

The Transformation of the Jawara Clan's Political Behavior: From New Order Coercion to Pragmatic Clientelism in the Era of Electoral Democracy in Banten, Indonesia

H.S. Suhaedi¹, Ishomuddin^{2*}, Syamsul Arifin³, Asep Nurjaman⁴, Wahyudi⁵

¹Doctor of Sociology, University of Muhammadiyah Malang

^{2,3,4,5}Professor of University of Muhammadiyah Malang

*Corresponding Author

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ABSTRACT

This article analyzes the transformation of the political behavior of the Jawara Clan in Banten as a long trajectory stretching from the colonial period to the contemporary era of electoral democracy. The research was conducted using a social-behavior paradigm and a phenomenological-qualitative approach based on an instrumental case study of the political behavior of the Jawara Clan in the 2020 and 2024 Regional Elections (Pemilukada) of Serang Regency. Data were obtained through in-depth interviews with political elites, kiai (Islamic clerics), jawara, academics, political brokers, and grassroots community figures, supplemented by historical document study. The findings reveal three major phases in the transformation of the Jawara Clan's political behavior. First, the pre-colonial and colonial phase, in which the jawara acted as social bandits and a revolutionary elite of resistance against Dutch colonialism. Second, the New Order phase, in which the coercive power of the jawara underwent systematic institutionalization through the formation of the Indonesian Banten Association of Pencak Silat Masters and Arts and Culture (P3SBBI) as well as co-optation into the Golkar Party as an organic force of the state. Third, the post-Reform electoral-democracy phase, in which the jawara underwent what the author terms the rationalization of agency—a systematic shift from coercive instruments to mechanisms of pragmatic clientelism. The author argues that this transformation is not merely a tactical change, but a structural adaptation reflecting the capacity of the Jawara Clan as a rational actor capable of converting physical capital into political, economic, and symbolic capital. However, this transformation also harbors a structural vulnerability that was exposed in the 2024 Regional Election when confronted with the intervention of central power through legal channels and the coercion of the state apparatus.

Keywords: Jawara Clan, Transformation, Political_Behavior, Coercion, Pragmatic Clientelism, Banten

INTRODUCTION

As an old city that was once the center of power of the Banten Sultanate, Serang—now a regency government—holds a distinctive appeal for continued exploration in contemporary political sociology. Among the many fascinating historical narratives that to this day remain a phenomenon perpetually under observation is the presence of the jawara as a local elite in the dynamics of power in Banten. As a traditional elite possessing prowess in silat (martial arts) and the esoteric sciences (kanuragan), the jawara emerged as a strongman figure defending the interests of the community amid the uncertainty surrounding the extinction of the sultanate's power and the dispossession of the community's land rights and agricultural produce. Their presence was initially a spontaneous response to the vacuum of authority left by the collapse of the Banten Sultanate in 1812 at the hands of Daendels. It was within this power vacuum that the jawara found their social space, while also legitimizing their functional role as providers of security, mediators of conflict, and—in some cases—actors of rebellion against the colonizers.

This jawara-community interaction, which unfolded over a long period—in keeping with the still-unstable socio-political conditions of Banten—subsequently formed a pattern of personalized exchange, a pattern that

ultimately gave rise to a *patron-client* relationship of reciprocal benefit (Aspinall & Berenschot, 2019). This pattern is not a modern innovation, but a historical legacy rooted in the structure of Banten's agrarian society, which depended on strong local figures to safeguard its continued survival. Theoretically, this phenomenon confirms Joel S. Migdal's thesis (1988) on *Strong Societies and Weak States*, in which the Jawara Clan emerges as *strongmen* filling the vacuum of authority resulting from the state's inability to carry out social penetration and control evenly. Within this spiderweb-like (*weblike*) social structure, the jawara became not only a physical figure but a social institution providing the rules of the game and strategies of survival for the community. They are the nodes that connect various local communities to the market economy, to the state apparatus, and to a broader network of interests.

Previous studies of the Banten jawara tend to share a uniform focus, namely portraying the jawara from their dark side, particularly in the context of modern politics. Andi Rahman Hakim underscored how democracy in Banten has been colored by the violent practices of the jawara, a phenomenon termed the "Bantenization of democracy." Generally, researchers tend consistently to highlight the role of the jawara in money politics and the use of threats to influence electoral outcomes. Likewise, in describing the jawara's political network, previous studies analyzed it as a destructive patron-client relationship in which loyalty is exchanged for protection or financial benefit that is often illegal. Syarif Hidayat even portrayed this network as part of a "shadow state" that controls politics and business through corruption and nepotism. These views, although important for revealing the pathological dimension of the jawara's role, tend to reduce the complexity of the jawara's political behavior to a monolithic narrative about a threat to democracy.

Meanwhile, Sartono Kartodirdjo (1984) and Tihami (1992) view the jawara more from their historical and cultural side, both as social bandits opposing colonialism and as santri (religious students) possessing magico-religious knowledge. However, these studies do not deeply analyze the adaptation of the Jawara Clan's strategy, particularly in the modern arena of regional elections. The jawara are depicted merely as political actors whose behavior tends to be criminal, intimidating, and destructive of a healthy democratic order. Hudaeri (2003, 2007) made an important contribution by elaborating the socio-historical dimension of the *kiai-jawara* relationship, but his focus is more on cultural genealogy than on the transformation of political behavior in the contemporary electoral arena. The author finds that there is a significant analytical gap in understanding how the jawara, as rational actors, adapt their strategy to changes in the political regime in Indonesia—particularly the shift from the authoritarian New Order regime to the post-Reform electoral-democracy regime.

This article fills that gap by no longer asking *whether* the jawara have a negative influence, but rather asking *how* their political behavior adapts and changes in confronting an increasingly established structure of electoral democracy. The principal question this article addresses is: how has the political behavior of the Jawara Clan in Banten transformed from the colonial era to contemporary electoral democracy, and what has been the principal driver of that transformation? To answer this question, the author advances the thesis that the transformation of the Jawara Clan's political behavior can be understood through three major phases—pre-colonial/colonial, New Order, and electoral democracy—each of which reflects a rational adaptation to the prevailing structure of power. In each phase, there is a shift in the capital that serves as the principal foundation: from coercive-physical capital in the first phase, to coercive-institutional capital in the second phase, to clientelistic-material capital in the third phase.

The author argues further that this transformation is not merely a surface change, but demonstrates the adaptive capacity of the Jawara Clan as a rational actor able to read changes in the political structure and adjust its strategy accordingly. In Bourdieu's terminology (1986), this transformation is a systematic practice of capital conversion—from physical capital (muscular strength, the esoteric sciences) to political capital (formal office), from political capital to economic capital (projects and budgets), and from economic capital to symbolic capital (the legitimacy of leadership). However, this transformation also harbors a structural vulnerability that was only exposed when the clan confronted the intervention of central power in the 2024 Regional Election of Serang Regency.

The contribution of this article is both theoretical and empirical. Theoretically, this article proposes the concept of the "rationalization of agency" as a framework for understanding how a traditional coercive actor adapts to

electoral democracy. This concept is hoped to enrich the literature on *strongmen* in Southeast Asia, which has tended to regard these actors as remnants of pre-modernity destined to disappear with political modernization. The study of the Jawara Clan shows that traditional *strongmen* do not automatically disappear with democratization—on the contrary, they can undertake highly sophisticated adaptation to maintain domination within a new political configuration. Empirically, this article presents detailed documentation of the dynamics of the jawara clan in Banten that complements and deepens previous studies on this topic.

The urgency of this article also lies in its political momentum. The 2024 Regional Election in Serang Regency was an anomalous moment in which the domination of the Jawara Clan, which had endured for more than two decades, underwent a structural defeat. Analyzing the transformation of the clan's political behavior in the context of this anomaly provides a richer understanding of the factors at play in the reproduction and deconstruction of local political hegemony. The lessons that emerge from this case are relevant not only for Banten, but also for other regions of Indonesia experiencing similar dynamics—where an established local political dynasty confronts a challenge from a shifting national political configuration.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This research employs a social-behavior paradigm with a phenomenological-qualitative approach. The choice of this paradigm is based on Ritzer's view (2007) that the social-behavior paradigm is relevant for observing the actions of individuals or groups that appear concretely in society. This paradigm enables the author to understand the political behavior of the Jawara Clan not merely as a macro-structural phenomenon, but as a concrete practice carried out by particular actors within a specific historical context. The type of research is an instrumental case study (*instrumental case study*) as developed by Denzin and Lincoln (2009), in which the case of the conduct of the Serang Regency Regional Election functions supportively to understand a broader phenomenon, namely the transformation of the Jawara Clan's political behavior.

The locus of the research is Serang Regency, Banten, with a temporal focus on the conduct of the 2020 and 2024 Regional Elections. The choice of these two regional elections is based on a consideration of contrast: the 2020 Regional Election reflects the peak of the reproduction of the clan's hegemony, while the 2024 Regional Election reflects the anomaly of the deconstruction of that hegemony. This contrast enables the author to read the transformation in both a diachronic and a synchronic dimension. Data were collected through in-depth interviews with forty-two key informants comprising political elites (former regents, party officials), *kiai*, *jawara*, academic observers of Banten politics, political brokers, and grassroots community figures. The interviews were conducted between January 2024 and November 2025, using a *purposive sampling* technique followed by *snowball sampling* to reach key actors who were initially difficult to identify.

The data were supplemented by document study covering historical records of the Banten Sultanate, local policy documents, media coverage (Kompas.id, DetikNews, MediaBanten.com, Faktabanten.co.id), official publications of organizations controlled by the clan, as well as academic literature on the *jawara* from Sartono Kartodirdjo (1984, 1996) to Mohamad Hudaeri (2003, 2007), N. H. Lubis (2004), and recent studies of *strongmen* in Southeast Asia. Data analysis was conducted by combining the Data Analysis Spiral (Creswell, 2013) and the Interactive Model of Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2014), comprising data collection, data condensation, *data display*, and verification and validation. The validity of the data was ensured through source triangulation, method triangulation, and peer discussion with experts on Banten political studies from UIN Sultan Maulana Hasanuddin Banten and Universitas Sultan Ageng Tirtayasa.

Research ethics were given close attention, particularly given the political sensitivity of the topic analyzed. Anonymization was applied selectively: informants in vulnerable positions—such as mid-level brokers, party cadres still active, village heads still in office, and community figures economically dependent on the clan—were given pseudonyms or referred to by initials. Informants who are public figures or academics, with explicit consent, could be named. Documentation of interviews was carried out in two ways: audio recording for interviews the informant permitted, and written notes for interviews that were not permitted to be recorded. Drafts of the research findings were exchanged with several key informants for verification prior to publication—ensuring that the author's interpretation did not deviate from the informants' actual experience and did not place them in a position that could be politically or socially detrimental.

LITERATURE REVIEW

To dissect the transformation of the Jawara Clan's political behavior, this article employs four complementary theoretical frameworks. First, Social Exchange Theory (Blau, 1964), which views social interaction as a transactional process in which individuals mutually give and receive something deemed valuable. For Blau, power in patronage arises from the asymmetry of exchange—when one party has the ability to provide rewards difficult to obtain from other sources, the recipient becomes bound by a moral obligation to provide reciprocal support. This framework is highly relevant for explaining how the jawara—who initially provided security services and conflict mediation—gradually converted this exchange into electoral political loyalty in the era of democracy.

Second, the concept of capital conversion from Pierre Bourdieu (1986), which explains how actors convert economic, social, and symbolic capital to maintain domination in a particular social arena. Bourdieu emphasizes that capital is not a static entity but a dynamic one—it can be exchanged, converted, and accumulated through careful strategy. Bourdieu's concept of *habitus* is also important for understanding how the dispositions internalized in the jawara—such as an orientation toward coercion, loyalty to the patron, and an ethos of brotherhood—persist even though the external form of their activity changes. In other words, the jawara's *habitus* remains constant, but their practices adapt to the changing structure of the arena.

Third, Migdal's thesis (1988) on *strong societies and weak states*, which explains how local *strongmen* emerge to fill the vacuum of state authority in a society resembling a spider's web. Migdal advances the concept of the *triangle of accommodation*, an orchestrated tripartite symbiosis in which central leadership, the local bureaucracy, and *strongmen* mutually compromise. The state “allows” *strongmen* to control local resources and mobilize the masses, provided that political stability and electoral support for the regime are maintained. This thesis provides a strong framework for understanding why the New Order did not eradicate the jawara, but instead integrated them into the formal structure of power through Golkar and its affiliated organizations.

Fourth, the concept of *political brokerage* from Aspinall and Berenschot (2019), which positions the political broker as a key actor in the clientelistic network. Aspinall and Berenschot map how, in contemporary Indonesia, the practice of clientelism becomes the principal mechanism of political representation in which access to public resources is exchanged for electoral support. This framework is enriched by Munshi's finding (2021) that clientelism using wealth is preferred by candidates with a coercive background over the use of intimidating political behavior—a finding highly relevant for understanding the jawara's shift in strategy from direct coercion to material distribution. In this logic, the jawara who initially used the “machete” (golok) adapt into distributors of “gold”—not because they became more democratic, but because rational calculation shows that material exchange is more efficient and legally safer than direct intimidation.

These four theoretical frameworks—Blau, Bourdieu, Migdal, and Aspinall-Berenschot—are used synergistically to read the transformation of the Jawara Clan's political behavior. Blau helps in understanding the logic of exchange underlying each phase. Bourdieu provides the instrument for reading capital conversion across phases. Migdal provides the context of the state-society structure that shapes the jawara's room for maneuver. Aspinall and Berenschot provide the specific framework for understanding the most recent transformation toward contemporary electoral clientelism.

In addition to these four principal frameworks, the author also draws on several additional concepts that complement the analysis. The concept of *bossism* from John Sidel (1999), concerning the phenomenon of local political mastery by figures who combine economic power, coercion, and patronage networks, is used to understand the case of Banten as part of a broader phenomenon in Southeast Asia. The concept of the *politics of protection* from Ian Wilson (2015), which analyzes the transformation of thug gangs into formal political actors in post-New Order Indonesia, provides a relevant comparative framework—although the case of Banten has its own particularity because the jawara have deeper traditional roots than urban thug gangs. The concept of the *radius of trust* from Francis Fukuyama (1995), concerning the scope of social trust that can be mobilized within a community, is used to understand how the jawara clan manages its material-distribution network through a personal network grounded in trust built up over generations.

The synthesis of these various theoretical frameworks enables a richer analysis than if only a single framework were used. Each framework captures a different yet complementary dimension—Blau captures the micro-logic of exchange, Bourdieu captures the dynamics of accumulation and conversion of capital, Migdal captures the structural configuration of state-society, Aspinall-Berenschot capture the operation of clientelism in contemporary Indonesia, Sidel captures the phenomenon of bossism in Southeast Asia, Wilson captures the transformation of a coercive actor into a formal political actor, and Fukuyama captures the dimension of social trust underlying the clientelistic network. This synthetic approach is necessary because the political behavior of the jawara clan is a multidimensional phenomenon that cannot be captured comprehensively through a single theoretical framework alone.

The author also wishes to underscore that this synthetic approach is not a haphazard eclecticism—it is a deliberate methodological strategy for handling the empirical complexity of the phenomenon analyzed. Each theoretical framework has its own ontological and epistemological assumptions, and combining several frameworks requires caution to ensure that these assumptions do not fundamentally contradict one another. In this article, the author argues that the frameworks employed—although they originate from different theoretical traditions—can be coherently combined because all of them share an orientation toward the analysis of actors as rational entities operating within a particular structural context. Blau, Bourdieu, Migdal, Aspinall-Berenschot, Sidel, Wilson, and Fukuyama all acknowledge the agentic capacity of actors while also acknowledging structural constraints. This convergence of ontological orientation enables a productive synthesis without becoming trapped in contradictions that would weaken the analysis.

DISCUSSION OF RESEARCH OF RESULTS

1. The Pre-Colonial and Colonial Phase: The Jawara as Social Bandits and a Revolutionary Elite

The position of the jawara became distinctive in Banten society (N. H. Lubis, 2004) in tandem with the crisis of power following the toppling of the Banten Sultanate in 1812 by Daendels (Kartodirdjo, 1996). The collapse of the sultanate caused the structure of power in Banten to become highly unstable and uncertain. The administrative system previously centered on the authority of the sultan now became fragmented, while the Dutch colonial structure had not yet fully replaced the old power. It was within this power vacuum that the jawara found their social space. Their presence became that of a *patron* in society because they were seen as a guarantee of security in a harsh and uncertain living environment. Although acts of violence were subsequently committed by the jawara, in the community's view this was regarded as a *commonplace* matter, a form of *balance of power* aimed at reclaiming their rights to land and to their work (Suhartono, 1995).

Although frequently identified with criminal activity outside the corridors of law, Kartodirdjo (1984), in his monumental work *Pemberontakan Petani Banten 1888* (The Banten Peasants' Revolt of 1888), affirms that the jawara held a crucial role as part of the “revolutionary elite” in the history of resistance in Banten. Their presence was a manifestation of a strategic alliance between informal coercive forces and the traditional elite—including the *kiai* and the aristocracy—in order to oppose the colonial order. In the first half of the nineteenth century, the actions of the jawara in fact contained a strong political dimension as an instrument of social liberation, although in the 1880s their identity briefly shifted to that of non-discriminatory plunderers. The Cilegon Revolt of 1888, led by circles of *kiai* with the support of the jawara network at the grassroots, is the clearest illustration of the political dimension of jawara activity in the colonial era.

This evolution of the jawara's role demonstrates a dialectic between criminal identity and political functionality. The symbiotic relationship between the jawara and the traditional elite—such as *kiai* and aristocrats—as recorded by Kartodirdjo, was the starting point at which physical force (coercion) began to be exchanged for social legitimacy and political capital. This ‘social bandit’ character became the foundation for the formation of a network of power that, in the modern era, would no longer operate outside the law but instead operate at the very heart of power through the mechanisms of formal democracy. The author argues that the seeds of contemporary jawara political behavior—marked by social exchange and integration into the formal structure—can in fact be traced to this phase, when the jawara began to convert physical coercion into social-political capital exchanged with the traditional elite.

This institutionalization of the jawara's coercive power did not stop at the symbolic domain alone, but transformed into a strategically-economic territorial mastery. The typology of the jawara as a connecting actor reached its crucial point in the early twentieth century, when their role shifted from merely traditional guardians of security to a force mobilizing the masses across a broader spectrum of political ideology. This is as examined by Michael C. Williams (2003) in discussing the PKI (Communist Party) revolt in Banten in 1926. Williams explains that the power of the jawara, who controlled markets and auction sites as far as Tanjung Priok, was regarded as an “intermediary” group that played an important role in rallying the peasant masses to launch the revolt under the command of the PKI. This revolt demonstrates the jawara's ability to mobilize the masses across ideologies—from a traditional-religious base to a modern-communist base—a capacity they would inherit and develop in the post-independence era.

Atsushi Ota (2006) adds another important dimension: the jawara, like the ‘social bandit,’ were peasant-criminals regarded by the state as criminals, yet who purported to fight for the restoration of an ideal, ‘good and old’ social order, and remained outside the political system. However, the jawara sometimes became an important link in the colonial political system, as did the *djago* in the Priangan region. Pangeran Achmat sought to cooperate with the English regime, and Sahab accepted the administrator position offered by the Dutch government. The jawara swiftly altered their opportunistic stance, depending on the balance of power, in order to obtain as much support and as much benefit as possible from the situation. This opportunism was not a moral weakness, but a rational strategy showing that, from the outset, the jawara already operated as actors who read the configuration of power and adjusted their loyalties pragmatically.

In this phase, the jawara's political behavior can be characterized by three principal features. First, they operated primarily through coercive-physical capital—muscular strength, the esoteric sciences, and the brotherhood network of the paguron (martial-arts schools). Second, their relationship with the traditional elite was instrumental—the kiai and aristocrats provided religious and structural legitimacy, while the jawara provided coercive force. Third, their position toward the state was ambivalent—on the one hand as rebels opposing colonialism, on the other as actors who could be embraced into the colonial administration when that was advantageous. These features will continue to be visible in the subsequent transformations, albeit in different forms.

The author wishes to underscore that this pre-colonial and colonial phase is not merely a historical prologue irrelevant to understanding contemporary dynamics. On the contrary, this phase laid the foundation of habitus and dispositions that would continue to influence the jawara's political behavior into the contemporary era. Dispositions such as strategic opportunism, loyalty to the patron, the ability to mobilize the masses, and an orientation toward territorial mastery—all were formed in this phase and continue to be reproduced through internal socialization within the jawara community. When we observe the political behavior of the Hasan Sohib Clan in the contemporary era, we are in fact observing a modern manifestation of a habitus whose roots are centuries old. Understanding this historical dimension is highly important because it explains why the transformation of the jawara's political behavior proceeded with extraordinary internal coherence—that transformation did not change the foundation of habitus, but adjusted the external expression of that habitus to the changing structure of the arena.

Another dimension that must be understood from this phase is the construction of collective memory about the jawara in Banten society. The history of the jawara's resistance against colonialism became one of the principal pillars of contemporary Banten cultural identity. Stories of jawara who fought the Dutch, jawara who defended the oppressed people, and jawara who became guardians of religious tradition—all became part of a popular mythology maintained through oral tradition, artistic performance, and local historical narrative. This collective memory provides the contemporary jawara—including the Hasan Sohib Clan—with a very strong basis of symbolic legitimacy. They are not seen as ordinary political actors, but as continuers of a heroic tradition rooted in the history of resistance. This construction of collective memory gives the clan a strategic advantage difficult to match by competitors who lack a similar historical base.

The author wishes to underscore that this construction of collective memory about the jawara is not a passive reflection of historical fact—it is an active construction involving a particular selection, emphasis, and interpretation of past events. The heroic aspects of jawara activity—resistance against colonialism, the defense

of the oppressed, the role in popular revolts—are maintained and emphasized, while the more ambivalent or problematic aspects—such as plundering activity, violence against the community, or collaboration with colonial forces in certain periods—tend to be forgotten or marginalized in the popular narrative. This narrative selection is no coincidence—it is the product of symbolic work carried out by actors who have an interest in maintaining a positive image of the jawara. Understanding this construction of collective memory is highly important because it shows that the basis of the jawara's historical legitimacy cannot be regarded as a natural given—it is the product of active and continuous cultural work.

Another aspect of the pre-colonial and colonial phase important to note is the geographical dimension of jawara operations. Banten has a specific geographical character—with mountainous areas in the south, coastline in the north, and agricultural plains in the center. Each area has different social dynamics, and the jawara developed operational strategies suited to each geographical context. In the mountainous areas, the jawara functioned primarily as community guardians and mediators of inter-village conflict. In the coastal areas, they were involved in the dynamics of trade and seafaring. In the agricultural plains, they played a role in the mastery of land and the management of labor. This geographical differentiation created what may be termed “varieties of jawara”—with differing profiles in accordance with the socio-economic ecology of the places where they operated. This diversity became one of the sources of the jawara's structural strength because it gave them the capacity to adapt to various contexts—a capacity that would continue to be leveraged in the transformations of the subsequent phases.

2. The New Order Phase: Institutionalization of Coercive Power through P3SBBI and Golkar

Entering the New Order era, the organic power of the jawara underwent systematic institutionalization. The Soeharto regime—which built political stability through the management of social forces at the local level—did not eradicate the jawara, but instead integrated them into the formal structure of the state. Hasan Sochib, the patriarch of the Jawara Clan who would later give rise to a political dynasty in Banten, became the central figure in this process of institutionalization. The collectivity of the jawara was institutionalized within the Indonesian Banten Association of Pencak Silat Masters and Arts and Culture (P3SBBI), founded around 1971 in Serang with the motto “self-defense, defense of the nation, defense of the state.” This motto is interesting to analyze because it reveals a symbolic strategy to associate the jawara with the nationalist ideology of the New Order.

The P3SBBI became a network institution of silat *paguron* comprising roughly a hundred *paguron* in Banten. This organization functioned not only as a vehicle for the preservation of silat culture, but also as an instrument of political mobilization for the interests of Golkar and the New Order regime. The word *pendekar* (master/warrior), according to Hamid and Facal (2013), was used as a form of reducing the negative stigma of the jawara, who were not infrequently equated with criminal groups or troublemaking gangs. With this shift in terminology, the jawara underwent what may be called a symbolic cleansing—they no longer appeared as “bandits” or “thugs,” but as “masters” who safeguarded the nation's culture. This labeling strategy, in Bourdieu's terminology, was an effective effort at converting cultural-symbolic capital.

In addition to forming the institutional body of the jawara, Hasan Sochib was also quite successful in expanding his network of power by becoming a Golkar official or entering Golkar's autonomous bodies (Banom) such as MKGR. With his presence in Golkar, Hasan Sochib became ever freer to develop his power relations. He consolidated the influence of the *kiai* by holding command of the Satkar Ulama as the distinctive organizational hallmark of Golkar in Banten. The Satkar Ulama became the cultural-network organ that bound the power relationship between Hasan Sochib and the *kiai*. This mastery of the Satkar Ulama was highly strategic because it enabled Hasan Sochib to actualize Tihami's classic adage (1992) about “juwara iku tentrane *kiai*” (the jawara is the army of the *kiai*) within the electoral politics of the New Order—in which the votes of the NU masses organized by the *kiai* could be mobilized for the interests of Golkar.

In the business sector, Hasan Sochib controlled and commanded business organizations such as the Regional Chamber of Commerce and Industry (KADIN) of Banten, the Indonesian National Association of Construction Entrepreneurs (Gapensi) of Banten, and the Indonesian National Construction Services Development Institute. This mastery was no coincidence, but the result of an integrated strategy that made the jawara a broker

between the interests of the state, the interests of big business, and the interests of the grassroots community. This phenomenon is consistent with Migdal's thesis on the *triangle of accommodation*: the state “allows” the Jawara Clan to control local resources and mobilize the masses, provided that political stability and electoral support for the regime are maintained. This is what explains how the Hasan Sochib clan was able to transform coercive power into an organic force of the state through Golkar and various business organizations.

The state-jawara relationship in this era was symbiotic and beneficial to both parties. As mapped by Joshua Barker (2001), the New Order government launched the Siskamling (Neighborhood Security System) policy, designed to control the activities of gangs and integrate them into the formal security structure. More organized gangs, including jawara groups, were drawn into the official security system through programs such as Hansip and Satpam (civil-defense and private-security corps) (Wilson, 2015). This step was taken to ensure that these groups operated under the control of the state and did not exceed the existing legal boundaries. At the same time, the jawara obtained formal legitimacy and access to state resources. In Bourdieu's terminology, this was a successful conversion of coercive capital into political-institutional capital—the jawara did not lose their coercive power; they merely integrated it into a legal-formal framework.

What is important to note is that the jawara's political behavior in this phase transformed along three dimensions. First, from coercive-physical capital to coercive-institutional capital—the same power, but now institutionalized within P3SBBI, KADIN, and Golkar's autonomous bodies. Second, from an instrumental relationship with the traditional elite to a structural relationship with the state—the jawara no longer merely partnered with kiai and aristocrats, but became an integral part of the state's political machine. Third, from being ambivalent toward the state to being an organic force of the state—the jawara ceased to be outsiders and became insiders, becoming an instrument of the regime for managing the local community.

At the same time, this transformation created the conditions that would later enable the emergence of a political dynasty. Hasan Sochib's mastery of Golkar, P3SBBI, KADIN, and the kiai network through the Satkar Ulama was not merely an accumulation of positions, but the construction of an infrastructure of power that could be inherited. Hasan Sochib's children and relatives—from Ratu Atut Chosiyah, who would become Governor of Banten, Ratu Tatu Chasanah, who became Regent of Serang, Tubagus Haerul Jaman, who became Mayor of Serang, to Airin Rachmi Diany, who became Mayor of South Tangerang—inherited this infrastructure and developed it in the post-Reform era.

The author also found that the transformation in the New Order phase had a highly important symbolic dimension often underanalyzed in the literature. The attachment of the term “pendekar” to replace the negatively connoted term “jawara” was not merely wordplay—it was a systematic strategy for reconstructing the collective identity of the jawara in the public sphere. This strategy is consistent with the logic of labeling analyzed by Bourdieu, in which renaming is one of the most effective mechanisms for changing the symbolic capital of a group. By becoming “pendekar,” the jawara no longer carried the criminal stigma—they instead presented themselves as preservers of culture and defenders of the state. This symbolic transformation was highly important because it enabled the jawara to integrate into the formal structure of the state without having to face the cultural resistance that would have occurred had they continued to appear as negatively connoted “jawara.”

Another interesting dimension of the New Order phase is that the institutionalization of the jawara through P3SBBI created what may be termed the “bureaucratization of coercion.” Unlike the pre-colonial and colonial phase, in which coercion was personal and unpredictable, coercion in the New Order phase was institutional and predictable. A jawara wishing to use coercive force had to go through the organizational structure of P3SBBI, with a clear leadership and identifiable rules of the game. This bureaucratization was highly advantageous to the New Order regime because it transformed jawara coercion from a potential threat to stability into an instrument that could be managed for the interests of the regime. At the same time, this bureaucratization was also advantageous to the jawara because it gave them formal legitimacy and protection from the criminalization that would have occurred had they operated as informal actors outside the structure of the state.

The author argues that understanding the institutional dimension of the New Order phase is highly important because it explains why the transition to the Reform era did not destroy the jawara—on the contrary, this transition gave them broader space to actualize their accumulated capital. When the political institutions of the New Order collapsed or underwent structural adjustment, the infrastructure the jawara had built—P3SBBI, the KADIN network, the Satkar Ulama, and other wing organizations—remained intact and could be activated for the new political context. This continuity of infrastructure explains why Indonesia's political transition in the late 1990s and early 2000s did not produce a fundamental discontinuity in the dynamics of local politics in Banten—it instead gave broader space for the jawara's adaptation into the configuration of electoral democracy.

Another interesting dimension of the New Order phase is that the jawara's involvement in the formal structure of the state created what may be termed a “hybrid identity.” The jawara in this phase were no longer purely traditional figures operating entirely outside modern structures, but figures combining traditional elements with modern elements. They still maintained traditional cultural practices—*silat*, *manaqiban*, visits to *kiai*—while also carrying out modern practices—holding office at KADIN, attending Golkar meetings, managing contracting companies. This hybrid identity was highly functional because it enabled the jawara to interact with various segments of society and political structures with competence appropriate to each context. When dealing with the rural community, they could present themselves as continuers of tradition. When dealing with the economic elite, they could present themselves as professional businesspeople. When dealing with the bureaucratic structure, they could present themselves as legitimate political actors.

3. The Reform and Decentralization Phase: A Safety Valve for the Consolidation of Hegemony

The past Reform regime was followed by the enactment of Law Number 22 of 1999 on Regional Government—a legal milestone that opened the era of decentralization in Indonesia. The initial intent of decentralization was to strengthen democracy by bringing power closer to the people, accelerating regional development, and abolishing Jakarta's hegemony over the regions. However, rather than bringing prosperity to the people or causing democratic consolidation to proceed well, for the jawara decentralization instead became a *safety valve* for building their power in a *powerful* manner. Hasan Sohib, popularly called “*abah*” (father) by his lieutenants, became the *godfather* in the conduct of governance and the regulation of the implementation of development, particularly in Serang. The process of implementing governmental and political development would be disrupted without the blessing of Hasan Sohib.

The carving-out of Banten into a province of its own in 2000—separated from West Java—was a crucial moment that the Jawara Clan exploited to consolidate its power. Hasan Sohib was one of the key actors in the struggle for this carving-out. After Banten officially became a province, the Hasan Sohib clan succeeded in placing Ratu Atut Chosiyah as Deputy Governor in the first term and then as Governor of Banten in the subsequent terms. This mastery of executive office, combined with command over Golkar as the dominant party in Banten, created a dynastic structure very difficult to penetrate by conventional political competition.

Under the pretext of decentralization and democracy, the jawara became ever freer to weave an expansion of the political-economic network of exchange that adapted to the phenomenon of changing political-cultural conditions. The jawara's political behavior in several respects tended to shift toward a pattern of exchange relations of a *pragmatic-instrumentalist* dimension. These exchange practices resemble the adaptation of the organizational strategies of thug gangs and street extortionists in post-New Order Jakarta (Wilson & Suryana, 2019). What is different in Banten is the scale and degree of institutionalization—the jawara in Banten are not merely a street gang, but have become a political infrastructure integrated with the party, the bureaucracy, and the business network.

This adaptation of the clan's strategy from a coercive pattern toward the strengthening of the structure of exchange demonstrates a systematic effort at the institutionalization of capital. In Bourdieu's perspective (1986), this process is the way the clan converts its economic and social capital into symbolic capital. The institutionalization of the jawara through P3SBBI and the mastery of the business network demonstrate a systematic process of capital accumulation. The Hasan Sohib clan succeeded in converting economic capital and social capital (the jawara-santri network) into highly powerful symbolic capital. The great name of the

clan became *doxa*—an incontestable political truth in Serang, in which their power was regarded as a sociological matter of course that the community had to follow.

However, decentralization also provided space for the emergence of *local bossism*. Regional leaders elected through formal democratic procedures often acted as structural leaders who monopolized control over economic resources and used coercive force to silence criticism. The transition from the centralistic system of the New Order to decentralization has been described as a shift in domination from “stationary bandits” at the center to “roving bandits,” or “petty kings” at the regional level who exploit public resources for the interests of their own oligarchy (Rahayu et al., 2018). This is as described by Sidel (1999) in his analysis of *bossism* in the Philippines—a phenomenon that also applies to the case of Banten.

In this phase, the jawara's political behavior underwent the most significant and complex transformation. They were no longer merely social bandits, no longer merely masters co-opted by the state, but a political elite mastering the formal structure of democracy. The political dynasty that formed in Banten—with the Hasan Sochib clan at its core—is the most mature manifestation of what Migdal called the triangle of accommodation, but with a new twist: the jawara were now no longer merely *strongmen* co-opted by the state, but became the state itself at the local level. They are the executive, they are the legislators, they are the controllers of the party, and at the same time they continue to maintain the traditional coercive network through RBB and P3SBBI.

The author argues that the Reform and decentralization phase created a unique condition that in fact benefited the jawara clan—a consequence not anticipated by the architects of political reform in Indonesia. The initial intent of decentralization was to empower local communities through the devolution of power from the center to the regions. In practice, however, this devolution of power instead provided greater space for local actors who already possessed an accumulation of capital—such as the jawara clan—to consolidate their domination. Without tight central control, the clan could use regional executive office to direct the regional budget (APBD) toward projects that benefited their business network. Without consistent national media oversight, their clientelistic practices could proceed with minimal resistance. This ironic consequence demonstrates the importance of designing political reform with an awareness of the existing structural context—not merely with normative idealism about decentralization as an instrument of democratization.

Another aspect of the Reform phase to note is the change in the dynamics of political elite recruitment. In the New Order era, the recruitment of the political elite was carried out primarily through a single-party structure (Golkar) that was highly hierarchical and controlled from the center. In the post-Reform era, the recruitment of the political elite was carried out through a more competitive mechanism—with political parties having to rally electoral support through attractive candidates. This condition gave a structural advantage to the jawara clan because they possessed an accumulation of capital difficult for new actors to match. Clan members could easily obtain a nomination ticket from various parties—not only Golkar—and with their capital, they could run an effective campaign. This recruitment dynamic explains why various clan members could occupy strategic positions in various regions of Banten and from various party affiliations—an achievement that might be difficult to imagine in a more egalitarian system.

What is also important to note is that the Reform phase displayed what may be termed the “paradox of electoral democracy” in the local Indonesian context. The direct regional elections introduced in 2005 should, in theory, have strengthened the accountability of regional leaders to the people. In practice, however, this system instead strengthened political dynasties that possessed an accumulation of capital difficult for new candidates to match. To run a regional-election campaign in Indonesia, a candidate needs significant financial resources, an extensive organizational network, and access to channels of political communication. A candidate from the ecosystem of a political dynasty—such as the Jawara Clan—possesses all of these in abundance. Meanwhile, a new candidate must build everything from scratch—a very difficult task within the limited time frame of a campaign. This paradox explains why procedural democratization in Indonesia did not automatically produce substantive democratization—in many cases, it instead created conditions that consolidated the domination of the traditional elite within the formal framework of democracy.

Another important dimension of the Reform phase is the emergence of complex multi-party coalition dynamics. In the New Order era, the political structure was very simple—with Golkar as the dominant party and two other parties (PPP and PDI) as “tolerated” parties. In the post-Reform era, the political structure became far more complex with the emergence of many parties that had to build coalitions to nominate candidates. This complexity in fact provided an additional advantage to the jawara clan because they possessed the financial capacity and political network to build effective multi-party coalitions. In the 2020 Regional Election, for example, Ratu Tatu Chasanah succeeded in building a large coalition with support from Golkar, Gerindra, PDIP, NasDem, and several other parties. This large coalition gave the clan almost total political domination in Serang Regency—an achievement difficult to imagine without the financial capacity and political network the clan possessed.

4. The Shift to Pragmatic Clientelism: The 2020 Regional Election of Serang Regency

The phenomenon of the 2020 Regional Election of Serang Regency demonstrates a significant sociological shift, in which the physical violence that had long been attached to the traditional identity of the jawara transformed into a form of materialistic *social exchange* (Blau, 1964). This transformation from “physical domination” to “economic domination” made the relationship between the clan and the constituency more transactional, yet still binding. In the 2020 Regional Election, Ratu Tatu Chasanah—the biological daughter of Hasan Sohib—paired with Pandji Tirtayasa and was able to garner 64.4% of the vote and dominate all 29 subdistricts in Serang Regency. This victory was no coincidence, but the culmination of an architecture of clientelism built over several decades.

The use of violence became “costly” politically because of the risk of legal sanction and delegitimization. The post-Reform era brought with it an ever-stronger supremacy of law, ever more independent media, and an ever more critical civil society. In this context, the open intimidation customarily used by the jawara in the previous era became counterproductive—it could trigger legal sanction and a loss of public support. The Jawara Clan then carried out what the author terms the *rationalization of agency*. Drawing on Peter Blau's Social Exchange Theory, they realized that loyalty built upon fear is fragile, whereas loyalty built upon the fulfillment of economic needs is more stable and more predictable. The “machete” (coercion) was replaced by “gold” (resources), in which the patron-client relationship was formalized through the distribution of staple goods, cash, and even procurement projects for goods and services.

The bureaucratization of the jawara also occurred systematically in this phase. The jawara no longer appeared on the streets as physical champions, but sat in bureaucratic seats as regents, mayors, or legislators. Sociologically, a conversion of capital took place in which physical capital (muscular strength) was converted into political capital (formal office), political capital was used to access economic capital (the regional budget/projects), and economic capital was then recirculated to purchase symbolic capital. The formation of the Kaserangan Silat style by Ratu Tatu Chasanah is a brilliant example of the de-escalation of violence: the potential for conflict among paguron was dampened by uniting them within a single cultural identity channeled by those in power. This initiation was not merely a ceremonial activity, but a practice of converting objectified cultural capital (the various silat traditions) into institutionalized cultural capital (official initiation by the regional government), which was then converted into symbolic capital.

The utilization of informal structures as “pipelines” also became an important feature of this phase. The Jawara Clan did not distribute “gold” randomly, but through the highly solid pipelines of the *Radius of Trust*. Religious figures or kiai provided moral legitimacy for the material assistance given. Village heads and their apparatus became the technical operators of distribution at the grassroots level. Wing organizations such as the United Banten Volunteers (RBB), Karang Taruna, PMI, and TAGANA transformed into an efficient logistics machine. RBB in particular—affiliated with the P3SBBi founded by Hasan Sohib—functioned as a permanent broker working in the field every time the clan competed politically. RBB was not an ad hoc organization for a single electoral event, but a long-term infrastructure maintaining the reproduction of the clan's habitus at the grassroots.

The mastery of civil-society organizations became one of the keys to the 2020 victory. Ratu Tatu Chasanah served as Chair of the Indonesian Red Cross (PMI) of Banten Province for four consecutive terms since 2007.

This mastery of long duration provided control over a massive and hierarchical organizational structure extending down to the subdistrict, village, and even school level (through the Youth Red Cross). Andika Hazrumy led Karang Taruna and TAGANA at the provincial level, strengthening the network of young cadres dispersed down to the RT and RW (neighborhood) level. The mastery of these organizations gave the clan access to what Usman (2018) calls *linking social capital*—the social capital that connects the grassroots community with the formal structure of power.

This system created an extraordinary short-term stability. The community no longer saw the Jawara Clan as a frightening figure, but as a “generous patron.” This is what explains why their hegemony was so durable up to its peak in 2020. The victory of Tatu-Pandji with 64.4% and full domination across all 29 subdistricts was not merely the result of a conventional electoral campaign, but a demonstration that the architecture of clientelism the clan had built had reached a maximum level of effectiveness. Economic capital (government projects), social capital (the RBB and P3SBBI organizational network), cultural/symbolic capital (the charisma of being a descendant of Hasan Sohib), and political capital (command of the party) worked synergistically to create a power structure that appeared unrivaled.

The author found that the 2020 victory also displayed a high degree of complexity in the management of the clan's clientelistic network. The distribution of material was not carried out haphazardly—it was managed through a highly structured mechanism with careful calculation. The mapping of voter demographics was carried out with high precision, with categorization based on economic need, religious affiliation, closeness to local figures, and the history of electoral support. The distribution of material was then adjusted to the profile of each category—for voters with high economic vulnerability, the distribution of staple goods was effective; for voters with a strong religious orientation, mediation through religious figures was important; for voters with closeness to a particular organizational network, mobilization through organizational officials became the principal instrument. The sophistication of this clientelistic-network management is one of the sources of the clan's strength difficult for competitors to imitate.

Another dimension of the 2020 victory important to analyze is the clan's success in managing public narrative. During the campaign period, the narrative of “development success” in Serang Regency became the dominant theme—with reference to infrastructure projects, improved public services, and social-assistance programs launched by the clan's government. This narrative was mediated through local media, coordinated social media, and informal channels of communication at the grassroots. At the same time, the critical narrative toward the clan—which in fact existed and was voiced by local activists—was successfully minimized in its impact through a combination of counter-narrative material distribution and superior mobilization capacity. This effective management of narrative gave the clan a symbolic dimension complementing the material dimension of their clientelism.

The author also found that the 2020 victory illustrates the complexity of the relationship between structure and agency in local Indonesian politics. On the one hand, this victory was supported by a favorable structure—significant control of the regional budget, the domination of the Golkar party at the local level, the accumulation of cultural capital built across generations, and an already-ordered organizational network. On the other hand, this victory also required active agency—strategic decisions about resource allocation, candidate selection, campaign management, and responses to the dynamics of competition. The synergy between a favorable structure and effective agency created the conditions that produced extraordinary electoral domination. Understanding the dynamics of this synergy is highly important because it enables a more nuanced analysis of the reproduction of political dynasties—not merely as a deterministic structural phenomenon, but as the product of a complex interaction between structure and agency.

An equally important aspect of the 2020 victory is its temporal dimension. This victory was not merely the result of an effective campaign in the lead-up to the regional election—it was the culmination of political investment that unfolded over several decades. Since the era of Hasan Sohib in the 1970s, the clan had consistently built political infrastructure, accumulated capital in various dimensions, and maintained relationships with the grassroots network. Every political event—from village-head elections, regency/municipal elections, legislative elections, gubernatorial elections, to presidential elections—was used as a momentum to strengthen this infrastructure. It is this consistency of multi-decade investment that gave the

clan an operational capacity very difficult to match at a critical moment such as the 2020 Regional Election. A challenger candidate newly entering the arena—even with large material resources—could not rival an accumulation that had unfolded over half a century.

5. The 2024 Anomaly: The Saturation of Clientelism and the Limits of the Rationalization of Agency

However, the transformation from coercion to clientelism that appeared successful in 2020 began to experience an impasse in the 2024 Regional Election. The conduct of the 2024 Regional Election became the stage for a political anomaly that brought down the long domination of the Jawara Clan. The candidate from the clan, Andika Hazrumy—grandson of Hasan Sohib and son of Ratu Atut Chosiyah—who paired with Nanang Supriatna and was favored by various survey institutions, suffered defeat by Ratu Rachmatuzakiah, a newcomer backed by the infrastructure of the party in power at the center. This defeat was even aggravated by the Constitutional Court's ruling on a re-vote (PSU) at all polling stations, which indicated highly unusual political dynamics.

The question that arises is: why did the highly successful transformation of 2020 experience an impasse in 2024? The author argues that the “gold” mechanism the clan had developed has a *saturation point*. When a new patron emerged bearing greater “gold” or able to sever the channel of the clan's gold distribution through the oversight of the apparatus, the community began to regard material giving as a “routine entitlement,” so that its political exchange value declined. This is what the author terms the *diminishing marginal utility* of symbolic capital—a dimension not yet sufficiently explored in classical Bourdieusian theory. Continuous material giving changes its status from a “gift” into a “routine entitlement,” and when this happens, that capital loses its magical power to bind loyalty.

Furthermore, the intervention of central power through legal instruments and the coercion of the apparatus—dubbed by the local community the “Brown Party” (Partai Cokelat)—succeeded in sabotaging the channel of the clan's social exchange. When legal instruments were used to audit or pressure the bureaucratic elite and village heads, the clan lost its technical capacity to distribute “gold.” In the logic of Knoke (1990), power depends on a stable network configuration. However, the structural pressure in 2024 created *structural holes* that the incumbent failed to close. As a result, the clan lost the ability to mobilize resources effectively down to the grassroots level. The clan's defeat shows that social exchange will fail if the agent loses the ability to fulfill its promise due to the damaging of the channel of distribution.

The 2024 anomaly reveals that the rationalization of agency carried out by the Jawara Clan has an absolute limit. The transformation from coercion to clientelism is a highly intelligent form of agentic evolution for surviving in a democracy, but the failure in 2024 proves that this “gold” system is highly dependent on a monopoly of resources; once that monopoly is broken by the intervention of a higher structure, that hegemony will undergo deconstruction. In other words, the jawara—however sophisticated their adaptation—remain actors operating within the bounds of a broader structure. They can adjust their capital to changes in the political regime, but they cannot overcome the situation when that structure actively opposes them.

The implication of this finding for our understanding of *strongmen* in Southeast Asia is that their adaptive capacity is not without limit. As shown by Sidel (1999) in the case of the Philippines and Wilson (2015) in the context of post-New Order Indonesia, *strongmen* and the groups affiliated with them can survive across various political regimes by changing their strategy. However, when the state structure actively turns against them—using legal instruments and coercion to dismantle their clientelistic network—even the most adaptive *strongmen* will experience vulnerability. This is the key lesson that emerges from the anomaly of the 2024 Regional Election in Serang Regency.

The author also found that the 2024 anomaly gives rise to several important lessons about the dynamics of local power in Indonesia. First, the hegemony of a political dynasty—however structurally strong—is contingent on a broader structural configuration. As long as that configuration is favorable, the hegemony can reproduce stably. When the configuration changes—particularly through the intervention of the central structure—the hegemony can undergo rapid deconstruction. Second, the instruments of electoral democracy can be used both for the consolidation and for the weakening of a political dynasty. In 2020, those instruments

were used for consolidation through an effective clientelistic mechanism. In 2024, the same instruments could be leveraged for weakening when combined with structural pressure from the center. Third, the 2024 anomaly raises normative questions about the quality of democracy—is the weakening of a political dynasty through the intervention of the central structure a triumph for democracy, or rather a manifestation of a centralization of power that constrains local political autonomy?

A deeper reflection on the 2024 anomaly shows that the process of weakening the clan was not monolithic—it involved several mechanisms working simultaneously. First, the mechanism of alternative resources—with the emergence of the network of the Ministry of Religious Affairs and the Ministry of Villages, Disadvantaged Regions (Desa PDT) able to channel resources to *pesantren* and local communities in Banten. This mechanism created an alternative channel that weakened the clan's monopoly over material distribution. Second, the mechanism of selective law enforcement—with the intensification of oversight of regional government officials loyal to the clan, creating a climate of uncertainty that reduced the bureaucracy's capacity to support the clan's electoral agenda. Third, the mechanism of alternative narrative—with the emergence of a challenger candidate able to present a “fresh” and “non-dynastic” image as an attractive alternative for voters weary of the clan's domination. The synergy of these three mechanisms explains why the weakening of the clan in 2024 could proceed effectively even though the clan still possessed significant resources.

Finally, the 2024 anomaly offers a lesson about the ambivalence of weakening a political dynasty. On the one hand, the clan's defeat can be seen as a victory for democracy—the people are not confined within a long-standing clan domination. On the other hand, the mechanism that produced that victory—including the mobilization of central government infrastructure and the use of the apparatus's coercive instruments—also harbors problems from the perspective of substantive democracy. The weakening of a political dynasty that proceeds through the intervention of the central structure is not a pure triumph for democracy—it also implies the risk of a centralization of power that could produce a different authoritarian configuration. Political sociology has the task of continuing to monitor these dynamics with an adequate analytical framework, so that its contribution to improving the quality of democracy remains substantive and does not become trapped in a simplistic narrative of “evil dynasties” versus “virtuous competition.”

The author also wishes to note that this analysis of the 2024 anomaly is tentative and still requires further observation for more comprehensive verification. The re-vote (PSU) ordered by the Constitutional Court adds complexity to the interpretation of the 2024 regional-election results—with the possibility of new dynamics emerging in the conduct of the PSU. Questions about whether the weakening of the clan will continue into a structural trend or whether it is merely a temporary contingency that can be reversed in subsequent contests—all require further observation over several upcoming periods. What can be ascertained from the present analysis is that the 2024 anomaly has displayed the structural vulnerability of a clientelism that previously appeared invulnerable—a significant finding regardless of how the subsequent dynamics develop.

CONCLUSION

This article concludes that the political behavior of the Jawara Clan underwent three phases of transformation, each of which reflects a rational adaptation to the prevailing political structure. In the pre-colonial and colonial phase, the jawara acted as social bandits and a revolutionary elite that emerged as a result of the vacuum of authority following the collapse of the Banten Sultanate. In the New Order phase, the coercive power of the jawara was institutionalized through P3SBBI and co-opted into Golkar and the state's business network. In the post-Reform electoral-democracy phase, the jawara carried out a rationalization of agency by replacing coercive instruments with mechanisms of pragmatic clientelism.

This transformation is not merely a tactical change, but a structural adaptation that proves the capacity of the Jawara Clan as a rational actor able to convert capital—from physical capital to political, economic, and symbolic capital. In each phase, they read the prevailing configuration of power and adjusted their strategy to maintain domination. This is what explains the resilience of the Jawara Clan dynasty across the New Order regime, the Reform transition, and two decades of electoral democracy. However, this transformation also harbors a structural vulnerability that was only revealed when confronting the intervention of central power in the 2024 Regional Election. The saturation of clientelism and the sabotage of the channel of distribution by the

state apparatus prove that the rationalization of agency has an absolute limit—it works as long as the monopoly of resources is maintained and the state remains accommodative.

This finding corrects the static view of the jawara in previous literature and shows that the analysis of local *strongmen* in Southeast Asia needs to attend to the dynamic-adaptive dimension of the actor toward changes in the political structure. The author offers a theoretical contribution in the form of the concept of the *rationalization of agency*—a process in which a traditional coercive actor adapts its capital into a mechanism of material exchange that is more efficient and legally safer. This concept is useful not only for understanding the case of Banten, but also for analyzing similar phenomena in other regions of Indonesia and in other developing countries where traditional *strongmen* adapt to electoral democracy.

The practical implication of this finding is that efforts to strengthen the quality of local democracy in Indonesia are not sufficient through procedural reform alone, such as the refinement of the electoral system or the strengthening of electoral oversight. Structural efforts are also required to reduce the community's dependence on clientelism—for example, through the digitalization of social assistance so that it cannot be personalized by a patron, the strengthening of public services grounded in citizens' rights, and the reform of political-party cadre formation to break the dependence on dynastic figures. At the same time, it must be ensured that the state's coercive instruments—such as the legal apparatus and the police—are not used as a political weapon to dismantle or build a new hegemony in accordance with the interests of the central regime, as threatened to occur in the events of 2024.

The author wishes to close with several notes on the limitations of this analysis and directions for further research. First, the focus on a single clan in a single regency—although providing depth of analysis—limits the possibility of generalization. Comparative studies of other local political dynasties in Indonesia (in South Sulawesi, Lampung, Yogyakarta, and other regions) are required to test the extent to which the pattern of transformation identified in the case of the Jawara Clan applies more broadly. Second, the gender dimension in the dynamics of the clan—particularly the role of female figures such as Ratu Atut Chosiyah, Ratu Tatu Chasanah, and Airin Rachmi Diany—has not been sufficiently explored in this article and warrants becoming the focus of further research. How the clan's female figures manage interaction with the jawara network, which is traditionally masculine, and how these dynamics affect the reproduction of the clan's political habitus, are important questions to investigate.

Third, the dimension of digital transformation and its influence on the political behavior of the jawara clan has also not been sufficiently analyzed in this article. The social-media era has created a new space for political communication that cannot be fully controlled by traditional clientelistic structures. The emergence of civil-society movements organized through social media, the capacity of independent media to disseminate criticism rapidly, and new dynamics in political mobilization through digital platforms—all create conditions that could fundamentally change the local political configuration. A study of how the jawara clan adapts (or fails to adapt) to digital transformation would provide an important perspective on the future of local political dynamics in Indonesia. These limitations, rather than weakening the article's contribution, instead serve as an invitation for other researchers to continue and extend the analysis presented here.

Finally, the author wishes to underscore that the study of the Jawara Clan in Banten is not merely a regional case study relevant only to the Banten context. It is a study that provides an analytical window onto the dynamics of local politics in Indonesia more broadly. Many regions in Indonesia have a similar political-dynasty configuration—with a cross-generational accumulation of capital, integration into the formal structure of democracy, and an adaptive capacity toward changes in the political regime. The lessons that emerge from the case of the Jawara Clan—about the rationalization of agency, capital conversion, and structural vulnerability—can be applied to understand similar dynamics in other regions. This is the broader contribution of this article to Indonesian political sociology: it does not merely explain a single case, but provides an analytical framework that can be applied to understand a broader class of phenomena. Thus, this article is hoped to be one contribution in the effort to build an Indonesian political sociology that is more contextual, more nuanced, and more substantive—a discipline that can make a concrete contribution to the effort to improve the quality of democracy in Indonesia.

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