister of State-Owned Enterprises at the time also revised Government Regulation No. 26 of 2008 regarding the National Spatial Planning (RTRW) to facilitate the disbursement of funds from China (Kuwado, 2017). This revision, approved by relevant ministries, was reinforced by several key decisions: Minister of Transportation Decree No. KP.



25 of 2016 on the Determination of the High-Speed Railway Line connecting Jakarta and Bandung through the Halim-Tegalluar Crossing; the Governor of DKI Jakarta Decree No. 1640 of 2019 on the Designation of Locations for the Development of High-Speed Railway, Stations, and Facilities between Jakarta and Bandung; and the Governor of West Java Decree No. 593/Kep.707-Pemksm/2019 on the Determination of Land Procurement Locations for the Construction of the Jakarta-Bandung High-Speed Rail Route and Stations, which includes land procurement in nine cities/regencies, namely East Jakarta Administrative City, Bekasi City, Bekasi Regency, Karawang Regency, Purwakarta Regency, West Bandung Regency, Cimahi City, Bandung City, and Bandung Regency.

c. Disharmony of the KCJB with Government Policies

There is a disharmony between the national and provincial spatial planning regulations, such as Government Regulation No. 13 of 2017 and Regional Regulation No. 22 of 2010, and the development of the KCJB project. This issue, particularly in Bekasi Regency, has led to legal uncertainty. The project is not listed in the Bekasi Regency's Regional Spatial Plan (RTRW) (Silvia et al., 2021), while formal legal constraints limit access to justice and contradict the principles of Pancasila and the 1945 Constitution. As a result, the land use along the KCJB route is being changed, jeopardising the livelihoods of affected communities. The route spanning 5.940 km in Cimahi has received support from the city government, including through revisions to the 2012-2032 RTRW (Cimahi City Regional



Regulation No. 4 of 2013), although this process has not yet fully completed. The government assures that projects in Cibeber, Melong, and Leuwigajah will proceed smoothly (Bangkit, 2019). However, the dominance of developers in decision-making highlights the need for a balance between infrastructure development and the protection of social rights.

In the case of land disputes in Ngamprah, the decision made by the Bale Bandung District Court in case number 11/Pdt.KONS/2018/PN.Bib, which determined the land consignment, was deemed unrepresentative of the community as it did not include the land ownership of residents in Sukatani Village. This reflects the limited representation of the community in decisions regarding land acquisition for strategic projects. A similar situation occurred in

Cikaobandung, where the lack of transparency in the project's socialisation led to limited community participation, which was more symbolic than substantive. Decisions made in these cases largely accommodate the interests of the state and corporations, rather than the aspirations of the affected communities.

From Lefebvre's perspective of spatial justice, the situation in Cikaobandung reflects inequality in the distribution of space due to the dominance of neoliberalism, which prioritises privatisation and large investments. The lack of active community participation in planning and decision-making creates an unjust space, where access to land and resources is predominantly controlled by economic and political elites. In line with Harvey's views in *Space of Hope*, achieving spatial justice requires broader community involvement in



determining the direction of development, so that spatial policies benefit more than just a few parties and also reflect the social and economic rights of the affected communities.

In 2016, PT KCIC was designated to manage land acquisition in nine cities and regencies. However, they decided to partner with PT Arjuna for this task. In 2017, PT KCIC terminated its contract with PT Arjuna and began implementing Law No. 2 of 2012 on land acquisition. Dudi Hubaidi, a local resident, revealed that PT Arjuna offered a significantly lower price for purchasing his family's 1.6-hectare rice field, just IDR 200,000 per square metre, despite the land being far from the Cikalong Wetan road. A meeting was held, but no solution was reached at that time. Mr. Dudi agreed to sell his land if the price were IDR 2 million per square metre (Hidayat et al.,

2017). Although most residents have received compensation for their land, 33 families in Cikuda and 24 families in Pangleseran are still awaiting for payment. PT KCIC has not provided a clear explanation for selecting PT Arjuna as the implementing party.

In the same year, PT KCIC held a meeting with the local residents. Instead of seeking a solution, they provided excuses when the residents demanded clarity. According to Yulianto, the head of the neighborhood association in Perumahan Lembah Teratai Bandung Barat, PT KCIC offered IDR 380 million for a standard 73 m² house, while the market price for houses in the area was already IDR 400 million, and houses nearby were even priced at IDR 600 million, making the offered price inappropriate (Hidayat et al., 2017). This issue also applied to land acquisition in Purwakarta.

Since 2016, PT KCIC has leased three plots of land from 13 residents in Kampung Pasir Salak at IDR 50,000 per square metre for five years to dispose of project waste (Putricantika, 2023). The socialisation process was slow in Sempur Village, where brokers purchased land without following the official procedures. In Depok Village, there was an issue with waste disposal, and PT KCIC did not provide any clarification. The uncertainty in handling social and environmental concerns surrounding the KCJB project requires transparency to mitigate the negative impacts. The presence of various contradictory spaces undermines long-established property rights that have been exploited for years by different classes.

The contestation of interests in spatial practices is inevitable, as it is influenced by the rationality

of each space user. Indonesia–China relations under President Jokowi have intensified through the BRI, with a B2B scheme that involving Indonesian state-owned enterprises as project managers. Rini Soemarno, during her tenure as Minister of State-Owned Enterprises, played a key role, despite initial concerns about China’s dominance. According to Lim et al. (2021), Rini was instrumental in convincing China, even though a feasibility study had been previously conducted by a Japanese consortium during President SBY’s administration. Fiscal challenges, such as the 3% GDP deficit limit, were addressed by promoting long-term impact projects like the KCJB through indirect financing schemes by state-owned enterprises. However, China’s involvement as a strategic partner left lingering



public questions, particularly regarding the dismissal of objections from influential parties.

Ridwan Kamil tried to align central and regional interests, but the Regent of West Bandung at that time, Sutisna, rejected the KCJB route because it was deemed not beneficial to the local community (Husodo, 2019). Sutisna demanded additional facilities, such as bridges and roads, which were provided by state-owned enterprises. This reflects the complexity of decentralised politics, where Ridwan Kamil delegated authority between regional elites and national partners (Nurulliah, 2019). Despite Rini Soemarno's support, Ignasius Jonan opposed the project due to concerns over the budget and favoured cooperation with Japan. However, his role was increasingly marginalised, and he was eventually dismissed

(rmol.d, 2016). The military's distrust of China also became an obstacle, but after an agreement was reached, the project at Halim Station was subsequently approved. Alongside Rini, Luhut Pandjaitan became a strong advocate for the policy and facilitated the cooperation, including in the matter of Chinese foreign workers (TKA) in Indonesia (Rakhmat, 2020).

d. The Impact of the KCJB Project on the Livelihood of Local Residents

Not only does the contestation among various actors mentioned above, but the KCJB project has also neglected environmental sectors, as stated by a representative of WALHI:

"According to WALHI Jabar, 23 cases related to this project have been reported, covering issues such as permits, environmental concerns, social impacts, and work-related accidents.



Dwi Sawung, the Campaign Manager for Spatial Planning and Infrastructure at WALHI Nasional, stated that the construction of the high-speed rail project is reckless and disregards spatial planning. There are suspicions regarding the Environmental Impact Assessment (AMDAL) process, which was completed in less than two weeks. Additionally, several ministries walked out during hearings, including the Ministry of Transportation. This has caused further problems for local communities, such as the loss of water sources, road damage, and flooding due to improper land clearing, particularly in West Bandung. I acknowledge that Chinese contractors are notorious for neglecting environmental conditions and the safety of other workers," (Interview DS, Manager of Spatial

Planning and Infrastructure Campaign at WALHI, via Zoom, on 11 October 2023).

The explanation above highlights how the expansion of infrastructure development overlooks human rights, such as the loss of water sources. Law No. 32 of 2009 on Environmental Protection and Management mandates that the government protect citizens's right to a healthy environment and natural resources. The loss of water sources and jobs for some farmers represents the failure of the state to protect its citizens. The privatisation by state-owned enterprises has prompted citizens to organise the #FROM JABAR movement.

According to Lefebvre, capitalism increasingly influences spatial planning, where space is designed as an abstract concept by architects and urban planners who focus



on the ideal representation of urban design. This concept often overlooks the social needs of the community and tends to favour economic interests. In line with the views of Kębłowski et al. (2016), public transportation policies often hide capitalist interests behind public agendas. Although public transportation aims to meet the needs of society, its main agenda still revolves around economic profits. In the context of the High-Speed Rail, spatial planning practices are not only reproduced for capitalist interests but also restructured with legal legitimacy. However, it is essential to ensure that this restructuring prioritises the public interest and the welfare of the community in a fair manner.

Conclusion

Based on the previous discussion, it is evident that the construction of the KCJB project has not been well-managed,

despite expectations that it would serve as an innovation in Indonesia's transportation sector. The Indonesia–China cooperation has created a tug-of-war for power to safeguard their respective interests. The lack of understanding and protection of resources has opened the door for poor practices in the investment climate, with the government tending to favour capitalist interests and sacrificing the welfare of the people. The perception of “prosperity” between the public and the government is also misaligned. Additionally, major issues such as a cost overrun amounting to IDR 120 trillion have occurred due to inaccuracies in electricity procurement and land acquisition calculations. To address this, the government injected State Capital



Participation (PMN) amounting of IDR 7.5 trillion in 2021-2022, while PT KAI replaced WIKA, using the company's funds.

Currently, the operators are trying to sustain the business by requesting an extension of the concession period from the original 50 years to 80 years, despite this violating existing regulations. KCIC represents a phenomenon of reliance on ticket sales revenue, which indicates that the reality of this project is increasingly neglected, undermining public trust. The power that influences the dynamics of social space is not merely understood as a physical measurement but as a property of those who hold capital. Overall, this relationship appears abstract and benefits certain parties, yet harms many others, especially in terms of transparency and social justice. This paper demonstrates that China has effectively

established a sphere of influence in Indonesia through its use of space. It is important to note that this investment is not just an economic expansion but also a part of a strategy to strengthen hegemony in the borrowing country.



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Contested Waters: Power, Access, and Struggles over the Cipasauran River in Serang Regency, Banten

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Abstract

This study examines the mechanisms of community access to water from the Cipasauran River, Serang Regency, Banten, which has been disrupted by damming activities carried out by PT Krakatau Tirta Industri (PT KTI). Employing a qualitative approach with a case study design, this research maps the distribution of water resource benefits, identifies the mechanisms used by various actors to obtain, control, and sustain access, and analyses the power dynamics that shape these mechanisms. Findings reveal that companies predominantly benefit from the river's water resources through multiple access mechanisms, thereby restricting local communities' access. Additionally, ecological changes caused by the dam have further exacerbated these restrictions. The study concludes that the allocation of Cipasauran River's water resources is largely skewed in favour of the company's interests, facilitated by legal and relational-structural mechanisms. Furthermore, asymmetric power relations among actors have reinforced disparities in water access.

Keywords: Access, Social Movements, Ecological Changes, Water River

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Introduction

Water resources management, in practice, certainly involves various actors and unequal power dynamics (Bakker, 2005). One example is the management of the Cipasauran River, a vital water source for local communities in Serang Regency, Banten. This study examines inequalities in local communities' access to water resources from the Cipasauran River, which has triggered a social movement to fight for their right to access the river's water. The river serves as a crucial resource for the community, providing water for bathing, washing, and supporting agricultural and fishing activities. However, the construction of a dam by PT Krakatau Tirta Industri (PT KTI) has disrupted the community's access to river water and restricted various activities that depend on these water resources. Consequently,

the struggle for access to the Cipasauran River water flow, which is an important part of the community, is actualized through social movements to get the benefits they should get. This study seeks to investigate how access mechanisms are controlled, the role of corporate and state actors, and how local communities mobilise in response.

Previous research has shown that water resources are vital factors that trigger conflict, inequality, and social, economic, and political impacts. Based on prior studies on the socio-ecological impacts of water management, we classify this topic into three main categories. *First*, studies on water resources management through the perspective of policy implementation (Hadipuro & Putri, 2020; Anand, 2017; Benedikter, 2014) highlights the state's vital role



in governing and distributing water resources. The lack of transparency, accountability, and public participation in water management has resulted in inequalities in water distribution experienced by communities.

Second, river water management issues that involve private actors (Strauß, 2011; Wardana, 2017; Bakker, 2005). Previous research shows that water resources management often involves the private sector. The neoliberalisation process in water resources management tends to only benefit large investors who have capital, technology, knowledge, and market capacity, resulting in negative impacts on society and the environment, including pollution.

Third, the social impacts of water resources conflicts involving informal actors (Sultana, 2011; Crow & Sultana, 2002; Pouramin et al., 2020;

Syafi'i & Gayatri, 2019). These studies explain how informal actors, with gender, religious and cultural backgrounds, shape access to water resources. Although they often have limited access to adequate water resources, informal actors can form a significant collective force to gain access to water resources.

While existing studies have explored the roles of policy frameworks, private sector involvement, and informal actors in water resources management, there remains a significant gap in understanding how these elements interact and collectively influence access to water resources, particularly in contested regions such as Cipasauran. This study addresses this gap by examining the interplay between these actors—government policies, corporate practices, and informal networks—and analysing



how their interactions shape access to and control over the Cipasauran River's water resources.

Through a political ecology lens, this research examines the power dynamics, governance structures, and socio-economic inequalities that underpin water resource distribution in contested areas. Furthermore, it explores the role of local communities, particularly marginalised groups, in resisting and negotiating water access, providing a more nuanced understanding of the complexities of water governance. The unequal distribution of Cipasauran River's water flow, shaped by the differing capacities of actors to secure access, has triggered a social movement among local communities striving to reclaim their rights and benefits from the river's water.

Access, Power, and Contentious Politics in Water Governance

This section outlines the theoretical framework, discussing the concept of access and power dynamics in natural resource governance. Ribot and Peluso (2003) explain comprehensively distinguish between 'property' or property rights and 'access'. 'Property' refers to ownership and control relationships over resources that are legitimately recognised by institutions. Meanwhile, access analysis examines individuals' ability to utilise and benefit from resources, whether through legitimate or illegitimate means. Ribot and Peluso (2003) highlight two key aspects of access. First, access can be either legal (rights-based) or illegal. Second, access is structural and relational, encompassing



access to technology, capital, labor, knowledge, authority, identity, and social relations. This implies that an actor's ability to benefit from natural resources can be obtained from various mechanisms carried out by the actor.

In Cipasauran, this framework examines how actors such as the provincial government, PT KTI, and local communities navigate water access. PT KTI secures legal access through state permits, whereas local communities rely on informal mechanisms such as social networks and traditional practices. Power imbalances are evident, as corporate actors leverage capital and political influence, whereas marginalised groups rely on collective action and local knowledge. This reveals how access mechanisms, shaped by power

dynamics and governance structures, determine who benefits from the river and who is excluded.

Contentious Politics as an Access Mechanism

The unequal access to Cipasauran River water has sparked a social resistance among dependent communities, challenging the dominance of powerful actors such as PT KTI and the provincial government. This collective effort, termed 'contentious politics', involves organised actions—such as protests, advocacy, and legal challenges—to contest resource distribution and advocate for equitable access. Communities seek to hold powerholders accountable and reshape water governance to prioritise public interests over corporate control (Tarrow & Tilly, 2009).



In Cipasauran, contentious politics arises from the exclusion of local communities in decision-making and the prioritisation of corporate interests over communal needs. The government plays a dual role, serving as an arbiter, a target, or a plaintiff, depending on its alignment with corporate or community demands. While the provincial government grants permits to PT KTI, it also faces community claims for justice and equitable water access. Through campaigns, collective action, and advocacy, communities mobilise to challenge corporate control, leveraging legal and political opportunities to defend public interests (Tarrow & Tilly, 2009). This highlights contentious politics as a tool to address inequities in water governance.

A political economy analysis is essential for understanding water conflicts in contested areas such as the Cipasauran River,

as it connects economic power structures to water governance, revealing how these structures perpetuate unequal access. First, it identifies and maps the flow of benefits from the river, showing which actors—state institutions, private entities, or informal networks—capture the most value. Second, it uncovers the mechanisms these actors use to secure and maintain access—such as legal frameworks, financial investments, or coercive practices—which often marginalise weaker groups. Third, it examines the power relations behind these mechanisms, exposing how economic and political asymmetries determine who benefits and who is excluded. For example, powerful actors may shape policies or exploit informal systems to secure water access, leaving marginalised communities with little recourse. By connecting these dynamics

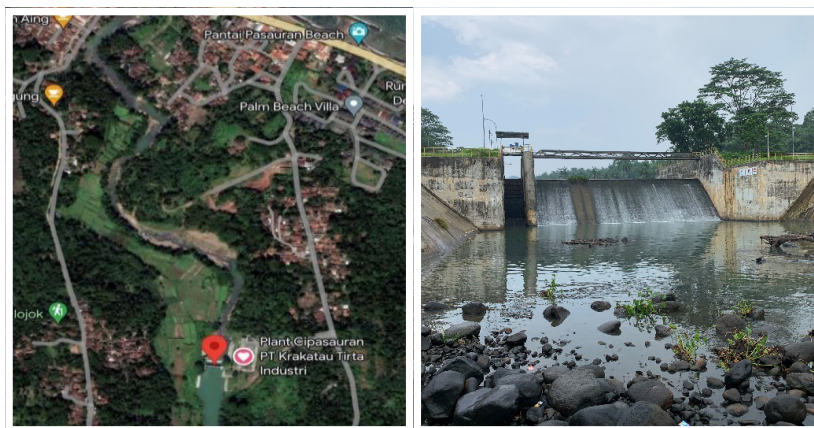
to broader economic structures, political economy analysis offers a comprehensive framework for understanding the roots of water conflicts and provides insights for fostering more equitable and sustainable water governance (Ribot & Peluso, 2003: 160-161).

Research Method

This study employs a descriptive qualitative approach, utilising semi-structured interviews, direct field

observations, and document analysis to examine the governance of Cipasauran River water resources and their socio-ecological implications. The Cipasauran River is an interesting thing to selected as the case study due to its critical role in local livelihoods and the ongoing conflicts over access to its water resources. Examining this case provides valuable insights into the broader challenges of water governance, environmental justice, and resource inequality.

Figure 1. River Flow Map and Pasauran Dam Point



Source: Google Earth, 2024; Author, 2023



The case study approach in this research aims to provide an in-depth analysis of incidents, relationships, experiences, or processes that occur from various points of view. Case studies generally prioritise depth over breadth, as they focus on specific events (Gerring, 2004: 352).

This research adopts a case study approach to examine the power relations and mechanisms that shape access to the Cipasauran River, a vital resource for local communities. It enables in-depth data exploration, detailed event analysis, and a nuanced understanding of water access dynamics. The study explores the intersection of economic, political, and social factors in shaping disparities in water governance, while also revealing strategies employed by various actors to control resources. By focusing on Cipasauran, this study provides micro-level

insights into broader water conflicts, informing equitable and sustainable water management practices (Denscombe, 2017: 38; Creswell & Creswell, 2017).

Findings and Discussion

Access Domination by Company

This study examines the distribution of access to Cipasauran River water resources, focusing on the mechanisms through which different actors, particularly corporations, secure and control these benefits. To identify each actor's capacity to obtain benefits, it is essential to examine the mechanisms they employ. First, each actor's capacity is assessed based on legal access, including regulations, arrangements, and licences granted by the competent authority. Second,



access is shaped by actors through relational and structural mechanisms (Ribot & Peluso, 2003). This section outlines how the dominance of access owned by companies causes inequality of access for local communities, which then gives rise to social movements.

Field findings show that the company (PT KTI) is the dominant entity in controlling the flow of benefits from the Cipasauran River water resources through various mechanisms, both legal and structural-relational-based access. Through cooperation with the government, the company can expand its operations and exploit Cipasauran River water for utilisation, extraction, and commercial processing as a traded commodity. *First*, the legality-based access mechanism highlights how PT KTI's utilisation of raw water is considered legal or legitimate

based on a permit issued by the Public Works and Spatial Planning Office, specifically *Surat Izin Penggunaan dan/atau Pemanfaatan Air* (SIPPA) No. 570/4/SIPPA-DPMPTSP/II/2018 (Water Usage and/or Utilisation Permit Letter). The government plays a central role in reinforcing corporate water access through licensing mechanisms that prioritise industrial needs over community access. The issuance of the Permit Letter reflects a broader trend of resource privatisation, in which regulatory frameworks favour corporate actors over local communities. This enables companies like PT KTI to freely manage, utilise, and extract benefits from the Cipasauran River's water flow, often at the expense of local access and equity. This dynamic illustrates how state policies and legal instruments institutionalise inequalities in water governance, granting

corporations significant control over vital resources while marginalising the water needs of local communities (PT KTI, 2023).

Second, structural-relational-based access. As part of PT Krakatau Steel which has various subsidiaries, PT KTI collaborates with PT Chandra Asri Petrochemical (CAP) Group to ensure the availability of raw

water for the industry and Cilegon City. In terms of structural-relational access mechanisms, this study outlines PT KTI's technological capabilities and its ability to secure government licences. First, this water industry company possesses the capacity and access to advanced technology for managing and utilising Cipasauran River water.

Figure 2. Krenceng and Cidanau Water Treatment Plants



Source: krakatautirta.co.id, 2023

PT KTI has Water Treatment Plants (IPA) in various water source areas, one of which is the Krenceng IPA, with an installed capacity of 2,000 litres per second. Krenceng IPA operates by treating water from the Cidanau River using four pump units with a capacity of 1,000-3,500 m³ per hour. The water is channelled through a 1,400 mm transmission pipe with a length of approximately 27.2 km to the water treatment

plant in Krenceng. The Cidanau Water Treatment Plant, which began operating in 2018, processes raw water sourced from the Cipasauran Dam. Water is delivered using three intake pump units with a capacity of 400 litres per second each. The Cipasauran Dam, operational since 2017, is 30 metres wide and 6.5 metres high (PT KTI, 2023; Bayuadji et al., 2020; Rau et al., 2015; Septiani, 2012).

Figure 3. Diameter Transmitter Pipe Line (1.4 metres) and Pump House (Pump Station)



Source: Krakatau.co.id, 2023



Second, access to authority or government is instrumental in facilitating the expansion of raw water industrialisation as a commodity. Through PT KTI, planning is carried out to ensure the availability of water for the people of Cilegon City and the industries in the area, which are the main pillars of the regional economy of Banten Province.

The management of water resources by PT KTI is legally valid, as it holds a licence from the relevant government. Legal legitimacy also refers to Law Number 17 of 2019 concerning Water Resources, which was approved on October 15, 2019, and later replaced by the Job Creation Law/Government Regulation in Lieu of Law (Perppu Number 2 of 2022) on December 30, 2022. This regulation explains that the state guarantees people's rights to water and regulates licensing for the use of water resources. However,

in reality, the permit issued by the government to PT KTI has resulted in inequality, with the community facing difficulties in accessing and benefiting from the water of the Cipasauran River (PT Krakatau Steel, 2023).

As a legal entity, the company has significant power to influence the governance of Cipasauran River water resources. Government regulations and permits create opportunities for companies to extract and utilise Cipasauran River water resources. With the support of adequate capital, technology, and knowledge, companies have strong access to intervene in the utilisation and management of Cipasauran River water resources.

The dominance and presence of companies controlling the Cipasauran River have disrupted local communities' access to the resource, while also triggering negative impacts on



the river's ecology. This situation reflects inequality in water resource management, where communities surrounding the river face challenges in accessing the benefits that should be fairly accessible.

Access Mechanisms by Local People

The configuration of actors involved in the management of Cipasauran River's water resources illustrates how the benefits of these resources are distributed (Ribot & Peluso, 2003). The local people of Pasauran Village, with their diverse gender, economic backgrounds, and daily activities, demonstrate the importance of access to water. The social-ecological conditions of the community illustrate their long-standing dependence on and attachment to the river's water resources.

PT KTI, as a legal entity with significant power, capital, and knowledge capacity, has great influence in the governance of Cipasauran River water resources. Regulations and licences from the government open up opportunities for the company to utilise these resources, supported by adequate capital, technology, and knowledge. The political-economic approach serves as the primary basis for decision-making, prioritising economic aspects, particularly the industrial sector in Banten Province. However, this approach ignores the social impact on local communities who rely heavily on the availability of Cipasauran River water for their economic activities and lives.

River water is a vital resource in human life, as it reflects how civilisations are built, shaping social and cultural identities,



trade and economic routes, and serving as a source of life for the daily needs of the community (Gialis et al., 2011). The Cipasauran River plays an important role in supporting the daily activities of the people of Pasauran Village, such as bathing, washing, serving as a resting place for fishing boats, irrigating fish farming ponds, and supporting the agricultural sector.

The ability to benefit from natural resources is determined by structural-relational factors through politico-economic and cultural frameworks (Ribot & Peluso, 2003: 164). The access mechanism in this case is carried out by the community around the Cipasauran River in benefiting from river water resources by using water pump technology. This technology-based access is owned by a small part of the community by collecting water using a pump machine that

is channeled through a small pipe. However, due to financial constraints, not all communities have access to water pump technology. Consequently, they rely on river water for activities such as washing, bathing, and other activities related to the water usages.

Most communities still access river water directly from the stream. However, they are facing a significant reduction in water discharge due to the PT KTI dam damming the Cipasauran River. This has disrupted community access as the amount of water has decreased and the water quality has become increasingly polluted with silt due to siltation.

Figure 4. Pasauran Village Community Access Using Pipes and Pumping Machines and Pumping Machine



Source: Field Observations and River Cruising, December 6, 2023

The disruption of the local community's access to river water resources triggered the surrounding community to hold hearings and request mediation from the Pasauran Village Government to realise the commitments promised by PT KTI.

Figure 5. Protest of Pasauran People



Source: Journalist of Fakta Banten, 2023

Access to the village government is a policy maker government authority is an effort made by the community how Cipasauran River water considering that the village resources are managed.



However, an interview with the Head of Pasauran Village Government on January 5, 2024, showed that the village government is faced with a dilemma, as it lacks a strong position in determining how the Cipasauran River water management should impact the welfare of the people of Pasauran Village. The management policy of Cipasauran River water resources falls under the authority of the provincial government, limiting the role of the village government.

Unequal Power Relations

The relational dynamics and networks formed in the struggle for access to Cipasauran River water resources reveal how local communities contest the domination of both corporate actors and the state over this vital resource (Bakker, 2005; Tarrow & Tilly, 2009). Central to

this struggle is the fragmented governance structure, where power asymmetries between different levels of government—provincial, district, and village—play a critical role in shaping access. The provincial government, as the highest authority, holds exclusive power to grant permits, such as the one issued to PT KTI, enabling the company to utilise the river's water resources under the guise of contributing to regional economic growth.

This top-down licensing mechanism effectively sidelines the district and village governments, which lack the authority to influence or regulate the management and utilisation of the river's resources. As a result, the provincial government's prioritisation of corporate interests through its permitting authority undermines the ability of district and village governments to protect



community water rights, creating a governance gap that exacerbates inequalities. This fragmentation not only reinforces corporate control over the river but also weakens the capacity of local governments to advocate for the needs of the Pasauran Village community, leaving them vulnerable to displacement and marginalisation in the allocation of water resources.

Historically, field data obtained from an interview with the Protest Action Coordinator on December 4, 2023, described the condition of the river water before the raw water industry activities. At that time, the community carried out many activities in the river with good water quality and sufficient quantity, even during the long dry season, because the Cipasauran River flow came from several springs in Banten.

The inherent cultural values between the environment and society are important

considerations to ensure that the distribution of benefits over natural resources, both economically and in terms of the materiality of the natural resources themselves, takes place fairly without disrupting community activities on river water (Escobar, 2006: 9). In the conflict over the water resources of the Cipasauran River, both the government and companies prioritise economic growth, while overlooking the cultural aspects of the communities that depend on river's water.

The socio-ecological relationship between humans and the environment is an important aspects in describing how ecological change can occur (Escobar, 2006). In ecological change, power relations always exist between those who have the capacity to take and utilise natural resources from the environment. In addition, the social conditions of society often

illustrate the unequal power relations between capitalists, who have capital, knowledge, technology, and communities facing limited resources.

Women in Pasauran Village have a strong identity and cultural attachment to the Cipasauran River water. Their awareness of access to the

benefits of river water reflects the socio-ecological impacts of PT KTI's water treatment, which has led to ecological changes and unequal access for women. This awareness shows that natural resource governance not only affects the environment and economy, but also impacts cultural values in the community (Escobar, 2006).

Figure 6. Women Activities on The Cipasauran River



Source: Author, 2023



The picture illustrates the daily activities of women in Pasauran Village, who rely on the Cipasauran River for water. The availability and quality of water greatly affects their lives, as most people still do not have toilets at home and often use river water for bathing, washing, and other activities. After the dam operated, women became one of the groups most affected by the ecological changes in Cipasauran River water. According to data from the Serang Regency Government, there are 4,032 women living in villages surrounding the Cipasauran River, making them a critical demographic affected by these changes.

Beyond being victims of ecological disruption, women in Pasauran Village have also emerged as active participants in resistance efforts. They have organised direct protests, voiced their grievances, and engaged in direct advocacy to raise awareness and mobilise other women in the community. Through these actions, women are not only challenging the inequities imposed by the dam's operation but also asserting their agency in the broader struggle for equitable access to water. Their involvement highlights the intersection of gender, ecology, and social justice, underscoring the vital role women play in advocating for sustainable and inclusive water governance in Pasauran Village.



Table 1. Data on the Number of Women in Affected 2023

Data on the Number of Women 2023	
Pasauran Village	Umbul Tanjung Village
1,616 People	2,416 People
Total: 4,032 People	

Source: Data Procceesed by Author from Sub-district Government of Cinangka, 2023

People Responses to Unequal Access

The disrupted access to water resources in Pasauran Village, caused by the activities of the raw water industry, triggered the formation of a social movement aimed at regaining the benefits of the Cipasauran River water. This movement is collective in nature, emerging from the community's awareness of the injustices caused by the operation of power, which results in inequality in the management of Cipasauran River water resources. This social movement involves various actors, referred

to as 'agencies' and 'structures', who participate in determining strategies (Savirani & Wardhani, 2022: 492).

The local community protests demanded several things, including: 1) the availability of clean water for daily needs due to the disruption of access to river water, 2) coordination regarding the risks associated with opening the dam gates, 3) compensation and assistance for affected communities, and 4) employment opportunities for local communities in industries that extract, utilise, and trade their water resources (Banten Top, 2022).



The social movement of the Pasauran Village community is carried out by gathering ideas from the surrounding community with various occupational backgrounds and the community in general. Then, this collective effort led to the formation of the Community Care for the Environment (KOMPLIN), a forum that critiques the ecological changes in Cipasauran River water. It serves as a public platform for the community to protest against PT KTI, as they are affected by the operation of the Cipasauran dam. Community social movements are also carried out by paying attention to political opportunities in the network formed by the community to measure the strength of the movement, given the unequal relational relations between the community and the government and the company.

It is this unequal access to natural resources that triggers collective efforts from the community to make claims on resources through protests, which Tarrow refers to as Contentious Politics and Social Movements (Tarrow, 2009). The narrative that developed in the community was that access to Cipasauran River water was considered important to support their daily and economic activities. This builds the community's awareness of the importance of Cipasauran River's water resources to their livelihoods.

Ecological changes to the Cipasauran River due to PT KTI's use of river water through a dam and pump station, have disrupted the community's access to their only water resource. Awareness of the importance of maintaining such access extended to various levels of society, including youth, women, farmers, fishermen, and some local leaders. The idea



emerged as an attempt by the community to lay claim to their river's water resources. Despite the relational weakness of the community, they continue to push the government and protest against the company to ensure the management of river water for the benefit of the surrounding community.

Farmers are one of the other actors whose economic activities cannot be separated from the Cipasauran River water resources. An interview with one of the farmers in Pasauran Village on December 7, 2023, revealed that although there are not many farmers in Pasauran and Umbul Tanjung Villages—because the agricultural sector is no longer attractive and promising for the younger generation and the conversion of agricultural land into settlements—agriculture remains the main source of

income in the village. Rice farming is highly dependent on weather conditions, as the recent dry season has greatly affected agricultural yields. As a result, other initiatives have been undertaken, such as planting commodities like chili.

In addition, agriculture is one of the sectors that is widely practiced by the people of Pasauran and Umbul Tanjung Villages, with 10 farmer groups consisting of around 823 farmers. To support the productivity of this sector, Cipasauran River water is essential for irrigating agricultural land. Farmers' access to river water, which is used to manage their land, is an important aspect in understanding how farmers are able to utilise and benefit from the water resources of the Cipasauran River.

Table 2. Data on the Number of Farmers in the Affected 2023

Total Farmer Data 2023	
Pasauran Village	Umbul Tanjung Village
451 People	372 People
Total: 823 People	

Source: Data Processed by Author from Sub-district Government of Cinangka, 2023

Figure 7. Overview of Irrigation and Farmer Activities Around Cipasauran River



Source: Author, 2023



The weakness of the farmers' network in organising a collective struggle to gain access to the Cipasauran River water causes farmers around the river to have difficulties in obtaining adequate irrigation for their land. The company's intervention in river water utilisation did not encourage farmers to realise the importance of collective efforts, unlike rural communities in the Andes who managed to form farmer communities to maintain their access to water resources. In these communities, local autonomy and collective action are critical to sustaining water management practices. Community-based water rights systems have historically allowed individuals to access water collectively, thus fostering a sense of community identity. These findings highlight the need for grassroots organisations to engage in multi-scale politics to effectively advocate for their

rights. The success of grassroots movements often depends on their ability to form alliances and navigate different levels of governance (Hoogesteger & Verzijl, 2015).

The utilisation of Cipasauran River water by PT KTI triggered the struggle of fishermen to maintain their access to the river, which they rely on as a place to rest their boats. Fishermen are one of the occupational choices taken by most of the people of Pasauran Village and around the Cipasauran River, because there are 270 fishermen and geographically, the village is located close to the coastline and the boat route in and out of the Cipasauran River. This river is a downstream area that becomes a boat route and a place for fishermen to anchor their boats.

Figure 8. Firhermen Activities on The Cipasauran River



Source: Author, 2023

The fishermen in Pasauran Village use the Cipasauran River as a docking area for their boats. However, after the construction of the dam, their activities have been disrupted due to the blocking of the river water as

the water level has decreased. In addition, the opening of the dam gates often released mud and large rocks and damaged several fishing boats, even causing some boats to drift away and disappear.

Table 3. Data on the Number of Fishermen in Affected

Data on the Number of Fishermen 2023	
Pasauran Village	Umbul Tanjung Village
63 People	217 People
Total: 270 People	

Source: Data Processed by Author from Sub-district Government of Cinangka, 2023



The protest action carried out by the community around the Cipasauran River by blocking the company's entrance was the culmination of various efforts made without sufficient results. They refused to allow the company's workers to enter and opposed the company's activities of extracting, processing, and utilising river water. The protest movement aims to question the disruption of the community's access to river water due to the company's dam that changes the ecological conditions of the river.

The response of the people of Pasauran Village, who contested their ideas against the authority of policymakers and companies regarding the disruption of their access to Cipasauran River water, illustrates how community social relations shape environmental governance and influence each other. The people of Pasauran Village, who have limited access to river water

resources, are excluded from the flow of benefits. This condition has triggered the community to protest and implement various strategies to regain access to, or benefits from, these water resources.

The community protests faced various obstacles and challenges. First, the company employed repressive actions, including mobilising a retired law enforcement officer to obstruct and prevent the community from protesting and blocking the company's entrance. Secondly, the community's limited knowledge in organising the movement led to disorganisation and fragmentation. For example, farmers and fishermen were reluctant to join the action, as they considered it dangerous and potentially harmful to the community. Thirdly, this action did not involve experienced organisations such as WALHI. To strengthen the social



movement led by the community, collaboration and networking with broader, more competent NGOs are necessary to advocate for issues related to the unequal access to water for the people of Pasauran village. This could also encourage the government to form policies that are more equitable in water governance.

To enhance the analysis, lessons from similar cases in other regions can offer valuable insights. For example, in the case of the Citarum River in West Java, communities were able to successfully pressure policymakers through well-organised coalitions, including local NGOs, environmental groups, and international organisations. These coalitions leveraged media campaigns, legal advocacy, and grassroots mobilisation to draw national and international attention to the river's pollution and mismanagement. As a result,

the government initiated the Citarum Harum programme, a comprehensive effort to rehabilitate the river and address community grievances (Solekhan, 2023). Similarly, in Bolivia, the Cochabamba Water War demonstrated the power of organised social movements in reversing water privatisation policies. Through mass protests, strategic alliances with labor unions, and international solidarity networks, the movement forced the government to cancel its contract with a private water company and restore public control over water resources (Olivera & Lewis, 2004; Assies, 2003).

Drawing from these examples, the Pasauran community could adopt several strategies to strengthen their movement. First, they should prioritise building a broad coalition that includes farmers, fishermen, women's groups, and local leaders to



ensure a unified and inclusive front. Second, partnering with experienced NGOs and advocacy organisations can provide the necessary resources, expertise, and networks to amplify their demands. Third, leveraging media and social platforms to raise awareness about their struggle can attract broader public support and put pressure on the stakeholders.

Impact of Access Mechanisms for Community

The community protest around the Cipasauran River against PT KTI aimed to demand the equitable distribution of

clean water for their daily needs. This demand successfully prompted the company to provide eight water containers (*toren*) with a capacity of around 3000 litres. Water distribution is typically carried out three times a day: at 10 am, 4 pm, and 8 pm. This demand became the community's primary response to the ecological changes in the Cipasauran River, as well as their strategy to ensure continued benefit from the river's water resources.



**Figure 9. Pipes and Water Storage Provided by PT KTI
After the Protest Action**



Source: Field Observations on December 4, 2023

Communities around the Cipasauran River also demanded coordination regarding the opening and closing of the dam gate by PT KTI. The dam's activities have raised concerns about potential dangers for the community. The opening of the dam gates without coordination could jeopardise the safety of residents who do activities on the river every day. In addition, it also poses a risk washing away and damaging fishing

boats moored along the river. Based on interviews conducted on December 6 and 7, 2023, with the Chief Fisherman and fishermen in the downstream area of the Cipasauran River, it was explained that at least two boats had been damaged due to the unannounced opening of the dam.

Another demand from the community around the Cipasauran River is compensation for the impact of



the changes in river water caused by its utilisation by PT KTI. The company uses Cipasauran River water as a commodity that is traded to meet the raw water needs of industries in Cilegon City. The community considers that the utilisation of Cipasauran River water by PT KTI benefits the company more than the local community. One of the demands that has not been optimally realised is the employment of workers from Pasauran Village. Considering that their river water resources have been taken and traded, the community feels that they have the right to get direct benefits from the management, including the opportunity to work in the PT KTI company, for example as an office boy or security.

Conclusion

The community's efforts to reclaim access to the water resources of the Cipasauran

River were driven by collective action, challenging dominant narratives and asserting the critical importance of equitable water access for local livelihoods. These efforts are exemplified in the protests against PT KTI, which can be understood as a form of contentious politics and a broader social movement aimed at resisting corporate control over the river.

The importance of maintaining access to water in the Cipasauran River has become a unifying factor for the community in carrying out social movements. For women, access to water is crucial to support their daily activities and maintain their health. For farmers, water is the primary source for irrigating agricultural land and plantations, while for fishermen, the sustainability of river's water flow is important to maintain water discharge to avoid damage to fishing boats. These three



groups only realised the urgency of their access to Cipasauran River water after company's activities dammed and diverted the water flow.

As the dominant entity, PT KTI accesses the water resources of the Cipasauran River through various mechanisms that primarily benefit the company. This domination has disrupted the daily activities of the community, especially farmers and fishermen, and created unequal power relations between the community, the government, and the company. The community lacks a strong enough position to influence the management of the Cipasauran River's water resources or ensure the fair distribution of its benefits.

The provincial government's centralised authority to issue water permits restricts district and village governments from regulating or advocating for local water rights, thereby

marginalising them in decision-making. This fragmented governance reinforces corporate dominance over the Cipasauran River, further sidelining local governments despite their proximity to the affected communities. Communities continue to resist, emphasising systemic challenges and advocating for equitable access to water. This struggle underscores how governance structures that favour provincial and corporate interests exacerbate inequalities. Decentralising authority and empowering local governments are essential for fair and sustainable water management, enabling them to defend community rights and address resource disparities effectively.

The findings of this study share similarities with global cases, such as those presented by Benedikter (2014) and Bakker (2005), which illustrate



how political and economic policies shape water resource management. In these contexts, state-backed privatisation models and neoliberal governance frameworks prioritise corporate interests and market-driven approaches, often at the expense of social and ecological considerations. For instance, in Vietnam, the commodification of water resources under neoliberal policies has marginalised small-scale farmers and rural communities. Similarly, in England and Wales, the privatisation of water services has led to rising costs and reduced accountability, disproportionately affecting low-income households. In the case of Cipasauran, the provincial government's licensing mechanisms and cooperation with PT KTI reflect a neoliberal approach that prioritises economic growth and

corporate profits over equitable water access. This has resulted in a stark disparity where the company reaps the benefits of the Cipasauran River's resources, while surrounding communities face increasing difficulties in accessing the water they depend on for their daily needs. These parallels highlight how neoliberal water governance—characterised by privatisation and state-corporate alliances—consistently deepens inequalities in water access and distribution across diverse geographical and political contexts.

This research highlights the important role of the government in determining how the governance of Cipasauran River water resources is carried out. Therefore, the recommendation from this research is that natural resource governance should prioritise inclusivity and social justice by implementing specific mechanisms and policies that



ensure equitable water access for all parties. For instance, governments could establish participatory decision-making frameworks that actively involve local communities, particularly marginalised groups such as women and small-scale farmers, in water management planning and policy formulation. Legal frameworks should be strengthened to mandate transparent and accountable licensing processes, ensuring that water use permits are not disproportionately allocated to corporate actors at the expense of local needs. Additionally, policies such as water user associations or community-based water governance models could be introduced to empower local stakeholders and distribute benefits more equitably. By embedding these mechanisms into governance structures, states can address

power imbalances, protect community rights, and foster sustainable and just water resource management.

While this research offers valuable insights into the dynamics of water resource governance in contested areas such as Cipasauran, it has limitations in exploring deeper, more nuanced issues among communities, companies, and the government. Future research should aim to address these gaps by delving into specific areas that remain underexplored. For instance, further research could investigate the role of governance structures at different levels—provincial, district, and village—and how their interactions shape water access and distribution. Additionally, a more in-depth analysis of gender dynamics is necessary to understanding how women—who are disproportionately affected by water scarcity—



engage in resistance efforts and participate in decision-making processes. The environmental impacts of water extraction and management practices—particularly on river ecosystems and biodiversity—warrant closer scrutiny. Finally, exploring the effectiveness of alternative governance models, such as community-based water management or co-management frameworks, could provide practical pathways for achieving more equitable and sustainable water governance. By addressing these areas, future research can provide a more comprehensive and in-depth perspective on the political ecology of water resource governance, contributing to both academic discourse and policy development.





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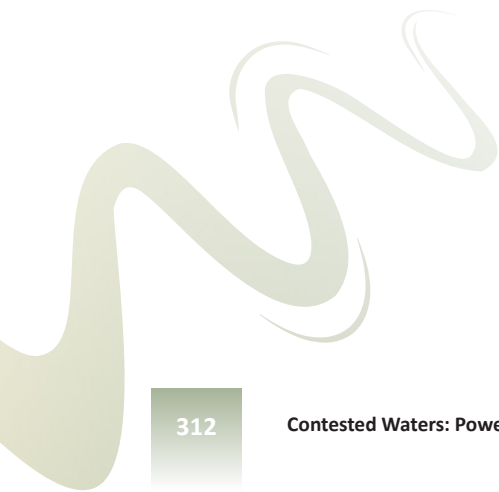
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Shrimp Boom, Migration Boom: An Analysis of Labour Structure in Petanahan Sub-district, Kebumen Regency

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Abstract

This study examines the expansion of migrant labour as a response to the shrimp boom in Petanahan, Kebumen Regency, which has transformed the local employment structure. The development of shrimp ponds by smallholder farmers, private companies, and the Area-Based Shrimp Ponds Scheme (TUBK) by the Ministry of Marine Affairs and Fisheries (KKP) increased labour demand and triggered migration flows, creating new dynamics in the labour market and potential social-economic tensions. This research employs a qualitative approach, incorporating literature review, in-depth interviews, and field observation. It is supported by Derek Hall and Tania Murray Li's (2011) theory of migrant labour and crop booms to address the research questions and analyse the continuity between booms and migrant labour expansion. The findings of this study reveal three key points: (1) the expansion of shrimp farming in Petanahan has increased labour demand, attracting both local and migrant workers; (2) migrant workers are divided into three categories based on employers: small shrimp farmers, plasma farmers, and TUBK; and (3) the key factors driving migration are more attractive economic incentives compared to the other sectors, limited job opportunities due to low education levels, and the recruitment process conducted by companies.

Keywords: Migrant workers; Shrimp boom; Kebumen Regency

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Introduction

This study examines the expansion of shrimp farm labourers in response to the shrimp boom along the coast of Petanahan Sub-district, Kebumen Regency. A shrimp boom refers to a significant increase in the production, demand, or market value of shrimp as an economic commodity. According to *Satu Data Kebumen* (2024), shrimp production in Kebumen reached 1,367.65 tonnes in 2019, increasing to 1,600.512 tonnes in 2020. Although production slightly declined to 1,590.054 tonnes in 2021, it rose again to 1,618.432 tonnes in 2022 and peaked at 1,903.555 tonnes in 2023.

The shrimp boom in Petanahan Sub-district was driven by two groups of actors: the local community, as the old actor, and the Ministry of Marine Affairs and Fisheries (KKP), as the new actor. The first wave

of pond development occurred between 2013 and 2016, driven by the local community, who constructed traditional shrimp ponds. During this period, the Investment Board and Integrated Licensing Service (BPMPPT) recorded the establishment of 116 community-managed ponds. The second wave was marked by the intervention of KKP, a new actor in the industry, which in 2019 developed a 100-hectare Area-Based Shrimp Farming (TUBK). Data from *Satu Data Kebumen* (2024) illustrates the expansion of shrimp farming in Petanahan from 2019 to 2023. In 2019, shrimp ponds covered 3.05 hectares before expanding to 41.55 hectares in 2020. However, the eviction of small-scale farmers in 2021 reduced the pond area back to 3.05 hectares. The area then grew again to 23.55 hectares in



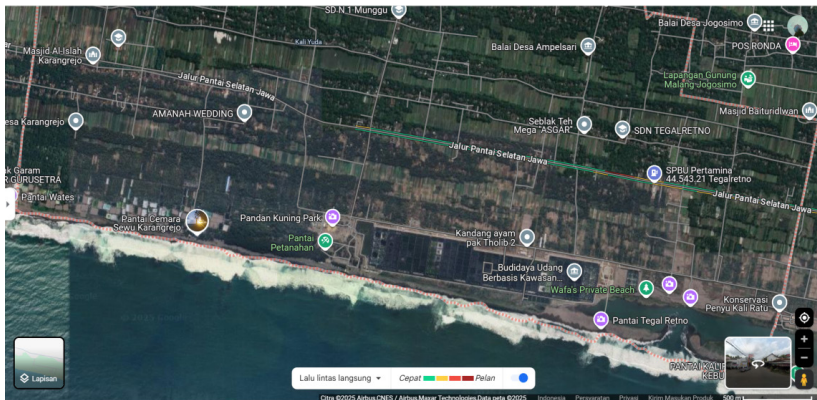
2022 with the establishment of a shrimp business park, ultimately reaching 63.03 hectares upon the park's completion.

Shrimp farmers and the KKP are examples of actors who invested in the shrimp boom in Petanahan. Meanwhile, those without sufficient capital to participate in the shrimp industry play a different role—as labour suppliers within the shrimp farming economy. The expansion of this sector has generated new employment opportunities, enabling individuals without capital to enter the industry as labourers. According to the KKP, the growth of both small-scale and large-scale ponds has significantly increased labour demand. The development of TUBK as a large-scale shrimp production scheme is even claimed to create thousands of jobs (Putri, 2021). The high demand for labour in the shrimp farming industry is primarily

driven by the labour-intensive nature of large-scale production, which relies heavily on low-skilled workers to carry out manual pond operations (Hall, 2011a).

As shrimp farming continues to expand in Petanahan, this growing demand for labour is not solely met by residents from the shrimp farming areas, such as Tegalretno, Karangrejo, Karanggadung, and Jogosimo Villages in Klirong Sub-district. Many workers also come from outside the area, including neighbouring villages, other sub-districts, and even cities beyond the region. This connectivity is widespread because it is influenced by information brought by migrant workers to their neighbourhoods, so it can be interpreted as an ongoing process of land and capital expansion that attracts newcomers to the coastal areas of Petanahan Sub-district.

Figure 1. Coastal Map of Petanahan Sub-district



Source: Google Maps

Previous research has extensively examined the relationship between shrimp farming booms and labour migration. Hall (2011a), in *Where the Streets Are Paved with Prawns: Crop Booms and Migration in Southeast Asia*, identifies three primary forms of migration associated with the shrimp booms: (1) smallholder migration, where farmers relocate to participate in booming crop cultivation; (2) state-facilitated transmigration

schemes; and (3) the recruitment of low-wage labourers, as observed in Thailand's shrimp industry. Meanwhile, Li (2011) examines migration in a broader context, particularly in the agricultural sector in Sulawesi. Li's study highlights the rapid transfer of land ownership to migrants—primarily from Bugis and Bali—through land sales and the clearing of land for cocoa cultivation. Transmigration schemes evolved into a structured migration pattern,



facilitated and encouraged by the state, turning it into a project that organised and subsidised people to engage in agricultural production through the provision of land, credit, transport, equipment, seeds, production technology, and other inputs.

Nevertheless, existing studies have yet to examine in detail the role of shrimp farming companies in organising labour migration and their impact on local labour dynamics. Research remains limited on how companies facilitate migration, whether the influx of migrant workers exacerbates or mitigates socio-economic tensions, and what regulatory frameworks are necessary to manage these dynamics. This study addresses this gap by analysing the mechanisms through which shrimp companies facilitate labour migration, the socio-economic tensions that arise between migrant and local

workers, and the regulatory measures required to manage these conflicts.

This study applies Derek Hall's migrant labour and Tania Li's crop boom concepts to analyse labour migration in Petanahan's shrimp industry. Hall (2011a) identifies two migration pathways: transmigration, facilitated by the government, and wage labour migration, driven by economic opportunities. Meanwhile, Li (2011) explains that crop booms lead to large-scale, near-monoculture production, influencing labour movement and socio-economic shifts (Hall, 2011b; Li, 2011). As Hall (2011b) further elaborates, the expansion of a booming commodity results in rapid production growth, which requires a significant workforce. In the context of shrimp farming, this leads to the influx of migrant labourers

seeking employment in both smallholder and large-scale pond operations.

Using a case study approach, this research examines how shrimp farm expansion—both small and large-scale—in Petanahan Sub-district has driven migrant labour influx and reshapes local socio-economic dynamics. It explores how migrant labour has expanded in shrimp farming and what motivates workers to enter the industry. By integrating these frameworks, this study provides a deeper understanding of the link between shrimp farming growth, labour migration, and its broader socio-economic implications

The Booming Shrimp Industry in Indonesia and Kebumen Regency

Marine Economics and Improving National Shrimp Productivity

The shrimp boom in Petanahan is a direct result of the central government's push for a national marine programme. The World Maritime Axis (PMD) is an idea built by Jokowi through the development of an advanced, prosperous, and sovereign marine economy based on marine economy, security, and maritime culture (PKSPL IPB University, 2024). Through this framework, Jokowi seeks to accelerate marine development that is more productive, efficient, inclusive, and environmentally sustainable. The purpose of PMD is to create new prosperity through the



marine sector, which has been undervalued because the state is more focused on extractive commodities.

President Jokowi has adopted the "Blue Economy" as a new business model to promote the sustainable utilisation of marine resources for economic growth, community livelihood improvement, and marine ecosystem health (Suryandari, 2024). The Blue Economy framework outlines three key targets for 2045:

1. Increasing the GDP contribution of the maritime sector to 15%;
2. Expanding employment opportunities in the maritime sector to 12% of total employment;
3. Enhancing environmental sustainability by designating up to 30% of marine areas (equivalent to 97.5 million hectares) for conservation.

During the Jokowi era, shrimp became a key commodity under the Blue Economy programme. The KKP prioritised shrimp farming through the shrimp business area programme due to its high export value. According to the Fish Quarantine, Quality Control, and Safety of Fishery Products Agency (Balai Karantina Ikan, Pengendalian Mutu, dan Keamanan Hasil Perikanan, BKIPM), Indonesia's shrimp exports consistently exceeded 40,000 tonnes from 2020 to 2023, despite a slight decline in 2023 (Krisandini, 2024). This highlights shrimp as a highly valuable fishery commodity for both domestic and international markets. The United States remains the largest importer of Indonesian shrimp with an annual volume of approximately 130,000 tonnes (Fortuna, 2024), followed by Japan, Malaysia, and Singapore. The growing global demand for Indonesian



shrimp exemplifies the shrimp boom phenomenon (Hall, 2011b), further strengthening its strategic role in the country's fisheries sector.

The high export potential of shrimp has driven intensive shrimp farming, which is undertaken by local communities, the government, and the private sector using modern, sustainable technologies. To enhance both the quantity and quality of shrimp production, the government introduced the shrimp business district as part of a national programme. The establishment of shrimp business parks reflects the ongoing shrimp harvest boom in Indonesia, aligning with government efforts to meet both domestic and international market demands. The increasing global demand for shrimp has prompted the government to expand production, ensuring continued growth in productivity (Hall, 2011b).

The shrimp business area operates through aquaculture pond areas, adopting an upstream-to-downstream approach, area-based aquaculture corporations, and zero-waste principles, downstream aquaculture products development, modern aquaculture 4.0, and integrated business management (Indah, 2021). The use of high technology in shrimp productivity is an inherent feature of commodities that are experiencing a boom (Hall, 2011a). As the initiator of the shrimp business park, the KKP has introduced two practical programmes to enhance shrimp farming efficiency and sustainability:

1. A pilot or modelling programme aimed at establishing a new standard for modern shrimp farming in Indonesia.



2. A traditional shrimp pond revitalisation programme across 13 national shrimp production centres.

The shrimp business district was developed under the Area-Based Shrimp Farming (TUBK) concept to boost productivity by expanding shrimp farming areas in Indonesia. According to KKP (2019), shrimp farming areas contributing to national production cover 562,000 hectares, with 93% consisting of traditional shrimp ponds and 7% classified as semi-intensive and intensive shrimp ponds (Razi, 2021). However, 56% of traditional shrimp ponds have been repurposed, leaving only 247,803 hectares of active traditional ponds. While intensive shrimp ponds contribute significantly to national production, traditional ponds have very low productivity and play only a minor role in efforts to increase national shrimp output.

The initial development of the shrimp business area began with TUBK Kebumen, envisioned as a pioneer in modern vaname shrimp farming, aiming for high productivity and premium-quality shrimp (Indah, 2021). Kebumen was selected as the TUBK development site due to strong support from the Regional Government of Central Java Province and Kebumen Regency, which facilitated its implementation. Furthermore, the success of small-scale farmers has demonstrated that Kebumen's water quality, environmental conditions, and climate are highly conducive to the expansion of a larger and more modern shrimp farming industry.

The construction of the TUBK in Kebumen serves as a model for further TUBK development, providing a reference for creating more effective, environmentally friendly, and economically



beneficial projects. This initiative also acts as a stimulus and a comparative study to improve TUBK implementation in other regions. Sukamara Regency in Central Kalimantan and East Sumba Regency in East Nusa Tenggara have been designated as the next development sites. The expansion of the shrimp business park aims to attract and encourage private sector involvement in revitalising traditional shrimp ponds, with a target of 9,000 hectares. Establishing shrimp business parks across multiple regions is part of a broader effort to accelerate the spread of vaname shrimp as a booming commodity (Hall, 2011a).

Shrimp pond revitalisation programmes are also conducted in several areas such as in East Lombok Regency, West Nusa Tenggara. Revitalisation is carried out using water pump technology and other more

complex technological designs to increase pond productivity. Over the past three to four years, incentive ponds in East Lombok have been established by several large entrepreneurs in collaboration with the KKP. The government's encouragement of other actors is natural when the benefits of a boom are felt by many non-agricultural actors such as the state and the private sector while still providing benefits to farmers (Hall, 2011a).

However, concerns have been raised about this project, as it is seen as a replication of the integrated food estate project that led to the destruction of Kalimantan's forest ecosystem. The ecological threats posed by this mega project have also raised alarms over its impact on local communities. According to Parid Ridwanuddin, the Coastal and Marine Campaign Manager, the shrimp business park project risks repeating the failures of the



food estate project and causing severe damage to coastal ecosystems (Putri, 2024). The conversion of mangrove forests has diminished their crucial role in protecting coastlines from abrasion and storms. Additionally, seawater pollution poses a serious threat to coastal fishers, as toxic substances such as ammonia—resulting from shrimp metabolism and the decomposition of feed, faeces, and dead plankton—contaminate marine environments.

Development of Shrimp Ponds on the Coast of Petanahan Sub-district

Field findings indicate that conflicts have emerged since this area became a centre for shrimp farming. Four main conflicts were identified: labour, land provision, land clearing, and waste management. These conflicts are summarised in a table, comparing the challenges faced by small-scale and large-scale shrimp farms.

Table 1. Conflict Scale for Coastal Shrimp Farms in Petanahan Sub-district

Conflict	Small-scale Shrimp Farms	Large-scale Shrimp Farming
Labour	Farmers do not hold the "lazy indigenous" stereotype about local labourers and therefore do not apply preferential selection in hiring labourers.	Pool workers are preferably recruited from buffer villages, while skilled workers are migrant labourers, as buffer villages are limited in providing skilled workers.
Land Provision	Extensive logging of cypress forests for ponds has led the local government to ban forest clearing and impose a pond tax on farmers.	Land for shrimp farming businesses is made available and supported by the local government through the clearance of cypress forests and coconut tree areas.



Land Clearing	The clearing of cypress forests does not interfere with the community's economic activities, as cypress forests are ecologically less significant.	The logging of economically valuable coconut tree areas has disrupted the activities of penderes (palm sap tappers).
Waste Management	Waste from small-scale shrimp farms, which still use traditional methods, has disrupted fishermen's activities, forcing them to search for fish further away.	The waste is claimed to have passed the filtration process and does not pollute the environment.

Source: Author's analysis

The coastal area of Petanahan Sub-district provides both material and ecological benefits to farmers. Materially, this region, which is predominantly covered by pine forest, ensures land availability for shrimp farming. The development of ponds in the fir forest area also helps protect these ponds from coastal abrasion caused by the notoriously large and high waves of the southern sea. Ecologically, Petanahan's coastal area, with direct access to the ocean, offers advantages in water intake, waste disposal, and favourable

weather conditions for shrimp farming. Farmers replenish pond water by drawing it through a long hose connected to a water pump. Similarly, pond waste, including used water, shrimp feed residue, faeces, and disease-causing agents, is directly discharged into the sea without filtration. Additionally, the hot and sunny weather characteristic of coastal regions supports shrimp appetite, accelerating their growth. These favourable conditions have driven the rapid expansion of shrimp ponds along the coast of Petanahan



Sub-district. The development of shrimp ponds started from the easternmost villages in Petanahan Sub-district, namely Tegalretno, Karangrejo, and Karanggadung.

The new trend of shrimp farming boom emerged because it generated substantial profits, giving rise to the term "suddenly rich." The high profitability of shrimp farming attracted many people to engage in this production boom (Hall, 2011a). As the shrimp boom benefited various actors in the community, the demand for land for pond construction increased significantly. In Petanahan Sub-district, approximately 3.8 hectares of cypress forest were lost due to the expansion of shrimp ponds. As a result, the function of the cypress forest as a wind and coastal abrasion barrier has begun to decline. This phenomenon has made coastal land increasingly

valuable, prompting the local government to assert control over these assets. In response to the continuous reduction of cypress forest areas, the local government has implemented regulations to limit further expansion by requiring farmers to register new ponds and imposing taxes on existing ones.

"Currently, the mechanism is more difficult. The creation of new ponds now requires a permit from the local government; without a permit, it is not allowed. Existing ponds are also taxed. The tax applies regardless of whether the pond is operational or inactive. Therefore, pond ownership must be carefully considered by shrimp farmers because they will still incur costs even if they go bankrupt." (Interview with Mr S, small-scale shrimp farmer, 12 February 2024).



These measures have successfully minimised and inhibited the deforestation of cypress forests along the coast of Petanahan District, which provide significant ecological benefits to the surrounding environment. Small-scale and plasma farmers are no longer permitted to build new ponds by clearing cypress forests. Instead, they acquire new ponds by purchasing or exchanging them with farmers who have ceased operations. This approach prevents further deforestation while also relieving former pond owners of the financial burden of taxes on inactive ponds.

Tax payments become an onerous burden when farmers lose income from shrimp ponds due to high mortality rates. To reduce tax expenses, farmers often choose to lease or sell their ponds. In the midst of leasing, new farmers usually invite the pond owner to participate in

stocking. The profit-sharing model between the pond owner and the investor allows new farmers to avoid rental costs. Some farmers also decide to sell their ponds because they can no longer afford the capital required for restocking. Ponds are typically sold to successful farmers, those who are just starting out, or companies that operate plasma farming systems along the coast of Petanahan Sub-district. Most of these companies come from the north coast of Java, such as Jepara and Rembang.

In 2019, a large-scale shrimp farming business was established with 149 ponds, beginning with the closure of small-scale farms. Small-scale farmers were prohibited from operating in the coastal villages of Tegalretno and Karanggadung to meet the 100-hectare land requirement. Meanwhile, Karangrejo Village remained



the only village in Petanahan Sub-district where small-scale farmers could continue their operations. The involvement of the Kebumen District Government in allocating land for shrimp farming highlights its role in facilitating land acquisition to accelerate the expansion of the shrimp boom.

According to Arief Sugiyanto, the Regent of Kebumen, the development of large-scale shrimp farms has provided significant benefits to Kebumen Regency, despite the loss of tax revenues from small-scale ponds (Fajar, 2021). However, the local government argues that this development can generate greater local revenue than the taxes collected from small-scale ponds. Arief Sugiyanto stated that the productivity of large-scale shrimp farms could contribute as much as 400 million annually to local revenue (Fajar, 2021).

The economic impact is also evident in the increased participation of local residents as labourers and landowners leasing their land for shrimp farming.

Social and Economic Impacts of TUBK Construction

The development of a large-scale shrimp farming area along the coast of Petanahan Sub-district has displaced two groups reliant on coastal livelihoods: capture fishermen and coconut tappers. Both depend on the coastal ecosystem for their income—fishermen catch fish at sea, while tappers hang bamboo on coconut trees along the shoreline. Seawater pollution from shrimp pond waste has disrupted fish habitats near the coast, forcing fishermen to venture further offshore to sustain their catches. Meanwhile, the conversion of

100 hectares of coastal land for shrimp farming has led to the felling of coconut trees, directly displacing coconut tappers.

The labour issue has become a growing concern for local communities amid the development of shrimp pond businesses. The recruitment of local labourers as pond workers was part of an agreement between the Village Government and KKP. However, KKP's requirement for labourers to have a high school education posed a challenge at the start of the recruitment process. Many local residents objected to this requirement, as most had only completed elementary or junior high school. They urged the Village Government to grant concessions, allowing them to continue working as pond labourers in TUBK.

Clasifications of Migrant Labourers in the Shrimp Boom Area on the Coast of Sub-district

Migrant Pond Labourers who Work for Small-scale Farmers

The wave of migration is a response to the increasing demand for labourers driven by the rapid expansion of shrimp ponds. The growth of both migrant labour and pond development along the coast of Petanahan Sub-district is interconnected, forming a cause-and-effect relationship that explains how the expansion of shrimp farming has attracted many people to the industry. Migrant workers believe that the industry provides ample employment opportunities, as successful small-scale farmers typically



require at least one pond worker, while those managing dozens of ponds employ several labourers.

This dynamic was evident at the onset of the shrimp industry boom in Tegalretno Village, where migrant labourers dominated nearly all ponds, as local residents preferred to remain farm labourers or capture fishermen. As a result, small-scale farmers recruited migrant labourers from outside the village to fill labour shortages. This initial reliance on migrant workers marked the beginning of a continuous influx of additional migrant labourers into the area.

The minimal requirements set by small-scale farmers for prospective labourers stem from the fact that the job does not require specialised skills and is classified as unskilled labour. In selecting workers, farmers prioritise trustworthiness and responsibility, even if candidates have no prior experience in shrimp

production. New labourers receive on-the-job training, covering essential tasks such as feeding routines and handling equipment failures, including waterwheel malfunctions.

Many workers choose employment with small-scale farmers as they struggle to meet the strict requirements imposed by companies. Information about job opportunities as pond labourers spreads easily beyond the coastal shrimp farming industry in Petanahan Sub-district, often through early-arriving shrimp labourers. These workers pass on news of labour demand to people in their home villages and frequently bring relatives in need of work to join them in small-scale shrimp farming. Consequently, many migrant workers in Petanahan's coastal shrimp farming industry are related.



Hall's (2011a) categorises migration in booming industries into three types, one of which is migration driven by individuals seeking wage labour opportunities. The coastal shrimp industry in Petanahan Sub-district falls into this third category, as workers migrate voluntarily to become wage labourers in shrimp ponds. Their arrival is closely linked to the shrimp production boom, which requires large numbers of low-skilled workers for labour-intensive operations that demand minimal expertise.

The largest flow of migrant labour comes from neighbouring villages or sub-districts. They come from neighbouring villages less than 10 km away, such as Bocor, Karangduwur, and Puring. Others commute from farther locations, such as Alian and Ayah District, with a travelling time of 1 to 1.5 hours. Those who find it difficult to return home daily

prefer to stay at the farm, and farmers typically allow them to go home for one night every two weeks.

The growing population of both migrant and local labourers has significantly increased the availability of workers compared to before. As a result, the ratio between labour supply and demand has become imbalanced, forcing both groups to compete for limited job openings as shrimp pond labourers. Moreover, one labourer can manage three to four ponds, reducing the number of workers needed by farmers. Despite this competition, there is no social jealousy or conflict between them. They compete fairly, as small-scale farmers are not particularly selective in hiring shrimp pond labourers.



Migrant Pond Labourers to Plasma Farmers

Migrant labourers from the north coast of Java, such as Rembang, Jepara, and Demak, are deployed to train smallholder farmers. They have significantly contributed to the influx of migrant labourers into the coastal shrimp industry in Petanahan Sub-district. The deployment of shrimp farm labourers is intended to reduce company expenses on farmer training and lower overall production costs. This mobilisation aligns with Hall's (2011a) concept of companies as a driving force behind the influx of migrant labourers into the coastal area of Petanahan Sub-district.

The influx of migrant labourers increased when plasma companies acquired ponds from small-scale farmers who had failed to harvest. Many farmers faced repeated

failures, preventing them from making a profit or recovering their capital. As a result, they were forced to shut down operations and could not afford to restock. To minimise losses, some farmers sold or leased their ponds, while others joined plasma mechanisms offered by companies from the north coast of Java. This arrangement allows farm operations to continue even when farmers no longer have the capital to sustain them.

The plasma programme brings migrant farm labourers—previously employed by the company on its north coast operational ponds—to Petanahan to train plasma farmers in adopting farming practices that align with company standards. Typically, 20 to 40 operational ponds owned by a plasma company are distributed among two to three plasma partners.

This number means that the company needs more migrant labourers to train plasma farmers.

Many migrant workers continue working for plasma farmers after being terminated by the company. As a result, they remain longer, bound by contracts with plasma farmers. Some prefer working for plasma farmers due to better incentives, including a bonus of 3-5 million per harvest. Additionally, they receive food rations in the form of raw ingredients that can be cooked at the farmhouse. Similar to shrimp farm labourers working for small-scale farmers, plasma farm labourers are also categorised as low-skilled workers despite their previous experience working for the company. The low-skilled labour category does not seem to differentiate between small-scale and plasma farmers. This is because it is not how long

they have worked but what they do. Both groups perform the same duties, including feeding shrimp, administering vitamins, maintaining water pH, cleaning shrimp faeces, and maintaining the waterwheel.

Migrant Farm Labourers on Area-Based Shrimp Farms (TUBK)

The recruitment of pond labourers was conducted through the village administration, with an allocation of 25 labourers for each village designated as a buffer zone for TUBK construction at the start of the withdrawal. A total of 75 pond labourer positions were filled by local workers from the three affected TUBKs. These prospective labourers had to meet the company's requirements to be eligible for employment at TUBK, some of which included:



1. Being 35 years old or younger at the time of application,
2. Originating from TUBK-affected villages,
3. Holding at least a senior high school education,
4. Man,
5. Passing a written selection process and interviews conducted by the Village Government and the Marine Fisheries Service.

These requirements proved challenging for many local residents, particularly due to the age restriction, minimum education level, and selection process. As a result, many opted to remain as small-scale farm labourers or agricultural workers. Consequently, 15 of the 90 available positions were ultimately filled by migrant workers.

The influx of migrant workers continued to grow due to the demand for roles beyond pond labour. The number of migrant workers in non-labourer positions reached 106 people. Some of the most common roles filled by migrant workers are laboratories and warehouses. These positions were rarely taken by local residents due to their limited educational qualifications.

Migrant farm labourers in TUBK come from various villages within Kebumen Regency, including Karanganyar, Buluspesantren, Adimulyo, and Tamanwinangun. Despite being from the same regency, they must still travel tens of kilometres to reach TUBK. To reduce daily commuting costs, some workers choose to relocate to coastal areas closer to TUBK. Compared to small-scale farms, TUBK offers a more attractive workplace due to its financial stability and better working conditions.

Pond labourers receive a monthly salary based on the Regency Minimum Wage (UMK), providing greater security than informal employment. Additionally, the division of labour at TUBK reduces individual workloads, as tasks are distributed across different divisions. For instance, pond labourers are solely responsible for feeding, cleaning, and maintaining the ponds, while machinery operation, shrimp feed processing, and water sanitation—typically handled by shrimp farm labourers on small-scale farms—are assigned to specialised divisions.

The arrival of migrant workers does not only fill positions as pond labourers. Many migrant workers from Kebumen Regency also take up roles in laboratories and warehouses. These positions are preferred alternatives to pond labour, as they do not require a university degree and offer a work environment with less

exposure to the sun. This shows that there are still many positions outside of pond labour that are not accessible to the majority of buffer zone communities due to low education levels.

TUBK has become a destination for skilled workers, as its operations rely on advanced technology. To meet this demand, TUBK transfers labour from other work units. The majority of migrant workers come from cities such as Jepara, Karawang, Pati, Sorong, Tegal, Bali, and Aceh, as they remain within the KKP work unit's network. These workers are primarily recruited for key positions, including technicians, management, and division heads.

There is a distinct difference between low-skilled and specialised migrant workers (Hall, 2011a). Low-skilled migrant workers come to TUBK independently, without



assistance from actors who facilitate their mobilisation or provide housing. As a result, those who arrive without official duties must cover their own accommodation costs. This pattern indicates that their migration is primarily driven by the demand for wage labour. In contrast, specialised workers receive support that extends beyond employment. They are often allowed to bring their families, benefit from mobilisation assistance, and are provided with company-sponsored official housing and other facilities to support their stay at TUBK. Their migration is strategically facilitated by the company, which assumes a role similar to that of the state in transmigration programmes. This structured recruitment process suggests that the company is actively shaping the

movement of skilled migrant workers, positioning their arrival as a form of corporate-sponsored transmigration.

Becoming a Shrimp Farm Labourer: A Rational Choice For Migrant Labourers?

Migrant Labourers Become Farmers' Mainstay at the Start of the Boom

Migrant shrimp farm labourers arrive as local residents in the coastal areas of Petanahan Sub-district remain hesitant to take up shrimp farming work. They perceive shrimp farming as highly risky, fearing that its high failure rate could threaten their wages. Instead, they prefer to remain as farm labourers, which they consider a more stable source of income. This reluctance is further



reinforced by the initial lack of successful shrimp farming in the region, making locals cautious about entering the industry.

Small-scale farmers who need farm labourers seek workers from neighbouring villages, offering incentives such as food rations and bonuses to attract them. Migrant worker networks further facilitate recruitment by spreading job information within their communities. This network pattern emerges as a response to how information about farm labour opportunities tends to circulate among closely connected actors (Li, 2011).

The phenomenon in coastal Petanahan Sub-district differs from Li's (2011) findings on oil palm plantations, where oil palm farmers tend to prefer Javanese men. Li (2011) highlighted stereotypes suggesting that Javanese workers have a high work ethic, while local people were often perceived as lazy.

However, shrimp farmers in coastal Petanahan Sub-district do not differentiate between local and migrant labourers in terms of work ethic. The influx of migrant labourers into this area is not driven by farmers' reluctance to hire local workers but rather by local residents' hesitation to enter the industry, as previously discussed.

There is a contradiction between the assumption that shrimp farming has created a large number of jobs and the reality on the ground. Small-scale farmers typically require only one or two labourers. The dissemination of job vacancy information is no longer as extensive as it was during the initial development of shrimp farming along the coast of Petanahan Sub-district. The lack of demand results from differences in the timing of shrimp farming activities



among small-scale farmers, meaning each farmer stocks at different times, which affects the availability of labourers.

Shrimp Farm Labour is Better Option than Farm Labourers

Hall (2011a) highlights the pervasiveness of the "get rich quick" narrative, which attracts labourers without production assets to become wage labourers, hoping to benefit from the profits of shrimp farming. Working as shrimp farm labourers has become an appealing option for both migrant and local workers seeking more lucrative opportunities. Profits that can reach hundreds of millions per pond in each harvest not only attract capital owners willing to take risks in the shrimp business but also draw labourers who see the potential for prosperity in the success of shrimp farmers.

Compared to farm labour, pond labour is a more attractive option for both local and migrant workers. In the agricultural sector, they earn only 70-80 thousand per day, which has been the hallmark of odd jobs in Kebumen. This wage differs only slightly from that offered by shrimp farmers, increasing by just 10-20 thousand, bringing their daily earnings to 100 thousand. However, the large bonuses provided by shrimp farmers after harvest are non-negotiable with the rice field owners, who are considered their employers. A bonus of 3-4 million per harvest is substantial compared to farm labour wages. This amount increases further when workers manage multiple shrimp ponds, as their earnings multiply accordingly. Consequently, all the labourers



who contributed to this study refused to return to farm labour and chose to remain shrimp farm labourers.

Some of them also chose to work as shrimp farm labourers at TUBK after its establishment in Petanahan Sub-district. They were drawn to TUBK due to its UMP-standard wages and employment security through BPJS Employment. As one of the labourers at TUBK explained:

"Working at TUBK already follows the UMP-standard minimum wage. We are also provided with labour and health insurance by the company. During each harvest, we can still bring home 8-10 kg of high-quality shrimp, which can be resold at a high price in the market or to neighbours." (Interview with Mr A, TUBK labourer, 9 February 2024).

Another factor influencing migrant workers' decision to leave farm labour was the flexibility it offered. Farm work provides considerable free time, allowing farm owners to permit their labourers to take on additional jobs as long as their responsibilities on the shrimp farm are met. Shrimp farm owners do not consider themselves disadvantaged when their labourers do other side jobs.

Shrimp pond labourers begin their day by cleaning shrimp debris, known as 'nyimpon,' followed by feeding and administering vitamins at scheduled times set by the pond owner. An additional task arises when electricity and machinery issues cause the waterwheel to shut down. Shrimp pond labourers, generally have more free time after ensuring that the shrimp are well-fed and that there are no machinery issues threatening their survival until



the next feeding. However, farm labour does not offer the same flexibility. Farm labourers work long hours, typically 9 hours a day from 8 am to 5 pm. This strict schedule not only limits their working hours but also restricts their ability to take on additional jobs. As a result, many male farm labourers have switched to shrimp farming, finding it more profitable, while their wives continue to work as seasonal farm labourers.

Shrimp Farm Labourers Do Not Require Specialised Skills or Higher Education

The low level of education among shrimp farm labourers places them in the low-skilled labour category, rendering them a source of inexpensive labour for farmers and shrimp farming corporations. This is consistent with Hall's (2011a) findings that shrimp farms in Southeast Asia

tend to rely on hired and migrant labour for low-skilled work. Labourers are not required to have secondary or higher education to work in this sector, as their tasks rely more on physical strength than their cognitive skills. Moreover, shrimp pond labourers do not need prior experience to enter this occupation. They can acquire knowledge about shrimp farm work through self-learning, guidance from farm owners, or instructions from experienced co-workers. Their learning process is based on direct experience and practical knowledge, enabling them to adapt quickly.

Low-skilled migrant farm labourers have limited job opportunities due to their lack of qualifications, which prevents them from accessing formal employment that requires specialised skills. As a result, they often turn to physically

demanding jobs, such as pond labour (Hall, 2011a). Similarly, the limited education levels among villagers in the TUBK buffer zone make it difficult for them to meet the KKP's requirement of a minimum high school education. Many request dispensation from their village head to be included as shrimp farm labourers in TUBK, despite having only an elementary or junior high school diploma.

The Need for Skilled Labourers in TUBK Drives the Transfer of KKP Workers

The use of high technology in the TUBK has been essential to accelerating the production of booming commodities (Li, 2011). The application of advanced technology in TUBK's operational activities has created a demand for labourers with specific expertise, sufficient experience, and in-

depth knowledge to operate sophisticated equipment. These workers are also required to fine-tune pond operations according to the measurable parameters of the technology, such as water temperature, water quality, and shrimp feeding.

Given the generally low levels of education among coastal communities in Petanahan Sub-district, this demand for skilled labour cannot be met locally. As a result, there has been an influx of skilled workers from outside Kebumen Regency, including Jepara, Karawang, Pati, Sorong, Tegal, Bali, and Aceh. These specialised labourers are employed in various roles such as technicians, managerial staff, and division heads.

TUBK encourages the arrival of workers with specialised skills, particularly those who have previously worked in KKP-owned units in other regions. The concept of "job transfer"



was applied by KKP to obtain workers with skills that could not be filled by local workers. Workers from other work units were encouraged to transfer to TUBK Kebumen, supported with various forms of assistance for mobilisation and housing to help them settle in the Petanahan Sub-district. The company's direct encouragement compelled them to travel long distances in order to continue working at the KKP.

Conclusion

The research identified several key findings regarding the influx of migrant workers during the shrimp boom in Petanahan. First, the shrimp boom originated from small-scale shrimp farming managed by local communities. It gained further momentum with the establishment of the TUBK area, which enabled significantly higher production capacity. Second, the study

categorised migrant workers into three groups based on their employment: those working for small-scale farmers, plasma farmers, and the TUBK. Third, the research highlighted several factors influencing the decision of migrant workers to relocate to Petanahan to work in the shrimp sector, including the perception that shrimp farming is more profitable than agriculture, low levels of education, and formal company assignments.

An important point highlighted in this study is that the expansion of KKP's in the development of shrimp farming areas has brought new dynamics to shrimp farm labour migration in Indonesia. In light of this, the author offers the following recommendations to stakeholders in TUBK. First, the KKP should ensure equitable access to employment opportunities in the TUBK area, with fair representation and



a balanced proportion of local and migrant workers. Second, local governments should emphasise that any incoming investment must contribute to the absorption of local labour. Third, regulating the ratio of local to migrant shrimp farm workers in TUBK is a necessary step for the KKP to prevent potential tensions between the two groups. This measure reflects the KKP's responsibility to the local community by ensuring that job opportunities are available to nearby residents, thereby preventing the marginalisation and displacement of local workers.

Small-scale farmers can continue to attract labour without resorting to stereotyping in the recruitment process of shrimp farm workers. This approach not only ensures that both local and migrant labourers have equal access to employment but also fosters an inclusive and

equitable working environment. By prioritising skills, abilities, and experience as the primary criteria in labour selection, farmers can ensure that individuals are chosen based on competencies relevant to the tasks at hand. Furthermore, such a policy enables farmers to contribute positively to social integration between local and migrant labourers, reducing potential conflicts and enhancing cooperation within work teams. Sustainable and responsible labour practices also help farmers build a reputation as good leaders—especially when the policy is clearly communicated and consistently implemented within the community. This not only benefits farm operations in the long term but also strengthens the local community as a whole.



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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 region². 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

² 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 Bleddek 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 Assistance/ 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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Who Speaks for Nahdlatul Ulama? Representation, Legitimacy, and the Politics of Claim-making in the 2024 Presidential Election

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Abstract

In Indonesia's presidential elections, the act of claiming to represent Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) has emerged as a potent political strategy—one pursued not only by political parties but also by religious elites, polling institutions, and self-proclaimed "neutral" actors. This article investigates how such claims are constructed and contested within the digital public sphere in the lead-up to the 2024 presidential election. Drawing on Saward's theory of representative claims, it analyses 413 online news articles using a combination of Discourse Network Analysis and qualitative text analysis. Empirically, the study maps who is speaking, about what, and on whose behalf—offering analytical insight into how legitimacy is narrated and performed. Theoretically, it extends the application of representative claims theory by demonstrating how legitimacy is negotiated in contexts where the constituency is internally fragmented, pluralistic, and contested—rather than unified or binary. These findings highlight the fluid nature of representation, especially in socio-religious communities such as NU, where claims to representation are constantly produced, challenged, and reframed in public discourse.

Keywords: Claims; representation; legitimacy; construction of interests

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Introduction

Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) has consistently attracted political attention in the lead-up to Indonesian elections. Interest in NU is not limited to political parties and formal politicians, but extends to extra-parliamentary actors as well. Along with the development of post-reform democracy, representation is no longer confined to formal political actors, civil society groups and the private sector entities now also participate in representative claims. Consequently, competition to claim legitimate representation of NU in the public sphere has become—and will likely remain—inevitable.

This is particularly significant given the sheer number of Nahdliyyin.² Based on data from Saiful Mujani Research and

Consulting, 20% of Indonesia's total population identify as NU members. When compared to the Permanent Voter List (*daftar pemilih tetap*/DPT) released by the General Election Commission (Komisi Pemilihan Umum/KPU), which totals around 204 million, this translates to approximately 40 million NU voters (Triono, 2023b). However, this figure only captures formal membership. A separate survey conducted by the Alvara Research Centre indicates that as many as 59.2% of Indonesians claim to have close ties with NU (Triono, 2023a). Unsurprisingly, NU-affiliated voters have long been a highly contested electoral constituency.

The National Awakening Party (Partai Kebangkitan Bangsa/PKB) has historically maintained close ties with NU, having been founded with the support of the Central Board of Nahdlatul Ulama (Pengurus Besar Nahdlatul

2 A term referring to individuals culturally or structurally affiliated with Nahdlatul Ulama (*kiai* NU).



Ulama/PBNU) (Rohman, 2018). However, the 2024 elections showed different results. A pre-election survey in East Java, a traditional NU stronghold, showed that PKB trailed behind the Indonesian Democratic Party of Struggle (Partai Demokrasi Indonesia Perjuangan/PDIP), which garnered 31% of the vote compared to PKB's 20.2% (Lembaga Survei Indonesia, 2023). Moreover, PKB Chairman Muhaimin Iskandar (commonly known as Cak Imin), who stood in the presidential race, was also defeated. In East Java, Prabowo Subianto-Gibran Rakabuming Raka (Prabowo-Gibran) won 65.1% of the vote, while Anies Baswedan-Muhaimin Iskandar (Anies-Imin/AMIN) only received 17.5% (Irawan, 2024). PKB also lost to PDIP in the contest of parliamentary seats in the province (Azmi, 2024).

The representation of NU is notably dynamic. Previous studies have shown that

various actors, such as formal organisations, civil society organisations (CSOs), and political parties, attempt to claim representation of NU for their respective interests (Nasrudin, 2022; Chalik, 2010; Adryamarthanino, 2022). The evolving role of PKB in representing NU in successive elections has also attracted scholarly attention. For instance, research has demonstrated that NU's support for PKB has fluctuated: in Bandar Lampung, PKB received both symbolic and substantive legitimacy from NU (Abror, 2019), whereas in Madura, the 2019 presidential election revealed that NU's political preferences did not always align with those of PKB (Burhani, 2019).

The decline in PKB's electability among Nahdliyyin voters in the 2024 election is therefore neither now nor unexpected. According to Ignazi (2021), a party's difficulty to



gain public trust and secure a majority vote signals a legitimacy crisis. Saward (2010) further argues that representational legitimacy does not stem solely from electoral outcomes; rather, it emerges through an ongoing process of making and responding to representative claims. This legitimacy is actively contested through convincing claims (Leifeld & Haunss, 2012), and can only be achieved when constituents recognise and accept those claims of representation (Guasti & Geissel, 2019).

Given PKB's failure to secure dominant NU support in the 2024 election and the increasing contestation over NU representation, a new analytical approach is required. Much of the existing literature on the PKB–NU relationship focuses on binary electoral outcomes—whether or not NU supports PKB—without examining the processes through which representative

claims are produced and contested. Yet NU's support for PKB remains volatile and contested. This study adopts the framework of representative claims, moving beyond formalistic electoral procedures to explore how claims to represent NU are produced, contested, and legitimised within the broader sphere of public discourse.

This study seeks to address the following question: How do various actors contest and construct claims to represent NU in the lead-up to Indonesia's 2024 presidential election through online mass media discourse? To answer this, the research examines public responses to PKB's claims, the discursive construction of NU-related interests, and the types and variations of claims articulated by competing actors in the pursuit of representational legitimacy.



Methods

This research employs a mixed-method approach, combining Discourse Network Analysis (DNA) with descriptive qualitative methods. In this analysis, political discourse is conceptualised as a dynamic network that interacts and is interdependent (Leifeld, 2016). By identifying patterns in language use, such as recurring word and sentence, the claim map shows how various actors shape NU-related interests through their representational claims. This network of claims provides a comprehensive view of the dynamics of claim contestation, enabling the identification of both support and rejection of these claims.

To deepen the discourse network analysis, a qualitative content analysis was conducted. This method aims to understand, interpret and explore meaning within written texts. In this study,

content analysis enriches the findings of big data analysis by capturing important elements in each claim that are not easily identified through network analysis alone. These elements illuminate the patterns in the types of claims made by PKB and other actors in constructing representational legitimacy.

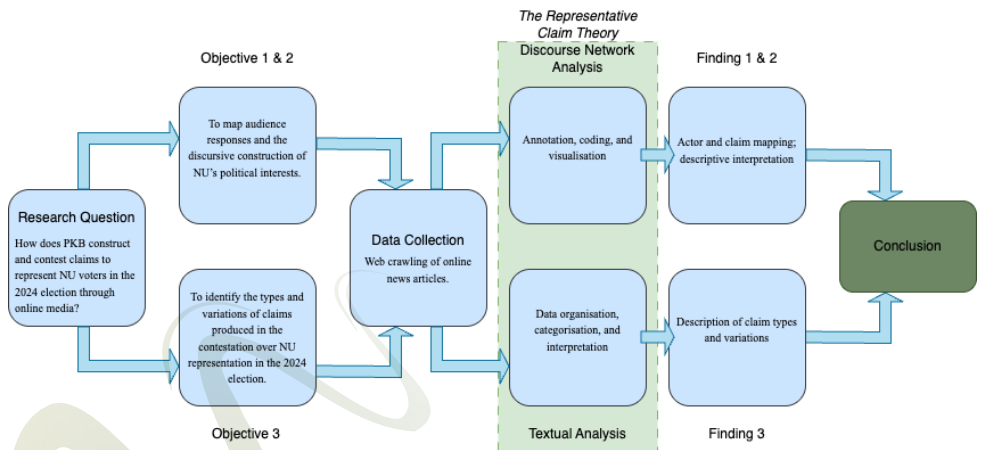
The integration of discourse network analysis and qualitative content analysis offer both breadth and depth in examining contested claims to represent NU in the mass media. While network analysis provides a macro-level landscape of discursive conflict, content analysis dissects the structure and meaning of each claim to better understand what, how, and why certain ideas are communicated and contested.

Data were collected from national and local online news media. Articles collected using the Event Registry tool with the keywords “(PKB or

National Awakening Party) and (Nahdlatul Ulama or NU)" over the period spanning from the official declaration of the AMIN candidate pair on 2 September 2023 to the end of the campaign on 10 February 2024. Media sources were limited to Kompas and Detik, the two most trusted and widely accessed news outlets between 2021 and 2023. Based on a Reuters survey

(Newman et al., 2023), Kompas is trusted by 69% of respondents, while Detik is accessed weekly by 61%. This study also includes articles from domains affiliated with Detik and Kompas. A total of 445 articles were initially identified, of which 413 were deemed suitable for further analysis after data cleaning and filtering.

Figure 1. Research Stages



Source: author's data



From the 413 articles, the author annotated statements identified as claims, resulting in a total of 470 claim statements. These statements were then coded using a discourse network analyser, producing 75 groups of distinct clusters of claims/discourses originating from 23 organisations. Upon further breakdown, these organisations encompassed 95 individual actors. The resulting discourses, organisations, and individuals were subsequently visualised as a network map using the Visone application.

Theoretical Framework

To analyse the data collected, this study draws upon Saward's (2010) theoretical framework of representative claims. Saward outlines five core elements that constitute a representative claim.

"A maker of representations (M) puts forward a subject (S) which stands for an object (O) that is related to a referent (R) and is offered to an audience (A)."

In this framework, the claim-maker (M) proposes a subject (S) to speak or act for an object (O), which is linked to a particular referent (R), and directs this claim to an audience (A). (M) makes a claim by describing (S) to represent (O) in a manner that aligns with their own interests. The audience (A) then judges the claim, accepting or rejecting it. It is crucial to distinguish between (M) and (S); as the claim-maker does not always position themselves as the subject, but may instead construct or appoint the subject to support their claim. Likewise, the object (O) is often framed through the attribution of specific characteristics (R) by (M) to strengthen the legitimacy or persuasiveness of the claim. These representative claims

are addressed to an audience, whether constituents, the media, or policymakers who may either accept the claim or respond with a counterclaim, thus generating a dynamic process.

To enrich the empirical analysis, the study also incorporates Guasti and Geissel's (2019, 102) typology of representative claims. They categorise claims based on the presence of identifiable

constituents and linkages. If both constituents and linkages are evident, the statement qualifies as a representation claim. If the linkage is rejected, it is considered a misrepresentation claim. Where a claim references a value or interest but lacks a linkage to a constituent, it is classified as an interest claim. If neither constituent nor linkage is clearly identified, the statement is categorised simply as a statement.

Table 1. Types of Claims Guasti and Geissel (2019)

Claim Type	Constituents	Linkage	Example
Representation Claim	called	called	"A is the party that represents B"
Misrepresentation Claim	called	rejected	"Party A does not represent B"
Claim of Interest/ Value	called	Not mentioned	"B supports party A"
Statement	Not mentioned	Not mentioned	"Party A has an impact on welfare"

Source: Guasti and Geissel (2019), processed by the author



These various types of claims can be used to reflect the dynamics, diversity, and emerging trends within PKB's representative claim strategy towards NU. Analysing the variation in these claims strengthens the earlier arguments regarding the heterogeneity of representation claim strategies and highlights the distinct elements embedded within each claim.

Results

Yahya Cholil Staquf's election as chairman of the Central Board of Nahdlatul Ulama (PBNU) presents a new challenge for PKB, which had previously enjoyed a harmonious relationship with the former chairman. This shift is particularly significant in the context of the 2024 elections, where Cak Imin, the chairman of PKB, is running as the vice-presidential candidate alongside Anies Baswedan—a figure

widely perceived as close to the Prosperous Justice Party (Partai Keadilan Sejahtera/PKS), a party often considered ideologically opposed to NU. Yahya Cholil has strongly emphasised NU's institutional neutrality (Pangaribowo, 2024), making it more difficult for PKB to secure support from the Nahdliyyin constituency.

Although PBNU has officially declared a neutral stance, some statements from PBNU officials suggest otherwise. For example, PBNU's secretary general claimed that the majority of v supported Prabowo (Ernes, 2024). Similarly, Nadirsyah Hosen, a well-known NU intellectual, revealed a systematic and large-scale mobilisation by the chairman and the *Rais 'Aam* (supreme leader) of PBNU to rally institutional support for candidate 02 (Ni'am & Asril, 2024).



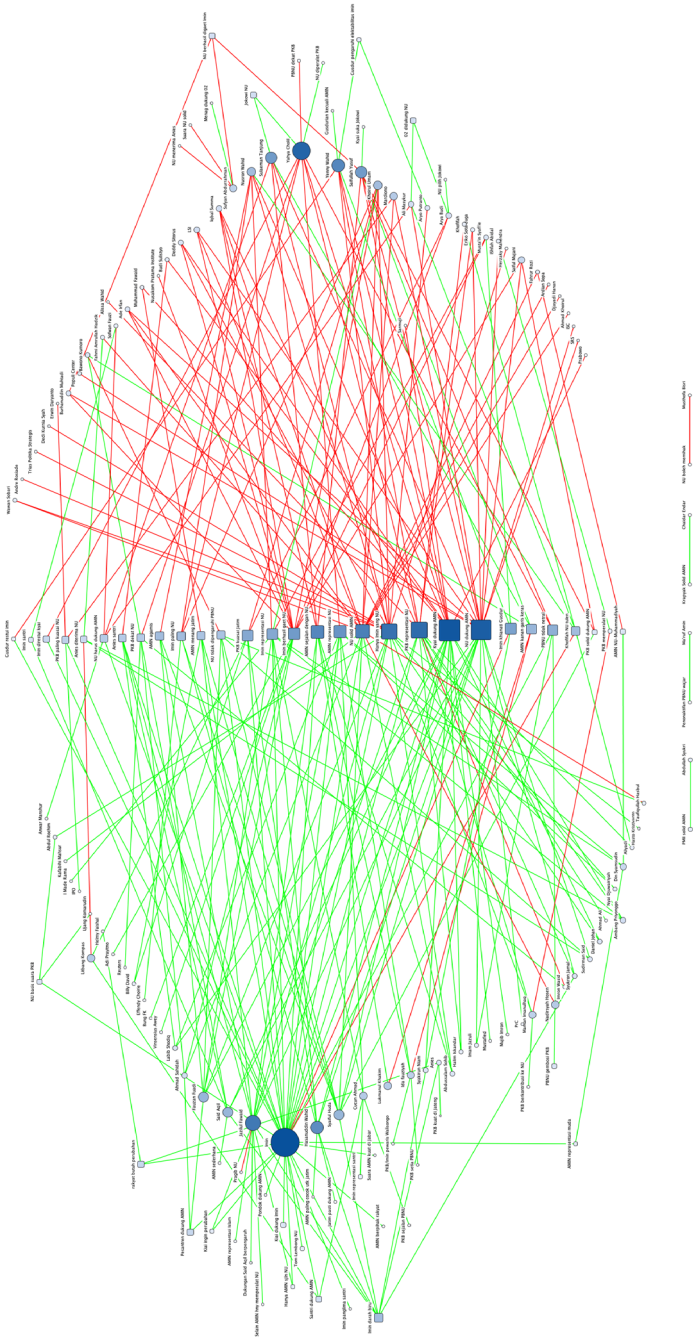
Tensions between PBNU and PKB were exacerbated by efforts to delegitimise support for PKB, including public calls from PBNU figures urging voters not to support candidates endorsed by Abu Bakar Ba'asyir—a radical Islamist leader who declared his support for the AMIN ticket—and not to back candidates who exploit religion for electoral gain, a veiled reference to Anies Baswedan's controversial campaign in the 2017 Jakarta gubernatorial race (Aditya & Setuningsih, 2023; Arifin, 2024). Nonetheless, political divisions between PBNU and some various regional board of NU (Pengurus Wilayah Nahdlatul Ulama/PWNU) reveal a fragmented political landscape within NU, where support cannot be centrally dictated or uniformly enforced.

The main finding in this study is the network of NU representative claims as reflected in two mass media sources. The network map of actors and

claims shows how audiences responded to the representative claims made by PKB. Mapping these responses is important to understand the dynamics of legitimacy surrounding PKB's claim to represent NU, as well as for revealing the interests and alignments of the many actors involved. In addition, this section discusses how the network map of claims can assist researchers in analysing how NU's interests are discursively constructed within these competing claims.

The network map also highlights the involvement of actors traditionally perceived as neutral—such as academics and polling institutions—in the production of claims, which are often shaped by underlying interests. Additionally, it identifies dominant actors who play major roles in the contestation of representation claims, both among political parties and extra-parliamentary actors.

Figure 2. Network Map of Audience Claims and Responses



Source: author's data



Finally, the findings from the content analysis are presented to determine the specific elements and types of claims produced by the most active actors. A closer examination of these claims reveals how different actors construct the interests of constituents in ways that serve their pursuit of representational legitimacy.

In the network map, square symbols represent claims, concepts, or discourses, while round symbols denote actors or individuals. A green tie indicates an actor's positive relationship with or agreement to a claim or concept, while a red tie, in contrast, indicates disagreement or opposition.

Overall, the map reveals a central vertical cluster of claims that effectively separates two opposing camps. Groups that support PKB's claims to represent NU's interests appear on the left side of the map, while

those that reject these claims are positioned on the right. The size and colour intensity of the nodes indicate the frequency with which each actor or claim appears in the media data: the larger and darker the node, the more frequently it occurs in the production of representative claims.

On the left side of the map, the largest node is 'Imin', indicating that Imin is the actor most actively advancing claims in support of PKB's representation of NU. On the right, the largest node is 'Yahya Cholil', indicating that he is the principal actor advancing anti-claims against PKB's representation narrative.

The stark contrast between Imin and Yahya—who emerge as the two most active producers of conflicting claims—reflects a deep-rooted social and political rivalry. This tension traces back to the 2021 NU Congress, during which Yahya was elected



chairman of PBNU, replacing Said Aqil. During his tenure, Said Aqil had generally accommodated PKB's political interests and even publicly asserted that "NU is PKB, PKB is NU." In contrast, Yahya has consistently emphasised NU's neutrality and has explicitly rejected PKB's claims to represent the organisation.

The most contested claims can be seen from the largest nodes on the map, such as 'NU supports AMIN', '*Kiai*³ supports AMIN', and 'PKB represents NU'. These claims are intensely contested, as indicated by the dense network of connecting tie surrounding them, signifying

both high frequency in media production and a considerable volume of anti-claims or rejection.

On both left and right sides of the network map are claims that do not have a direct relation to the opposing group, meaning that these claims were not explicitly refuted. For example, on the left side, claims such as 'Imin represents *santri*' and 'Imin is a blue blood', stand unchallenged by opposing groups. Conversely, on the right side, claims such as '02 is supported by NU' and 'NU is used by PKB' originate from actors opposing PKB.

An analysis of the actors and claims network reveals varied audience responses, ranging from strong acceptance to outright rejection. While many claims garnered both support and rejection, some received only support without rejection. These variations make it difficult to determine conclusively whether

3 A religious figure who leads a *pesantren* (Islamic boarding school) or holds scholarly authority within the Islamic Nusantara tradition, particularly in *kiai* Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) community. In NU society, a *kiai* plays both spiritual and social roles and often serves as a patron in patron–client relationships with students (*santri*) and followers (*jamaah*).



PKB has succeeded in gaining representational legitimacy among NU constituents because the diversity of constituents leads to diverse responses to the representative claims made by PKB. According to Guasti and Geissel's (2019), a claim is considered democratically legitimate only when supported by the relevant constituency. However, this framework presumes a cohesive constituency, which is not applicable in the case of NU, whose members—Nahdliyyin—are internally diverse in political orientation and interest. Within

such a pluralistic community, legitimacy becomes a dynamic and contested process, making it challenging to establish a singular or unified measure of representational success.

The actor-claim network map also shows that many of the representative claims revolve around the construction of NU's interests. Of the 29 contested claims, the three most prominent were 'Kiai supports AMIN' (53 mentions), 'NU supports AMIN' (45 mentions), and 'PKB represents NU' (32 mentions). Both PKB and PBNU, along with

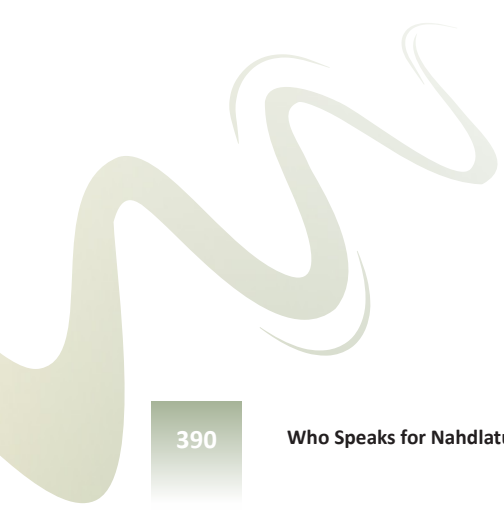
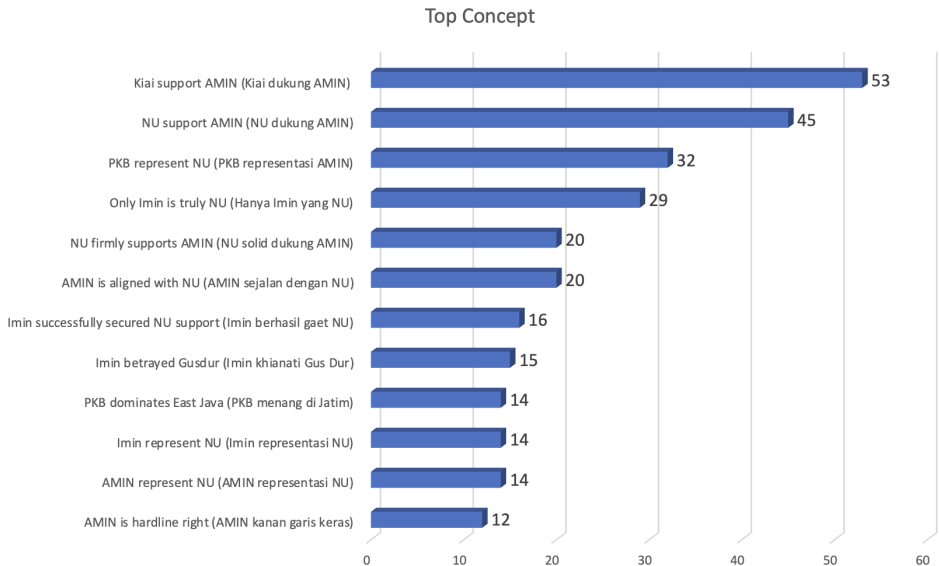


Figure 3. Top Concept 2023-2024



Source: author's data

various other actors, competed to define and claim representation over the interests of the *kiai*. These interests are particularly contentious, as *kiai* are widely regarded as influential religious leaders with loyal constituencies. Their authority enables them to guide the political preferences

of their *santri*, making their endorsement a powerful asset in electoral mobilisation (Chalik, 2010; Ulzikri, 2019).

From a total of 75 identified claim concepts, the author constructed a concept frequency diagram, focusing only on concepts that appeared in more than ten statements. The figure



shows the frequency with which each concept is invoked; however, it is important to emphasise that the counts include both supporting and opposing (anti-claim) statements. As such, the frequency does not reflect the sentiment (positive or negative) associated with a particular concept, but rather its prominence or contestation within the discourse. High-frequency concepts thus represent discursive battlegrounds where political actors and organisations most actively engage.

Categorising claims by concept allows for a clearer understanding of how NU interests are constructed by various actors, including politicians, PBNU officials, academics, and polling institutions. For example, NU is constructed as a group susceptible to manipulation, as an institution in need of reform,

as a supporter of President Jokowi, or as aligned with other political figures. More specifically, many actors also claim that the preferences of *kiai*—such as their support for particular candidates—constitute part of NU's collective interest. Even claims about the values and interests of the late Abdurrahman Wahid (Gus⁴ Dur) remains a contested symbolic resource, with ongoing disputes about whether Gus Dur endorsed Imin, or whether Imin represents his political and moral ideals.

One of the most debated and symbolically charged concepts is the claim that 'Only Imin is NU'. This claim contests the struggle over who most authentically embodies the NU identity. Such phenomenon reflects a core dynamic in the process of making representative claims.

4 "Gus" is a term of endearment and respect, commonly used in pesantren and traditional Javanese communities to refer to the son of a *kiai* or a respected figure.



As Hatherell (2021) argues, political actors frequently formulate representative claims through narratives that resonate with audiences, since narrative is a central means through which individuals interpret and make sense of the political world.

Behind the contestation over who hold the most legitimate claim to be recognised as an “NU person” lies an important social and historical context. Imin is the great-grandson of KH Bisri Syansuri, one of the NU’s founder, and the nephew of Gus Dur. Despite the complex political dynamics between them, their familial relationship remains close. Within Nahdliyyin discourse, this “blue blood” lineage commands significant respect. Although this discourse did not always occupy a central position in NU’s identity politics, it began to gain prominence following the NU Congress in Situbondo during the 1980s. At

that time, Gus Dur’s symbolic authority was consolidated, particularly in representing the Asy’arian strand within NU’s political landscape (Ali, 2004). To this day, the Asy’arian or *muassis* (founder) lineage continues to be revered and strategically employed to garner legitimacy and support, as demonstrated by Imin and his supporters within PKB.

The discourse network map in Figure 2 further illustrates the partiality of certain academics and polling institutions, whose claims are often treated as objective facts. For example, Politika Research Consulting stated that NU constituents support AMIN, while Indonesia Political Opinion asserted that PKB hold substantial influence within NU’s voter base. In contrast, Poltracking challenged this view, contending that PKB does not dominate electoral support in East Java. Other

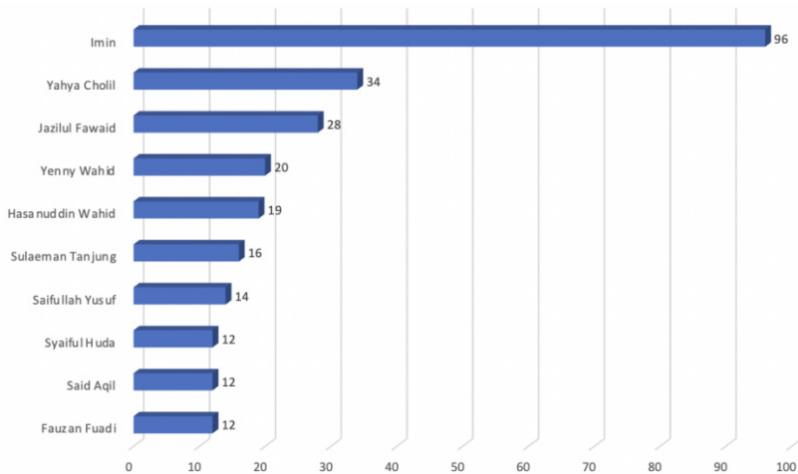


institutions, such as Indikator and LSI, similarly argued that NU constituent are not solidly aligned with AMIN, and that their votes are likely to fragment in the 2024 presidential election.

Academics have also offered different claims. Ahmad Sahidah, a lecturer at Nurul Jadid University, claimed that Imin successfully secured NU support after joining the Coalition of Change. Conversely, Khoirul Umam from Indostrategic argued that Imin actually failed to boost AMIN's electability among NU constituent. Meanwhile, Sufyan Abdurrahman from Telkom University rejected the notion that NU vsupport for AMIN would be consolidated.

From the total of 95 individuals identified as claim-makers, the author highlights the ten most prominent actors based on their frequency of appearances, as illustrated in Figure 4. Imin emerges as the most prolific, with 96 claim statements. Yahya Cholil follows as the second most active actor, with 34 claims—positioned in direct opposition to Imin. Jazilul Fawaid, a PKB politician, ranks third with 28 claims. Other key figures include Yenny Wahid, Hasanuddin Wahid, Sulaeman Tanjung, Saifullah Yusuf, Syaiful Huda, Said Aqil, and Fauzan Fuadi, each contributing fewer than 16 claims.

Figure 4. Top Actors 2023-2024



Source: author's data

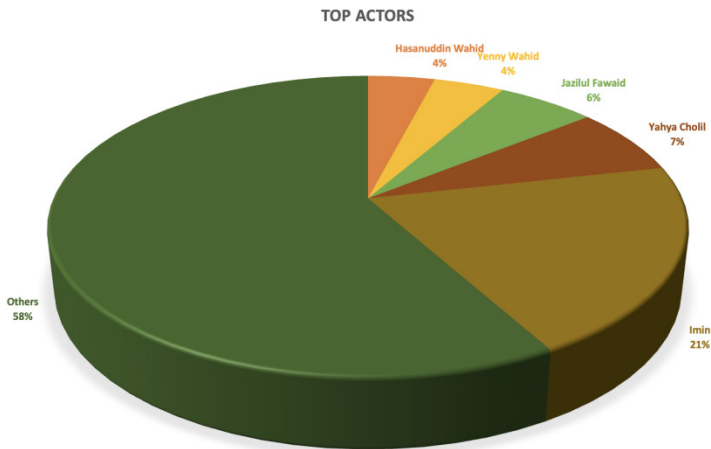
This diagram not only shows that the dynamic nature of the contestation over this claim—evident from the closely matched number of pro and contra statements—but also highlights the overwhelming dominance of a single actor in shaping the discourse. This dominance is most clearly depicted in Figure 5, which reveals that Imin accounts for 21% of the total number of claims.

This proportion—nearly one-quarter of all claims—underscores Imin's significant role in driving the narrative on representation. In stark contrast, the other top five actors do not come close to this level of influence. Yahya Cholil, for example, who ranks second in terms of claim production, is responsible for only 7% of the total claims.

Furthermore, Jazilul Fawaid, Yenny Wahid, and Hasanuddin Wahid contribute merely 6%, 4%, and 4% respectively.

within the context of each organisation's interests and institutional background. PKB, as the organisation most actively

Figure 5. Actor Dominance



Source: author's data

In addition to grouping individual actors, the author also categorised them according to the organisations they represent, as illustrated in Figure 6. This organisational grouping serves to streamline the data and to better interpret the dynamics

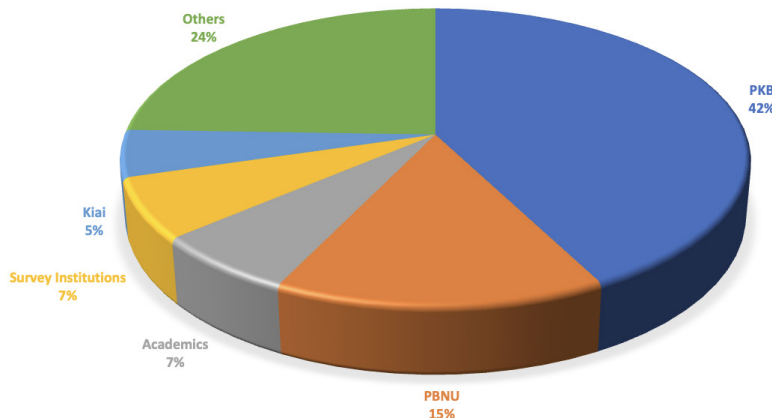
engaged in the production of the representative claims analysed in this study, accounted for the largest share, contributing 199 claims—equivalent to approximately 42% of the total. In second place is the PBNU, which issued a substantial

number of counter-claims in response to PKB's assertions, producing a total of 70 claims or about 15% of the overall dataset. Academics and polling institutions, which presented a range of perspectives regarding PKB's claim to represent NU, each contributed 7% of the total claims. Meanwhile, *kiai* and *pesantren*⁵ institutions were responsible for 5% of the

total claims. The remaining claims came from various other organisations, including political parties such as Functional Group Party (Golongan Karya), PDIP, United Development Party (Partai Persatuan Pembangunan/PPP), Great Indonesia Movement Party (Gerindra), National Democratic Party (Partai Nasional Demokrat/ NasDem), Democratic Party (Demokrat), as well as campaign teams (Team 02 and Team 03), foreign media outlets, and various other entities.

⁵ Traditional Islamic boarding schools led by *kiai*, serving as religious and socio-cultural institutions within NU communities.

Figure 6. Top Organisations and their Dominance



PKB produced a substantial proportion of the representative claims related to NU, accounting for 42% or 199 claims. Imin, as Chairman of PKB, also emerged as the most prolific individual actor, responsible for 96 claims, equivalent to 21% of the total. However, consistent with Hatherell's (2021) hypothesis, PKB's capacity as a political party in Indonesia to issue representative claims that secure legitimacy from a broad constituency within Indonesian society remains limited. This limitation opens up an empty space in representation that can be utilised by CSOs and non-governmental organisations (NGOs). In this study, this space has been partially occupied by PBNU, which contributed 70 claims, or 15% of the total. Its Chairman, Yahya Cholil Staquf, ranks second only to Imin in the number of claims produced.

By applying the theoretical framework of representative claims in the Indonesian political context, this study enables a comparative analysis of the representative claims employed by parliamentary (PKB) and extra-parliamentary (PBNU) actors. Both actors actively compete to assert political claims on behalf of NU, wherein their discourses not only interact but also contend with one another, as outlined by Hatherell (2021).

Beyond mapping the discourse network and actors, the author further analyses the individual statements and classifies them within structured tables. The analysis focuses particularly on two central figures in the contestation over NU representation: Muhaimin Iskandar as Chairman of PKB and Yahya Cholil Staquf as Chairman of PBNU. Each statement is evaluated using Saward's (2010) framework of representative



claims, which identifies four key elements: M (the claim-maker), S (the subject considered representative), O (the intended constituency), and R (framing of the nature or interests associated with O).

Furthermore, the classification of claim types follows the typology proposed

by Guasti & Geissel's (2019), which analyses the relationship between S and O in order to determine the legitimacy of M's justification. Based on this assessment, claims can be categorised as representations, misrepresentations, interest/value claims, or simple proclamations.

A. Muhaimin Iskandar/Imin

Table 2: Elements and Forms of Muhaimin Iskandar/Imin Claims

No.	Statement	M	S	O	R	Linkage	Form of Claim
Imin - Kiai support AMIN							
1	But the majority of NU <i>ulama</i> and <i>kiai</i> have always been consistent in supporting PKB, this is what is called the heir to the history of NU's struggle.	Imin	-	NU clerics	support AMIN	ideological similarity (linkage to Imin/PKB implicitly)	representation claim
2	Alhamdulillah, in a short time I got a complete answer from the <i>ulama</i> , all <i>istikharah</i> , all ideas, and all of them approved the pairing of Mas Anies and me.	Imin	-	scholars	support AMIN	-	value/interest claims



3	Chairman of the National Awakening Party (PKB) Muhaimin Iskandar alias Cak Imin claimed to have received support from NU <i>ulama</i> and young figures in East Java.	Imin	-	clerics and young leaders of NU East Java	support AMIN	-	value/interest claims
4	I was ordered by the <i>kiai</i> at the PKB Congress in Bali in 2019, Muhaimin Iskandar Ketum PKB 2024 must run as a presidential or vice-presidential candidate.	Imin	-	Kiai	support AMIN	-	value/interest claims
Imin - PKB represents NU							
1	Historically, NU and PKB have shared similar modest economic backgrounds.	Imin	PKB, mediocre	NU	PKB is the party	common background	representation claim
2	I, PKB, and my friends are like water from the source of the political struggle of <i>Ahlusunnah wal Jamaah</i> . Water from the source of the Nahdlatul Ulama mountain.	Imin	PKB, heir to the political struggle	NU	-	the similarity of the ideology of the struggle of <i>ahlussunah wal jamaah</i>	representation claim
Imin - NU support AMIN							
1	I'm sure that ordinary NU-minded people, not the elites--will vote for AMIN. People who truly live by NU's values will stay loyal to AMIN.	Imin	-	NU citizens	support AMIN	-	value/interest claims
2	It's just a matter of taking care of proving that PKB voters are steadfast, that the grassroots choose cadres, that NU chooses NU, that NU chooses NU who chooses NU activists, or that East Javanese choose East Javanese.	Imin	NU, East Java	NU members, East Java	support AMIN	both NU and East Javanese	representation claim

Source: analysis by the author



Muhaimin Iskandar, commonly known as Imin, is the Chairman of PKB and a vice-presidential candidate in the 2024 presidential election. He is the most prolific claim-maker in this study, with some of the most frequently invoked concepts in his statements, namely: '*Kiai* support AMIN,' 'PKB represents NU,' and 'NU support Imin.' Table 5 shows how Imin constructs the narrative that both he and PKB represent NU, while also aligning NU's interests with his own political objectives.

In the discourse surrounding '*Kiai* support AMIN,' Imin predominantly puts forward interest or value claims. These involve asserting the preferences or orientations of a constituency—in this case, various *kiai*, including NU-affiliated *kiai*, *ulama*, *habaib*, leaders of Muslimat NU, and young NU figures in East Java—without necessarily positioning himself

as their direct representative. The main interest he attributes to this group is their support for the AMIN ticket.

Nonetheless, Imin also makes explicit representational claims. For instance, in referencing '*ahlussunnah wal jamaah*', he not only appeals to shared ideological roots but also asserts that the majority of *ulama* will continue to support AMIN due to the alignment between their theological stance and the political movement he embodies. This marks a shift from merely articulating values to positioning himself as a representative of those values.

In the discourse 'PKB represents NU,' the claim takes the form of a more direct representative. Imin consistently constructs a narrative of connectedness between PKB and NU, drawing on shared economic, ideological, values, and teachings. He frequently

refers to PKB as the “*heir*” to NU’s legacy, a rhetorical device intended to legitimise both the party’s alignment with Anies Baswedan’s presidential campaign and his own claim to represent NU.

Finally, in the discourse ‘NU support AMIN,’ Imin attempts to convince the audience that NU-affiliated voters will inevitably support him in the 2024 presidential election. These statements are

predominantly value/interest claims, as they do not explicitly frame him as the subject of representation. However, one notable representative claim emerges when Imin invokes regional and cultural affinity—suggesting that NU members should vote for fellow NU members, and that East Javanese citizens should support candidates from their own region.

Table 3. Elements and Forms of Yahya Cholil/Yahya’s Claims

No.	Statement	M	S	O	R	Linkage	Form of Claim
Yahya - Kiai support AMIN							
1	If there is a claim that the PBNU <i>kiai</i> approves, it is absolutely not true because there is absolutely no discussion in PBNU about candidates, there has never been any discussion in PBNU about presidential candidates.	Yahya	-	PBNU	neutral	rejecting claims of interest	Misrepresentation
2	There is no (vice-presidential candidate) on behalf of NU. If there is a claim that PBNU <i>kiai</i> approve, it is absolutely not true.	Yahya	-	PBNU	neutral	reject claims of interest	Misrepresentation



Yahya - PKB represents NU							
1	Gus Yahya then said that the relationship between PBNU and PKB is really not close, just like with other political parties. Indeed, it is not close, just like the PBNU's relationship with other parties, because we consider all of these to be the same.	Yahya	-	PBNU	not related to PKB	reject claims of interest	Misrepresentation
2	Political parties are welcome to fight for the people's trust. But, I repeat once again, there are no candidates on behalf of NU.	Yahya	-	NU	there is no candidate who represents it	rejects PKB's claim of representation (implicit)	Misrepresentation
3	Yahya has often said that PKB is not a political party that represents PBNU.	Yahya	-	PBNU	not related to PKB	reject claims of interest	Misrepresentation
Yahya - NU supports AMIN							
1	There is no presidential candidate endorsed by PBNU, especially if there are individuals who act on behalf of NU and carry the name of NU for political purposes.	Yahya	-	PBNU	there is no candidate who represents it	rejects AMIN's claim of representation (implicit)	Misrepresentation

Source: analysis by the author



Yahya Cholil, as Chairman of PBNU, leads the organisation at the heart of NU community. Despite his formal leadership position, in accordance with Saward's (2010) theory of fluid representation, both Yahya and PBNU continue to issue representative claims to secure legitimacy as the true representatives of all NU constituent. As shown in the previously discussed network map, Yahya is actively involved in shaping claims across three main concepts: 'Kiai support AMIN,' 'PKB represents NU,' and 'AMIN represents NU.'

The majority of Yahya's statements take the form of misrepresentation or anti-claims, —claims that directly challenge or reject the assertions made by Imin and other actors affiliated with PKB. Yahya consistently maintains that PBNU, NU, and the broader community of NU *kiai* do not endorse the AMIN

presidential ticket and reject PKB's self-positioning as NU's political representative. He explicitly affirms that there is no formal political alignment between NU and PKB, and that no political party has the official mandate to represent NU.

Notably, Yahya does not go into great detail when articulating the specific values or interests of NU or PBNU. This may reflect the already strong legitimacy of his position (Saward, 2010), as he heads the PBNU—an institution widely accepted as NU's official representative body. His leadership was established through a democratic process in the Mukhtar NU and is broadly recognised within the NU community. In contrast, while PKB has historically maintained close ties with NU, it currently lacks a formal institutional mandate affirming its political representativeness of NU.

Table 4. Elements and Forms of the Claim 'Kiai support AMIN'

No.	Statement	M	S	O	R	Linkage	Form of Claim
PKB - Kiai support AMIN							
1	<i>Kiai</i> will offer prayers to anyone who comes to them. But deep down, <i>Inshaallah</i> their hearts remain with PKB and Cak Imin.	Daniel Johan	PKB and Cak Imin	<i>kiai</i>	support AMIN	heart and historical proximity	Value/ interest claims
2	I am sure, I am sure (<i>ulama</i> support AMIN). Gus Muhaimin is not a vice-president who comes to the <i>kiai</i> when he wants to run for president. If the others, as far as I know, only come to the <i>kiai</i> when they want to be president or vice-president. Gus Muhaimin has no interest, visiting is something that is mandatory.	Hasanuddin Wahid	AMIN	scholars	support AMIN	Imin's closeness to <i>kiai</i>	Value/ interest claims
3	Many <i>kiai</i> , Islamic boarding schools, <i>masyayikh</i> , <i>gus</i> fully back up Gus Imin, yes. And that's natural because Gus Imin is the grandson of the founder of NU.	Syaiful Huda	Imin, grandson of NU founder	<i>kiai</i> , <i>pesantren</i> , <i>masyayikh</i>	support AMIN	primordial similarity (implicit)	Value/ interest claims
PBNU - Kiai support AMIN							
1	Gus Muhaimin has no strategy or recipe to embrace NU residents, even the <i>ulama</i> who used to support him are now slowly changing.	Saifullah Yusuf	Gus Muhaimin, there is no strategy	<i>ulama</i>	not supporting AMIN	rejects PKB's claim of representation (implicit)	Misrepresentation Claim

2	The majority of the <i>ulama</i> are inclined to vote for Mr Prabowo. I get a lot of calls from <i>kiai</i> from villages ... they are interested in fighting to win Prabowo.	Saifullah Yusuf	-	village <i>kiai</i>	support Prabowo	-	Value/ interest claims
Others - <i>Kiai</i> support AMIN							
1	<i>Inshallah</i> , there is no doubt that Mr Anies Baswedan, who is behind Gus Imin, is the commander of the <i>santri</i> , who is nicknamed by the community, not institutionally, but the community, called <i>kiai</i> and <i>habaib</i> , gives such a title.	Mujib Imron (<i>kiai</i>)	Imin, <i>santri</i> commander	<i>kiai</i> and <i>habaib</i>	support AMIN	back-ground similarity (implicit)	Representation claim
2	Moreover, Anies has also travelled to Islamic boarding schools and <i>sowan</i> to <i>kiai</i> throughout East Java and was well received.	Ambang Priyonggo (Academician)	-	<i>kiai</i> throughout East Java	received Anies	-	Value/ interest claims
3	Many <i>kiai</i> and <i>gus</i> will remain with Mr Prabowo. I have checked with the base, <i>Inshallah</i> Mr Prabowo is increasingly becoming the top choice of the people of East Java.	Sarmuji (Golkar)	-	<i>kiai</i> , <i>gus</i> , East Java community	support Prabowo	-	Value/ interest claims
4	According to him, Ganjar is a well-known religious figure and has a good relationship with Nahdliyyin. Therefore, he thinks the <i>kiai</i> will accept Ganjar.	Deddy Sitorus (PDIP)	Ganjar, religious	<i>kiai</i>	support Ganjar	good relationship with Nahdliyyin	Representation claim

Source: analysis by the author



The analysis of the table generally shows how actors from different organisations compete in constructing claims about the interests of *kiai* to the public. From PKB, several prominent actors such as Daniel Johan (Chair of the Natural Resources and Energy Division, Central Executive Board of PKB), Halim Iskandar (Minister for Villages and Development of Disadvantaged Regions, brother of Muhaimin Iskandar), Fauzan Fuadi (Chair of the PKB faction in the East Java), Hasanuddin Wahid (Secretary General of PKB), and Syaiful Huda (Chair of Commission X). They make various claims linking *kiai*, *ulama*, *pesantren*, and *masyayikh* to support for the AMIN presidential ticket. The ways in which they frame the relationship between AMIN and the *kiai* differ. Some emphasise historical ties between Imin, PKB, and NU, while others rely

on primordial connections, such as Imin's lineage as the grandson of NU's founder. Others still draw on personal traditions such as *sowan*—visiting *kiai*—as part of his political conduct.

From PBNU, only Saifullah Yusuf (PBNU Secretary General) emerges as a prominent actor making claims. Interestingly, his assertions diverge from those of PBNU Chairman Yahya Cholil. While Yahya consistently refutes PKB and AMIN's claims to NU and *kiai* representation, Saifullah Yusuf explicitly claims that the *kiai* support Prabowo. For example, he states that most *ulama* tend to favour Prabowo, even if they have not had direct contact with the candidate or his campaign team. This claim, coming from PBNU's Secretary General, contradicts PBNU's official position of neutrality, often asserted by its Chairman.



Beyond PKB and PBNU, actors from a wider range of organisations also engage in constructing constituent interests. These actors include politicians from Gerindra, Golkar, PDIP, Team 03, AMIN's team (Team 01) and various others, including academics and *kiai* not affiliated with the main political or religious institutions. While some *kiai* act as claim-makers, the object of their claims is often other *kiai* or *habaib*, demonstrating that *kiai* themselves are both subjects and producers of representative claims. Academics and polling institutions, while not overtly partisan, also express support or opposition through the framing of their claims.

Constituencies invoked in these claims vary, including *kiai*, *ulama*, *gus*, *pondok*, and *habaib* from specific regions such as Yogyakarta, Jombang, and East Java. The types of claims

range from value or interest claims to misrepresentation or delegitimising PKB/AMIN claims. For example, Nusron Wahid (Golkar politician) claims that *kiai* do not support AMIN; Budi Sulistyo (PDIP politician) claims that *kiai* should not be politicised; Muhammad Fawaaid (Gerindra politician), Prabowo (Gerindra politician), Yenny Wahid (Gus Dur's daughter), and Sarmuji (Golkar politician) claim that *kiai* support Prabowo; Deddy Sitorus (PDIP politician) claims that *kiai* supports Ganjar; while Mustafied (AMIN's team), Ambang Priyonggo (academic), and Mujib Imron (*kiai*) claim that many *kiai* and *pondok* support AMIN. These diverse and conflicting claims illustrate the intense contestation over NU and *kiai* representation during the 2024 campaign.



Conclusion

This study reveals the intense contestation of representation between parliamentary institutions (political parties) and extra-parliamentary actors (CSOs, media, and religious leaders) in the context of the 2024 Indonesian presidential election. By employing discourse network mapping and content analysis of representative claims, several conclusions can be drawn:

First, the response to PKB's representational claims over NU is highly varied and cannot be neatly categorised as wholly accepted or rejected. Each claim is met with differing degrees of endorsement and opposition. This complexity suggests a need to expand the theory of representative claims—particularly Guasti & Geissel's (2019) model—to better account for plural constituencies. The assumption that constituents

represent a unified body capable of either accepting or rejecting a claim fails in contexts like NU, where legitimacy emerges from a spectrum of reactions across a diverse base.

Second, the contestation of claims is enacted through the construction of NU's interests, self-image, counter image, and even the image of other figures. Most claims centre on *kiai* as a key political constituency capable of mobilising electoral support. These actors are not mere objects of political discourse but also active agents who make claims about others. Thus, *kiai* appear simultaneously as audience, object, and producer in the network of representative claims.

Third, representation cannot be secured solely through formal mechanisms such as party elections and congresses. Even when formal legitimacy



is achieved, representational authority remains open to contestation from competing actors.

Finally, the discourse network map reveals how certain academics and polling institutions—despite their appearance of neutrality—play a partisan role through the strategic framing of claims. As Saward (2010) notes, facts themselves can be constructed to support actors' interests in achieving representation.

The use of Saward's (2010) theory of representational claims, as extended by Guasti & Geissel (2019) has helped the author to map and examine the types of claims emerging in the contestation for NU representation. The findings offer an important lens for analysing how representation operates in Indonesia's religious-political context. However, the observed patterns deviate from Saward's

emphasis on the substantive correspondence between representatives and constituents. Instead of evaluating whether PKB substantively represents NU's values, this study has focused on the contestation of claims aimed at mobilising electoral support.

Accordingly, this study does not claim to assess whether NU's interests are genuinely represented by PKB or any other actor. Rather, it examines the struggle for representative claims during a political campaign period without showing the discourse battles that may occur during the policy-making process, which should be more able to explain how substantive representation processes take place.



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Empowering Communities from Below: Local Leadership and Organising in KWT Lestari

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Abstract

Community organising, as a form of bottom-up development, challenges top-down approaches that traditionally view communities as passive recipient rather than active agents of change. This study examines the internal dynamics of women farmers group (kelompok wanita tani/KWT) Lestari in Pakembinangun, Sleman, under the leadership of Sri Hartanti, a key figure who has been instrumental in the group's development. Using a qualitative method through in-dept interview, the research identifies the organisational model applied by KWT Lestari through twelve analytical indicators, including goals of community action, assumptions concerning community structure and problem conditions, basic change strategies, characteristic change tactics and techniques, salient practitioner roles, medium of change, orientation toward power structures, boundaries of the community client system, assumptions regarding sub-community interests, conceptions of public interest, client population, and client role. Despite challenges in sustaining member participation, findings show that KWT Lestari effectively employs the locality development model, positioning members as active change agents within their community. This study contributes to understanding how community organising can succeed in diverse social, cultural, and economic contexts, offering insights for future community-based development efforts.

Keywords : Bottom-up development, community organising, locality development, KWT Lestari

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Introduction

Top-down development has often positioned communities as passive recipients rather than active agents of change. In Indonesia, such approaches have been implemented since 1988 through various poverty alleviation programs, including the National Program for Community Empowerment (Program Nasional Pemberdayaan Masyarakat/PNPM) launched in 2006, and its successor, PNPM Mandiri in 2007. PNPM Mandiri was divided into several branches: rural, urban, disadvantaged and special regions, and socio-economic infrastructure (Wicaksono & Darusman, 2001). However, the continuation of these programs has faced various challenges, including fostering dependency on government aid and widespread corruption.

According to the Audit Board of the Republic of Indonesia (2015), by 2014 the total losses due to misappropriated PNPM Mandiri funds has reached IDR 300 million. Lucas (2016) highlights cases of corruption, such as village heads—like in Bandar Agung—who seized control of infrastructure projects and diverted up to 20% of the budget for personal gain. Infrastructure groups sometimes fabricated projects to secure funding, and even facilitators were involved in coaching local actors on how siphon off resources. Muslim (2017) notes that in Batu city, East Java, communities became dependent on business credit assistance (revolving loans), with many refusing to repay, resulting in high rates of bad debt. Liana et al. (2015) and Ensminger (2017) further document corruption across various PNPM sectors, including construction projects,



schemes, and revolving savings. These systemic issues ultimately led to the discontinuation of PNPM Mandiri in 2014.

The persistent dependence on PNPM assistance shows that communities in Indonesia have yet to achieve true self-reliance. Limited participation in development processes has deepened social and economic inequalities. The failure of top-down approaches to reflect the real needs of communities has led to emergence of a bottom-up approach—one that positions communities as the main agents of change through localised organising.

The concept of community organising dates back by Lao Tse after the 7th century B.C., and reemerged in modern times through figures like Saul Alinsky and Paulo Freire. Alinsky, focused on urban communities, emphasised people power as a sustainable, organised force for

social change (Schutz & Miller, 2015). Freire, working with rural communities, viewed community organising as a tool for raising critical awareness and resisting domination through culturally grounded engagement. These two figures are widely known for their great influence in theory and practice of community organising.

Community organising redefines development by involving communities in identifying, establishing, and pursuing shared goals (Ross & Lappin, 1967). While external facilitators may assist, true sustainability depends on internal leadership. As Tan and Topatimasang (2011) argue, success is achieved when communities independently manage and lead their own organisations—free from reliance on political parties, external agendas, or charismatic figures.



Given the diversity of social, economic, and cultural context, there is no universal model of community organising. Instead, effective strategies must respond to each community's unique conditions and needs. Therefore, to examine in depth how an organisation is formed, functions, and develops in its respective contexts, this study explores the organising model of KWT Lestari in Pakembinangun, Sleman, under the leadership of Sri Hartanti (commonly referred to as Tanti). Applying Jack Rothman's theory of community organising model, the research examines how KWT Lestari developed into a resilient organisation, as their remarkable ability to continuously innovate and effectively overcome challenge—particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic—by innovating aloe vera products, strengthening capacities, and expanding its market presence.

3 Core models of community organising

Rothman (1979) classifies approaches to community organising into three principal models, which remain widely used as analytical frameworks in social development studies. These are: locality development, social planning, and social action. Each model offers a different way on understanding the social dynamics, achieving strategic social change, and defining the roles of both community members and practitioners in the organising process.

Locality development

Locality development, commonly referred to as Model A, emphasises the sustainability of organisations through active community participation. Organisations following Model A emerge through a long-term



process driven by the community members themselves. Based on the assumption that community holds a deep understanding of their own circumstances, this model positions them as the most competent actors in identifying challenges and formulating effective, relevant solutions. Although the model underscores community capabilities, its sustainability still benefits from the presence of practitioners. However, their role is limited to that of facilitators or enablers, without replacing the community as the main actor. Ultimately, Model A aims to cultivate power and strength rooted within the community, enabling the organisation to operate independently of external actors.

Social planning

In contrast to Model A, Model B or social planning centres on the critical role of practitioners

in community organising. It conceptualises the community as recipients or clients facing complex issues, while practitioners serve as experts who design and offer suitable interventions. The relationship between the two is akin to that of clients and experts. Although community members are involved in the process, this model largely follows a top-down approach. Participation is typically restricted to the implementation phase, with little involvement in problem identification or decision-making. As a result, the community acts more as a recipient of externally formulated solutions than as a driver of change.

Social action

Social action, known as Model C, popularised by Saul Alinsky, a pivotal figure in community organising in the United States. Model C offers a radical approach,



aiming to redistribute power from dominant elite groups to historically marginalised or oppressed communities. According to Alinsky, societal problems stem not simply from individual or community deficiencies, but from a concentration of unaccountable power (Schutz & Miller, 2015). As a response, community organizing becomes a means of resistance and confrontation. This model emphasises the development of critical awareness among oppressed communities and the mobilisation of collective action such as protests, advocacy

campaigns, and political pressure to challenge and alter existing power structures. Unlike Models A and B, which emphasise collaboration or technocratic solutions, Model C explicitly recognises conflict of interest as inherent in power relations and sees this conflict as the driving force for social change.

To identify which model of organising model is implemented in a particular community or organisation, Rothman provides 12 indicators. These differentiate the characteristics of Models A, B, and C are summarised in Table 1.

Table 1. 12 indicators community organizing Jack Rothman

Indicator	Explanation	Model A	Model B	Model C
Goal categories of community	Assesses purposes: whether organising efforts prioritise participation or expert-driven	Emphasises participatory processes to build a self-reliant community and develop local leadership	Achieving goals that have been determined by practitioners	Process outcomes with the main goal of shifting power



Assumption about community structure and problem conditions	Reflects how society and issues are viewed	Community seen as fractured but potentially democratic and locally led	Community faces structural issues like poverty and inequality	Community is hierarchical with power imbalances and systemic inequality
Basic change strategy	Defines the primary method for change	Change result from direct involvement of members	Change is designed and implemented by external practitioners	Change means challenging oppression and mobilising mass
Change tactics and techniques	Describes methods and tools achieving change	Cooperative change through member deliberation	Cooperative change through technical analysis, research, and expert-led solutions	Protest, direct action, and confrontation to disrupt the status quo
Practitioner roles	Explain the practitioner's involvement	Practitioners as facilitators and community is the main actor	Practitioners lead and control the entire process	Practitioners act as an activist or advocates, siding with oppressed groups
Mediums of change	The scale of organising	Small, organised, and participatory groups	Large, formal, structured organisations	Mass organisation use to mobilise political power of the oppressed
Orientation toward power structures	Shows where power lies	Power is internal to the community and exercised collectively	Power is centred in practitioners or planners	Power lies outside and must be challenged through collective action
Boundaries of the community client system	Defines the scope of the organising target group	Based on geographic or local attachment	Based on specific group	Broad scope, targeting marginalised and oppressed group
Assumption regarding interest of community subparts	Details how different interest are managed	Conflicts resolved through participatory deliberation and consensus	Conflict managed top-down through rational and efficient decision-making	Conflicts should be addressed through confrontation and collective pressure



Conception of the public interest	Outlines how public interest is defined	Rationalist: discussion and majority agreement	Idealist: efficient decision-making by elites, professionals, and intellectuals	Realist: negotiation or confrontation between unequal group
Conception of the client population	Explain how communities are viewed by the practitioners	Clients are individuals with strengths needing empowerment	Clients are passive recipients of services	Clients are victims of injustice, needing support in struggle
Conception of the client role	Describe the client role in organising	Clients are active agents with the goal of achieving self-reliance	Clients are passive customers of professional services	Clients and practitioners act together to challenge unjust power structures

*Source: processed by the author (2024),
adapted from Rothman (1982)*

However, several critiques have been directed toward Rothman's models. Laing (2009) criticised Rothman's approach as reflecting cultural incapacity due to its lack of sensitivity to complex cultural contexts. The model is considered to overly generalise community organising strategies without adequately considering the values, beliefs, and cultural practices that influence group dynamics. In a diverse society like

Indonesia, a culturally grounded organising approach is crucial to address the shortcomings of the Rothman framework.

This paper examines the organising process of KWT Lestari using Rothman's twelve indicators to identify the organisational model applied. Furthermore, it explores the factors that have contributed to the development of KWT Lestari based on the identified



model. A qualitative method with a case study approach was employed to achieve this aim. This approach was chosen for its ability to reduce the distance between the researcher and the research subject, allowing for a closer relationship and in-depth exploration of the organising dynamics. It also facilitates a contextual understanding of how social processes emerge and develop within the community framework, including the cultural values implemented in the organising process.

To obtain rich and relevant data, this study involved interviews with five key informants who hold strategic roles within the KWT Lestari organisation: the head of KWT Lestari (Sri Hartanti), a practitioner (Untung Wijanarko), a management representative (Jumiyati), and two members (Rita Suratini and Ngatiyah). These informants were selected

for their capacity to provide comprehensive perspectives into the leadership, mentoring, management, and membership dynamics of the organisation.

Lestari Women's Farmers Group (KWT Lestari)

KWT Lestari is an organisation located in Tegalsari village, Pakembinangun, Pakem, Sleman. Since its establishment in 2019, this group has focused on organising its members through aloe vera cultivation. Under the leadership of Tanti, KWT Lestari has expanded beyond cultivation to the production of a variety of aloe vera-based products, which are marketed under its own brand.

The members' cultivation expertise has positioned Tegalsari as one of the main suppliers of aloe vera to supermarkets in Yogyakarta, earning the village the nickname "Aloe Vera village."

This recognition has enabled Tegalsari to become a centre for aloe vera cultivation training, with KWT Lestari members actively involved in facilitating training sessions across age groups. The village's reputation has brought both economic and social benefits to its members. Before determining the organisational model of KWT Lestari, it is important to understand the key stages of its formation and development.

First, the practitioner-led idea discussion. The idea to establish KWT Lestari originated from Untung Wijanarko, founder of Tani Organik Merapi (TOM) and a resident of Tegalsari. He identified a gap in the aloe vera supply chain in Yogyakarta. This idea was initially discussed with local leader Jumakir and entrepreneur Tanti, and later brought to broader forum, particularly during regular *rukun*

tetangga (RT) meetings.² The women of Tegalsari reached a collective agreement to establish the women's farmers group.

Second, fulfilling administrative requirements. The formation of a KWT requires compliance with Yogyakarta Mayor Regulation No. 128 of 2021. Key requirements include having a management structure, articles of association and bylaws, as well as a long-term organisational plan (Yogyakarta City Government, 2021). These requirements were met at the home of Tanti, with assistance from Suwarno, a field agricultural extension officer (*penyuluh pertanian lapangan/PPL*).

Third, aloe vera cultivation training. The aloe vera cultivation training was conducted using a

² Rukun Tetangga (RT) meetings are regular gatherings held by the smallest neighbourhood unit in Indonesia, where residents discuss local issues, organise community activities, coordinate social support, and strengthen community bonds through collective decision-making.



direct approach. Tanti facilitated access to training held in Kulon Progo, Wonosari, and Cangkringan. Following these sessions, KWT Lestari was officially formed in 2019.

Fourth, the initial organisation of KWT Lestari. The initial organisation of KWT Lestari still focused on aloe vera cultivation with various routine agendas, such as meetings, selling, and training sessions. These routines helped foster a strong sense of solidarity among members.

Fifth, the COVID-19 pandemic. The COVID-19 pandemic posed a serious challenge to the organisation. Restrictions on mobility led to decreased aloe vera demand, resulting in product waste and a loss of member engagement. Reduced face-to-face interaction and shifting priorities weakened internal cohesion. Many members abandoned cultivation, and group membership

declined significantly. Seeing this challenge, Tanti took a quick response to innovate and process aloe vera stems as an alternative.

Sixth, aloe vera processing. Drawing on previous training, Tanti led the effort to develop value-added aloe vera products such as chocolate, *dawet* (a traditional Indonesian drink), aloe vera crisps, and sticks. These initiatives revitalised the group and opened opportunities to participate in food fairs and events hosted by cooperatives and tourism authorities.

Seventh, network formation. In order to sustain its growth, KWT Lestari fosters partnerships and expand its reach through collaborations. The group also utilises social media for marketing to enhance its visibility and consumer base.



Result

This chapter outlines the organisational model applied by Tanti in forming and managing KWT Lestari, as part of an effort to mobilise women in Tegalsari village through aloe vera cultivation. The discussion includes the identification of the KWT Lestari's organisational model, the stages of the organisational flow, and the key actors involved at each stage. To determine the model used by KWT Lestari, this chapter employs an analytical framework based on Rothman's twelve indicators of community organising.

Goal categories of community action

The organisation process of KWT Lestari was initiated by Untung Wijanarko, a resident of Tegalsari village and founder of TOM. Untung saw a potential opportunity for aloe vera supplier

in Yogyakarta and brought this idea to the women of Tegalsari village. He presented the idea during an inter-neighbourhood forum involving representatives from each RT. The idea was well received, and the women gradually began to engage in collective activities to establish KWT Lestari.

Various collective activities were carried out in the establishment of KWT Lestari, such as the election of board members, the completion of administrative requirements, and the identification of training partners. At the beginning of the organising process, KWT Lestari successfully gathered 20 members, whose participation was driven by three main factors.

First, uniqueness. KWT Lestari's approach stood out, as no other village in the Pakembinangun sub-district had previously focused specifically on aloe vera cultivation. While



aloe vera had been cultivated individually in the past, this was the first time it was managed collectively. The unique nature of this initiative eventually led to Tegalsari village being recognised as the “Aloe Vera village,” a title that has brought numerous social and economic benefits to the local community.

Second, ease of cultivation. Aloe vera is easy to grow in various media, whether in pots or directly in the ground. Its low-maintenance nature made it especially appealing to the women of Tegalsari. As stated by Jumiyati,

“Rice is already common and its handling is a bit complicated. This one [aloe vera] is easier, that’s why I chose it.” (Interview with Jumiyati, a management representative of KWT Lestari, 11 July 2024).

Third, economic benefits. Although the primary aim of KWT Lestari was women’s empowerment rather than profit, the routine success of the cultivation process and subsequent harvesting gradually brought about tangible economic benefits. However, as the cultivation process ran smoothly and harvesting became routine, members began developing independent aloe vera-based businesses, contributing to the strengthening of their family economies.

Although the idea of aloe vera cultivation was initiated by Untung Wijanarko, the formation and growth of KWT Lestari were the results of the members’ own initiative and active participation. These women evolved from having little to no knowledge of aloe vera cultivation or community organising to becoming skilled in managing and marketing aloe vera



products, thanks to the training they received. The establishment of KWT Lestari was the result of a process that involved the active participation of its members. They were not merely passive recipients, but active agents working towards a shared goal. This organising approach, which emphasises the importance of process in building collective action, aligns closely with the principles of locality development, one of the models in Rothman's community organising framework, and reflects the approach led by Tanti.

Assumption concerning community structure and problem conditions

The process of organising KWT Lestari focuses on strengthening the capacity of each member. The capacity-building process has fostered the emergence of local leadership

rooted in the community context, most notably in the figure of Tanti. As the head of KWT Lestari, Tanti has played a pivotal role in mobilising members to actively participate not only in cultivation activities but also in the day-to-day management of the organisation. By fostering solidarity among members who were previously segmented along RT lines, KWT Lestari has become a collective space not only for cultivating aloe vera, but also forming a stronger social network. The success of KWT Lestari in encouraging the creation of local capacity and local leaders is a strategic step in supporting locality development.

Basic change strategy

Following the establishment of KWT Lestari and the emergence of local leaders, the dynamics of member participation became a crucial aspect in ensuring



the sustainability of the organisation. These participatory dynamics are key in assessing indicators of basic change strategies. Member participation in KWT Lestari can be observed through various phases of the organisational flow. First, discussion of the practitioners' idea. The idea of forming KWT Lestari, originally proposed by Untung Wijanarko was positively received by the women of Tegalsari village. Second, completion of administrative requirements. To meet the legal and procedural standards outlined in the Yogyakarta Mayor Regulation No. 128 of 2021, Tanti convened several meetings with members to complete the required documentation. This included defining the group's organisational structure, formulating definitive group plan and household budget, and drafting articles of association. Tanti also created space for

collaborative discussions around administrative matters, ensuring shared responsibility. Third, response to the COVID-19 pandemic. The pandemic posed a serious challenge to the continuity of KWT Lestari, primarily through disruptions in the aloe vera supply chain and the emergence of monopolistic practices by certain collectors. As market demand declined and internal tensions rose, many members lost motivation and began to neglect their aloe vera crops.

In response to these challenges, Tanti took the initiative to not only survive, but also continue to seek new opportunities through various innovations. Recognising that stagnation was not an option, she sought innovative ways to revitalise the group. Rather than relying solely on raw aloe vera sales, Tanti promoted product diversification. She initiated and

facilitated training in aloe vera processing, producing items such as nata de aloe, aloe vera sticks, chocolates, crackers, and *onde-onde* (traditional Indonesia snack) through various collaborations with relevant government agencies and local MSMEs. These innovations not only opened up new market opportunities but also rekindled the spirit of members who had waned due to the pandemic and conflicts of interest. Tanti's leadership has thus extended beyond administrative duties, positioning her as a key driver of change based on the needs and potential of the local community. The active involvement of the community at each stage, despite external challenges, shows that the organising carried out by Tanti, aligns with the indicators of the local organising model.

Characteristic change tactics and techniques

In leading the organisation of KWT Lestari, Tanti applied cooperative change tactics and techniques. The changes were based on joint decisions made through deliberation, ensuring that every member was involved and had a role in the decision-making process. Decisions were reached democratically through majority votes, thus aligning the organisation's trajectory with the needs and aspirations of its members. Tanti continuously adapted to changing situations and conditions by introducing organisational innovations. She consistently encouraged members to enhance their capacities through skills training, providing access to resources, and building collaborations with various external parties. These efforts not only enhanced individual competencies but also cultivated a shared



motivation among members to improve their quality of life. The cooperative nature of change management—through inclusive decision-making and continuous learning—highlights the participatory ethos of the organising process.

Salient practitioner roles

The establishment and development of KWT Lestari cannot be separated from the strategic involvement of practitioners, who played critical roles as facilitators and catalysts across different stages of the organisation's journey. These roles can be divided into three distinct periods: pre-formation, implementation, and processing of aloe vera. During pre-formation stage, there were four key practitioners were actively involved:

First, Untung Wijanarko, a founder of TOM. He acted as the initiator and coordinator behind the idea of establishing KWT Lestari. He noted,

"Indeed, I thought that the women farmers group (KWT) should have an organisation, so the organisation was formed with me as the coordinator. So, I acted as a facilitator, even though there was also an agricultural extension officer involved." (Interview with Untung Wijanarko, founder of TOM and key practitioner of KWT Lestari, 12 July 2024).

Second, Suwarno as the PPL from the Sleman Regency's agricultural services. He assisted with the administrative and technical requirements essential for formalising the group in accordance with relevant local regulations. Third, Imam Rodli as the owner of the aloe vera enterprise "Rama Vera".

He contributed significantly to training members in cultivation techniques and supported the initial planting efforts in Tegalsari village. Fourth, Maryanto as an aloe vera consultant. He provided technical guidance on cultivation challenges, such as underdeveloped fronds, wilting, and unsuitable planting media.

The next stage is implementation of KWT. At this stage, Untung continued his involvement by offering mentorship and advice on resolving organisational challenges. He is also a key actor in marketing aloe vera products during the early phases. Although KWT Lestari has since strengthened its internal marketing capacity, Tanti continues to manage product distribution centrally. This strategy is intended to

prevent internal competition and ensure that group's overarching goal, advancing all its members collectively, is achieved.

Although the practitioners involved come from various backgrounds, both public and private sectors, the interview results show that the approach used by Tanti in the organising process is the *jemput bola* method. This means that she actively seeks and invites practitioners with relevant experience and certification to be involved in the training. Instead of passively waiting for assistance, Tanti contacted experts to ensure that the aloe vera cultivation and processing process is carried out according to the right standards. KWT Lestari's success in involving many practitioners while maintaining its independence



reflects the effectiveness of the locality development approach that positions practitioners as movers and drivers.

Mediums of change

The organising process within KWT Lestari did not require such a large media platforms to achieve the strategies and goals that have been set. Instead, the strength of the organisation resided in the collective action and active participation of its members. At its inception, KWT Lestari comprised 20 members, each of whom played a vital role in shaping the group's direction. Of course, active participation must have a trigger. Since the beginning, Tanti has always involved members in every discussion and decision, such as discussions related to the election of administrators, the formulation of organisational statutes (AD/ART), and the establishment of shared goals.

The involvement of members from the beginning has made each member understand the common goals and have a sense of responsibility for the sustainability of the organisation. This active participation encourages members to take the steps necessary to achieve common goals, create solid cooperation patterns, and strengthen social relations within the organisation. The medium of change that prioritises collective efforts to achieve shared goals is a hallmark of community development.

Orientation toward power structure

Active participation from each member ensured that power was not centralised in Tanti or any practitioner, but was instead evenly distributed among the members. With this distributed power, every member had the opportunity

to voice their opinions in the decision-making process of KWT Lestari. Tanti played a crucial role in ensuring that all group members were actively involved in the organising process. To encourage member participation, Tanti uses various methods such as regular group discussions, equitable task distribution, and rotational leadership in certain activities so that other members can feel responsible and hone their leadership skills. In this way, Tanti not only strengthens group solidarity, but also fosters a sense of belonging and self-confidence among KWT Lestari members. This has shown that power is evenly distributed in KWT Lestari. This is in accordance with the locality development approach that places power in the community itself. Tanti, as the chairperson, has succeeded in facilitating the process so that all members have a role in the decisions taken.

Boundaries of the community client system

KWT Lestari's constituency is geographically defines, with membership limited to residents of Tegalsari village, specifically from RT 19, 20, 21, and 22 of Padukuhan Demen, Pakembinangun Sub-district, Sleman Regency, Special Region of Yogyakarta. Far from being a limitation, this boundary serves as a strategic foundation for fostering strong interpersonal connections and facilitating effective coordination. In line with this, Speer and Hughey (1995), in their study of 14 community organising efforts in the United States, explain that community organising that builds on shared values and emotional ties tends to have a more sustainable impact than those driven solely by rational responses to community issues.



Communities grounded in shared values and emotional bonds are more likely to foster lasting cohesion and commitment.

By prioritising community-based values, fostering emotional solidarity, and strengthening geographic ties, KWT Lestari demonstrates the effectiveness of Model A of community organising. It illustrates how leveraging local potential, preserving local wisdom, and encouraging comprehensive community involvement can generate significant impact.

Assumption regarding interest of community sub-parts

In a group with diverse membership, differences in interests are inevitable. Within KWT Lestari, these differences emerged between housewives

and working mothers, primarily due to variations in availability of time. As one member, Rita explained,

“Well, maybe because after coming home from work, they’re tired and don’t want to get involved in the group’s activities (Interview with Rita, member of KWT Lestari, 12 July 2024).”

However, participation in the organising process is crucial to ensure that knowledge and skills related to aloe vera cultivation and processing are inclusively disseminated, contributing to equitable progress for all members. Seeing the differences in time availability, Tanti chose a strategic step by assigning responsibility for each KWT Lestari activity to different members, ensuring that everyone maintained a sense of connection to the group regardless of their time constraints.



To bring all members together and boost enthusiasm in the organising process, Tanti frequently organised refreshment programs. These refresher activities take various forms, such as conducting comparative studies, holding training events, or other events that can bring KWT members closer together. Through these efforts, members could refocus on achieving the collective goals agreed upon at the beginning of KWT's formation. These inclusive community activities are reflective of the locality development approach, which seeks to enhance participation and social integration through collaborative efforts that accommodate diverse needs.

Conception of the public interest

In KWT Lestari, the public interest is not pre-given, but is formed through a deliberative

process that emphasises the importance of active participation from all members. This involvement is realised through consultative forums that provide space for dialogue, allowing members to identify and agree upon shared needs considered essential for the advancement of KWT Lestari. These participatory forums function as a filtering mechanism to formulate policies based on collective priorities and benefits. This process makes deliberation not only an arena for discussion, but as a means of social control that ensures that decisions taken represent the interests of the wider group, thereby filtering out personal interests.

The interests formed from the dynamic interaction of members with a bottom-up approach are in line with the principle of locality development. Thus, active participation becomes an



important foundation in forming consensus, strengthening social solidarity and increasing the legitimacy of group decisions.

Conception of the client population

Prior of the formal establishment of KWT Lestari, Untung Wijanarko, as a practitioner, recognised the women of Tegalsari as an active community involved in various village activities such as regular inter-neighbourhood meetings, community service, *karawitan* (traditional music), *yasinan* (religious recitations), *posbindu* (integrated development post for non-communicable diseases), *posyandu* (integrated health post aimed primarily at pregnant women, infants, toddlers, and children), and others. However, their engagement had yet to be channelled into economically productive efforts. As Untung stated,

"They have a strong spirit to move forward, but they have not yet been optimally empowered." (Interview with Untung Wijanarko, founder of TOM and key practitioner of KWT Lestari, 12 July 2024).

Through structured organising, KWT Lestari evolved into an independent and self-managed group, supported by strong local leadership and administrative frameworks. Member actively engaged in achieving common goals, developing product, conducting training, and managing member administration and organisational management. This underscores the empowerment ethos of the locality development model, wherein KWT Lestari members are not passive recipients but rather co-creators of their progress.



Conception of the client role

Members of KWT Lestari exemplify the role of active clients who develop the organisation. Their proactive involvement is closely linked to Tanti's effective leadership. As Untung mentioned,

"Compared to other KWTs, Tegalsari is the most active, because especially the one who coordinates is the chairperson, and the chairperson is active." (Interview with Untung Wijanarko, founder of TOM and key practitioner of KWT Lestari, 12 July 2024).

This statement emphasises the pivotal role of leadership in directing coordination and building collective spirit as a key element in the sustainability of community organisations.

Tanti's leadership has not only succeeded in establishing a stable organisational structure,

but also managed to cultivate emotional attachment and shared collective responsibility among members. A community that is able to build its capacity independently and collectively and does not depend on the role of practitioners reflects the locality development approach. The synergy between strong leadership, active participation, and collective action has made KWT Lestari able to survive and develop compared to other groups. KWT Lestari is a real example of the success of organising based on community participation.

Based on the existing findings, it can be stated that the organising process of KWT Lestari represents a real practice of the locality development approach. Three key elements, namely transformative leadership, active member involvement, and collective action, play a central role



in encouraging community sustainability and growth. The strategic role played by Untung as the initiator and Tanti as the chairperson of KWT Lestari has created a conducive environment for member participation in managing and developing the group independently. The success of KWT Lestari in facing various dynamics and challenges shows how solidarity and collaboration between members can strengthen social resilience.

Conclusion

The organisation of KWT Lestari located in Tegalsari, under the leadership of Tanti serves as a

concrete example how grassroots community organising can be achieved through the application of Rothman locality development model. By analysing structure, dynamics, cultural, practices, and participation of the organisation through the lens of Rothman's 12 indicators, the alignment between theoretical frameworks and practical implementation becomes evident. Table 2 below outlines how each of these twelve indicators is reflected in the organising practices of KWT Lestari, highlighting the strong alignment between theory and field realities.

Table 2. Results of the analysis of Jack Rothman 12 indicator

Indicator	Model A	Findings	Comparison
Goals categories of community	Emphasises participatory processes for self-reliance	Collective aloë vera cultivation initiated by Untung developed through active participation of women led by local leadership, Sri Hartanti	Strong participatory approach with local leadership driving empowerment, matching Model A's locality development focus



Assumption about community structure and problem conditions	Community is traditional, led by informal leaders	KWT Lestari prioritized enhancing the abilities of its members which facilitated the rise of local leadership through Sri Hartanti. Through uniting members from diverse RT groups to develop a collective sense of identity	Both view community as traditional with local leaders playing central roles, emphasis on capacity and solidarity building. This reflects Model A perspective
Basic change strategy	Change emerges through members involvement	Members actively participate in organisation activities, decision-making, and innovation, guided by Tanti	Aligns with Model A direct involvement strategy; where leadership actively engages members in community-driven change
Change tactics and techniques	Cooperative change through member deliberation	Decisions are made collectively by members discussing their needs and voting as a group	Matches Model A cooperative, participatory tactics emphasising inclusive decision-making
Practitioner roles	Practitioners act as facilitators, with community serving as main actor	Practitioners support KWT Lestari while the group remains independent. Tanti plays a key role by actively inviting experts and leading initiatives to improve members skills and capabilities. Her leadership helps members develop abilities in aloe vera cultivation, encouraging their independence both as individuals and as a group	Consistent with Model A facilitator role. The community takes the lead in organising itself with Tanti supporting and encouraging their active participation
Mediums of change	Small, organised, participatory groups	KWT Lestari was established with 20 active members who were deeply involved in decision-making and shared responsibilities	Matches Model A emphasis on small-scale, participatory organising with shared ownership led by local leadership



Orientation toward power structure	Power is distributed and controlled within the group	Power is decentralised and evenly shared among members; Tanti facilitates inclusive decision-making, promotes task sharing, and encourages leadership rotation to foster responsibility, confidence, and group solidarity	This aligns with Model A focus on local control and community empowerment
Boundary definition of community client system or constituency	Defining the spatial and social limits of the community	Membership is geographically focused on Tegalsari village residents, strengthening local social bonds and coordination	Community organising is locally bounded, leveraging local potential and social capital
Assumption regarding interests of community subparts	Acknowledging diversity and varying interests within the community	Recognises diversity in member interests and time availability and addresses this by distributing responsibilities and organising inclusive refresher activities to maintain enthusiasm and collective focus	Assumes diversity within community; uses inclusive strategies to address varied interests
Conception of public interest	Formation of shared goals and collective priorities through participation	Collective interests are actively formed through deliberative, participatory forums, ensuring consensus and social control. The decisions made reflect broad group interests, not only individual	Public interest is formed through collective participation and deliberation. This process strengthens group cohesion and encourages shared responsibility



Conception of client population	How the community members are perceived in terms of activity and potential	Women in Tegalsari had many group activities but were not well-optimised. Through KWT Lestari they became independent and actively managed their own products and training, showing that people's strengths can grow with proper support and empowerment	Through proper organising, individuals with strong potential were able to develop their strengths. This aligns with Model A view that communities need support rather than replacement
Conception of client role	Role of community members in the organising process (active vs passive)	Members act as active organisers, not merely beneficiaries. Tanti's leadership mobilises members effectively, fostering collective responsibility and emotional attachment, leading to sustainable and independent capacity building	Clients are active participants and leaders in the organising process, promoting sustainability

Based on the analysis of the 12 indicators from Jack Rothman's locality development model, this study found that the organisational development of KWT Lestari in Tegalsari is primarily driven by three interrelated factors: visionary leadership, active participation, and collective action. Visionary leadership from both the

chairperson of KWT Lestari, Tanti and Untung forms the foundation for fostering enthusiasm among members. Tanti continuously facilitates and organises the members of Tegalsari, building a strong sense of commitment. This commitment, in turn, enables active participation. Despite challenges in the number of active members, KWT Lestari



members have demonstrated meaningful engagement, both directly and indirectly. They have succeeded in becoming agents of change, rather than merely beneficiaries. The application of the 12 indicators has highlighted how joint efforts in towards shared goals have a major impact on KWT Lestari, fostering not only individual development but also collective group advancement. Collective action has proven effective, with joint activities driving members towards improved social and economic opportunities.

This community-based approach offers clear advantages over a top-down approach. The experience of KWT Lestari shows that when members are given space to actively participate in the planning and implementation of development, the results are more sustainable. KWT Lestari reminds us of the importance of collective awareness and

member participation in creating more meaningful change. The strong sense of ownership within the organisation forms the basis for overcoming challenges and creating new opportunities. Ultimately, this approach brings positive impacts on both economic conditions and social well-being of its members.





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