



## **Electoral compliance and cultural hegemony: The political economy of elite power in Indonesia's village governance**

**M. Ridwan Said Ahmad<sup>1\*</sup>, Jamaluddin Arifin<sup>2</sup>, St. Haniah<sup>2</sup>, Ibrahim Arifin<sup>1</sup>, Risfaisal<sup>2</sup>**

<sup>1</sup> Universitas Negeri Makassar, Indonesia.

<sup>2</sup> Universitas Muhammadiyah Makassar, Indonesia.

\* Corresponding Author. Email: [m.ridwan.said.ahmad@unm.ac.id](mailto:m.ridwan.said.ahmad@unm.ac.id)

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### **ABSTRACT**

Decentralization policies in Indonesia, particularly in Bone Regency, South Sulawesi Province, are often based on the assumption that decentralizing power will destroy traditional hierarchies and promote inclusive governance. However, this study challenges this optimistic view, arguing that without adequate social mechanisms, electoral mechanisms can paradoxically reinforce existing power structures rather than disrupt them. Using political contestation in the Pude Village Head Election as a critical case study, this study analyzes the resilience of feudalism within the framework of modern procedural democracy. Relying on extensive qualitative research, including in-depth interviews and observations of electoral maneuvers, the study explains how “elite fusion” distorts the democratic process. In Pude, local elites represent a powerful intersection of aristocrats, businesspeople, and religious leaders who collaborate to monopolize influence. Analysis shows that these actors exploit deep-rooted cultural doctrines not merely as tradition, but as a hegemonic tool to ensure political compliance. Consequently, patron-client relationships are manipulated to transform voting into an act of cultural obedience rather than rational political choice. Findings reveal that feudal power creates a severe democratic deficit, marked by low transparency, marginalization of non-elite voices, and suppression of genuine contestation. Theoretically, this research expands the literature on “elite capture” and neopatrimonialism by showing that cultural legitimacy is a form of political capital as powerful as economic resources in maintaining dynastic control. The study concludes that institutional reform alone is insufficient to advance substantive democracy; true democratization requires deconstructing feudal dependencies that render citizens subjects rather than empowered voters.

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## INTRODUCTION

Many studies on local politics have been conducted by sociologists and social researchers in relation to election contests at the village level. The results of these studies have become theoretical references for academics in the development of science and practical references for political practitioners to maintain their power in their respective contest areas. Various strategies are employed, involving systematic planning, such as mapping political forces to identify the mass base, strategic areas, local issues that are important to political coalition voters, and campaign approaches tailored to the characteristics and needs of voter segments (Mukti et al., 2024).

In certain cases, in the implementation of political contests at the local level, there are political phenomena where there are variables that are very dominant in influencing the struggle for power or perpetuating power for political actors, namely feudal power, which is deeply rooted in the social structure of rural communities (Butt, 2024). The feudal system, which continues to be passed down through lineage and kinship, is structured as a fairly strong political force at the village level (Indrawan et al., 2025). As with the leadership system adopted by the Lio tribe on one of the islands in Flores, which still upholds traditional values and local wisdom, it adheres to a leadership system known as *Mosalaki*, where prominent figures in terms of ancestry, authority, and charisma are the highest holders of power in the social structure (Suswandari & Astuti, 2021).

Feudal power continues to intertwine through various relationships that form kinship lines as a unified social system in rural communities, which are then channelled into political contests (Donner & Goddard, 2023). This is in line with the kinship political contestation in the 2020 Tosora village head election between *appang to wajo-wajo* and *appang to latempure*, where kinship politics had a significant influence, not only as voters, but also as instrumental solidarity in the victory of candidates (success teams) and as an instrument for filling positions in village administration, where elected candidates prioritise their relatives (*appang*) in filling village apparatus positions (Upe et al., 2022).

Utilising kinship networks plays an important role in perpetuating political power at the local level because it becomes social capital for gaining political and electoral support (Acuna et al.; 2025). In addition, kinship networks provide access to resources, a loyal voter base, and social legitimacy in the form of trust among network members. They can even hinder fair political competition and strengthen politics influenced by political elites who tend to pass on their political power to the next generation or those below them (Makulbayeva & Sharipova, 2025). This occurs because of a tendency to maintain power and continue previously initiated programmes (Maharani et al., 2024).

The inheritance of power through local political contests is part of feudal political practices that have been ingrained from generation to generation, becoming a culture that is idolised through the doctrines of the past (Poplawska, 2025). The cult of feudalism is used to shape the image of leaders as holy, wise, and representative of ancestral traditions, so that criticism or opposition is considered taboo and an insult to cultural values (Feldman; 2023). In line with the above description, it was found that the elite played a role in the election of the village head, which was influenced by the royal culture and the community's belief in the culture and structure of society originating from royal traditions during feudalism, believing that the Karaeng was the person who should lead the village (Ulfanisa, 2023). Through this system, power is considered sacred, often legitimised by religion or past beliefs that power is given supernaturally (Adolfsson et al.; 2024). The village community was taught to submit and obey the rulers without question, thereby reinforcing the social hierarchy and strengthening the dominance of the ruling class, slowing down social change and maintaining the stability of the feudal system for centuries (Guanglin, 2023).

The dynamics of political contestation at the local level, controlled by feudal power, continue to be the determining factor in the sustainability of the government system, especially in rural communities (Puansah et al.; 2024). Almost all villages in Indonesia adhere to feudal principles in the implementation of political contestation (Schäfer et al.; 2025). Pude Village, as one of the villages in Bone Regency that is still very much imbued with feudal principles, exhibits this phenomenon in its socio-political life. The political rights of the community are influenced by the hierarchical relationship between the nobility or traditional leaders as patrons of power and the common people

as their subordinates (Biermann, 2025). Power is inherited from generation to generation based on the lineage of the nobility through the contestation of village head elections. There are three factors that influence the perpetuation of the pattern of power inheritance based on lineage, namely: the figure of the noble descendant must be in accordance with the wishes of the community; clientelism between the noble descendants and the parties who help perpetuate their power by mutually expecting benefits; and tribalism, which is always maintained by the community (Sari & Mutmainnah, 2023).

Every implementation of the Pude Village Head election contest still refers to the Village Head Election Law Number 6 of 2014, known as the Village Law, which states that the Village Head Election is a democratic event to elect a new village leader. However, in practice, the democratic system is only technical in nature, serving as an administrative requirement, because the candidates for village head are always dominated by the aristocracy (Yakub et al., 2022). Each candidate who participates in the contest is verified in advance through kinship ties, without emphasizing individual capacities such as educational background and leadership skills. Educational background and leadership capacity are merely administrative requirements and not substantive requirements in the contest to elect the Village Head of Pude. This fact can be seen in the last two decades, which have been dominated by the same lineage. The following is a list of the names of the village heads who have served until now:

**Table 1.** List of Village Heads of Pude

No	Name of Village Head	Year
1	H. Saide	1992–1995
2	A. Idris (acting village head)	1996–1999
3	Drs. A. Saifuddin	2000–2008
4	Ms. A. Nurhasanah (village official)	2009–2010
5	Andi Amir, S.E	2010–2016
6	Patmawati (Acting Village Head)	2016 (May–November)
7	Andi Amir, S.E	2017–2022
8	Andi Amir, BSc	2022-present

Based on the information in the table above, the village heads who have served and are currently serving are from the same family lineage, namely the noble family. Before the democratic system was implemented in Indonesia, the Village Head of Pude was held by the noble family lineage, and even after the democratic system was implemented, the village head remained from the noble family. The kinship relationship between each village head from each period only revolves around the relationship between parents and children and close cousins. Various methods and strategies were carried out by the noble family in the village to maintain power through the village head election contest.

Basically, many generations have the potential and capacity to become village heads, but only get as far as participating as contestants in the elections (Noak, 2024). Every citizen who wants to become a candidate for village head is given the same opportunities and chances as part of the democratic process in the elections. Every candidate who has been declared eligible to participate in the contest continues to strive to gain support from all elements of the local village community. Various political strategies are employed to attract the sympathy and support of the community in order to win the contest. Village head candidates from the aristocracy have many advantages and great potential to win the election due to their large family networks, financial capabilities, and support from various larger structural forces (Thakur & Singh Negi, 2025).

Previous studies have extensively explored the role of kinship networks, clientelism, and cultural legitimacy in local elections, highlighting how traditional elites maintain power through social capital and ancestral authority (Upe et al., 2022; Ulfanisa, 2023). However, the majority of existing literature tends to focus on the strategies of mobilization or the sociological description of traditional leadership, often overlooking the specific paradox of how feudal mechanisms successfully co-opt

modern procedural democracy in Indonesian Law No. 6 of 2014 to the point where development stagnation is normalized by the electorate. Few studies explicitly dissect the intersection where administrative democracy acts merely as a camouflage for the continuation of absolute aristocracy, particularly in the context of Bone Regency where the 'democratic' voters knowingly perpetuate their own subordination. Consequently, this research is urgently necessary to uncover the structural resilience of feudalism that renders democratic institutions powerless, offering a critical analysis of why dynastic control persists despite the availability of open contestation mechanisms."

## METHOD

This research uses a qualitative research method (Moleong, L. J.; 2022) with a case study approach (Yin; 2009) to ensure that researchers can understand the phenomenon in depth in the context of feudal power in the contest for the election of the village head of Pude. Case studies provide holistic, detailed, and contextual insights into the situation, making it easier for researchers to explore complex and contemporary stages, meanings, and dynamics. This research was conducted in 2023 after the 2022 Pude village head election, lasting for six months from May to December 2023. The target of this research was the Pude village community, who were able to provide data or information related to the focus and objectives of the research. The subjects of this research were the Pude village head, nobles, traditional leaders, religious leaders, and community leaders. The research procedure began with the identification of problems, the determination of the focus of the problems and the objectives of the research, data collection, data analysis, and data validation. The instruments used were observation sheets, interview guidelines, recording devices, and the researchers themselves (Y. S. Lincoln, 1985).

Data was collected through direct observation by observing in depth and systematically the socio-cultural characteristics, political participation, political dynamics, and all situations related to the research objectives. Researchers recorded findings using semi-structured instruments, observation guidelines, and supporting documentation. These observations produced contextual, factual, real-time data and minimised informant interpretation bias, making it easier for researchers to classify data (consistency and accuracy). In-depth interviews and systematic document studies were conducted to explore in-depth, contextual, and factual information from informants in accordance with the interview guidelines that had been prepared, while document studies reinforced the written evidence. The collected data were then classified into primary and secondary data, obtained from selected informants using continuous snowball sampling techniques until information saturation was reached for analysis. Data analysis was carried out through the stages of data reduction, data display, and drawing conclusions. In order to obtain data validity, the analysis results were then validated using the triangulation technique (Denzin, 1970). The research data were reviewed from the perspective of (Foucault; 1970) on power relations and (Kurtz; 1989) on dynastic politics.

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

### RESULTS

As mentioned in the research objectives above, the results of an in-depth investigation based on the research procedure are formulated as follows:

#### **Feudal Power Practices in Village Head Elections**

The practice of feudalism in the contest for the position of village head in Pude can be seen from the power relations that are still traditional in nature and deeply rooted in society. Although formally, the election of the village head is carried out democratically, in reality, feudal patterns are very evident, where power continues to be perpetuated through hereditary succession. In this case, the fact

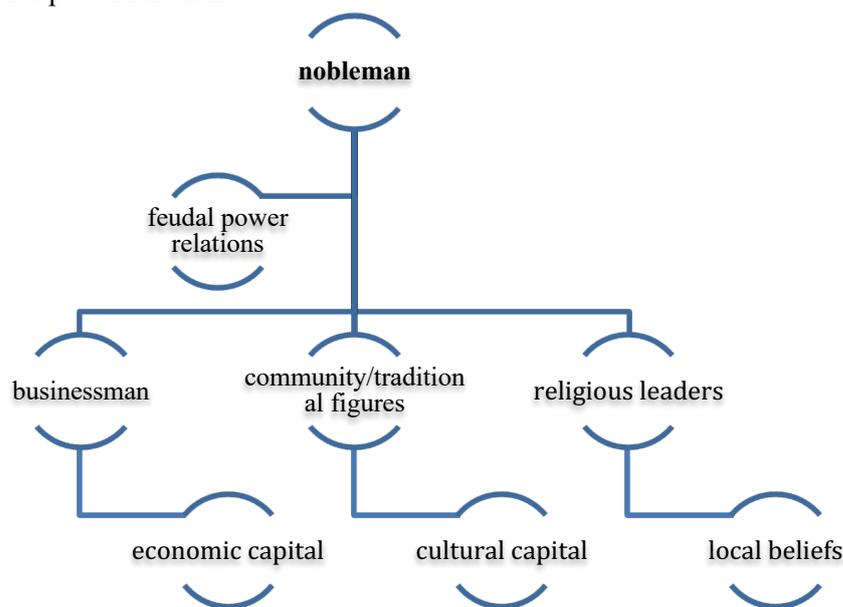
that the position of village head in Pude continues to be held exclusively by members of the aristocracy demonstrates the dominance of the local elite, who have power over resources and social hegemony. The perpetuation of power is not only supported by money or formal positions, but also by symbolic influence, traditional values, and the way of thinking of the community, which has been shaped by a feudal culture. In other words, power that appears to arise from the will of the people is essentially a dialectic of a long process of ideological domination that has taken root in the local culture of the community.

Technically, the practice of feudalism in the election contest in Pude Village places the descendants of nobility, community leaders, or influential families exclusively as elements that can support power. In this context, social relationships are based on personal loyalty rather than based on citizen equality. The Village Head can maintain his power not only through coercion, but also through cultural and moral legitimacy. Community support for village head candidates is generally not based on vision, programmes, or managerial capacity, but rather on genealogical ties (family relationships), social status, and the symbolic influence of large families that have been in power for a long time. The following describes the practices of feudal power in the contest for the position of village head in Pude.

*Local Elite Involvement.*

Local elites in the Pude Village Head election contest always play the most dominant role in influencing and even directing the political dynamics at play. Various elements are included in this local elite, such as aristocratic families, businesspeople, community/traditional leaders, and religious leaders who are dialectically and strongly connected, enabling them to exert a significant influence on the election process. The aristocracy seeks to perpetuate its dominance by promoting a representative to become village head, businesspeople provide material support to village head candidates to finance the political process, community/traditional leaders engage in effective political communication using a cultural approach, and religious leaders instil a sense of local identity in all voters in the village. Each element that is part of this local elite is a relationship that has the power to facilitate the village head candidate's victory in the contest. The following is a chart of feudal power relations in local political contests in Pude Village.

**Figure 1.** Local elite power relations



As illustrated in **Figure 1**, the power structure in Pude Village is not singular but forms an integrated local oligarchy network. At the top, the ‘nobility’ acts as the center of gravity that controls ‘feudal power relations’. This power becomes hegemonic because it is supported by three strategic pillars that supply different types of capital. Businesspeople provide the material basis (economic capital)

to finance political operations; Traditional Leaders reproduce historical narratives to provide cultural legitimacy, while Religious Leaders construct obedience based on local beliefs. The convergence of these three types of capital creates a political fortress that is difficult to penetrate by potential leaders from among ordinary people who do not have access to such capital accumulation.

Each local elite contributes differently to the village head candidate based on their respective capacities. As explained above, local businesspeople contribute in the form of financing and accommodation for the election process, which is the most important aspect of consolidating and mobilizing voters in the village. Consolidation and mobilization in the village head election process require considerable costs because the village community has low political participation awareness. The community members who participated in the consolidation were provided with various forms of assistance, including improvements to several village facilities such as footpaths and sports facilities, basic food supplies, and even money as a form of initial attention from the village head candidates towards the welfare of the community. Economic power in the Pude village head election contest had a very significant influence on political participation because the community could be easily mobilised and controlled. Based on the data obtained, this occurred due to low political education, habits or traditions that always occurred in previous village head elections, weak oversight by election organisers, and the economic limitations of the village community.

The village of Pude still has a strong social structure based on patron-client relationships or hierarchy, namely between the nobility and the common people. Through this hierarchy, the people of Pude Village, who are considered traditional in their thinking, accept the position and power of individuals not because of their rational abilities or the law, but because of inheritance, customs, or social status that has been recognised for generations. The involvement of the local elite in every contest for the election of the Village Head of Pude shows how networks of power, resources, and social hegemony are mobilised to form a considerable political force. Local elites not only provide support to village head candidates but also become actors who determine campaign strategies, resource allocation, and the formation of public opinion through various informal networks. This dynamic is a form of political domination wrapped in the process of village democracy. Local elites who give their full support to candidates from the aristocracy have signalled their intention to win the contest.

### *Cultural Doctrine*

Bone Regency has a complex historical background as *a traditional city*, which is reflected in its regional identity that is deeply rooted in Bugis social and cultural values, norms, and institutions that have been passed down from generation to generation. Technically, culture is highly respected and believed to be the framework of life for the people of Bone, which is governed by a customary system and *pangadereng* philosophy, consisting of five elements: *ade'* (custom), *bicara* (law), *rapang* (precedent), *wari* (social relations), and *sara'* (sharia). These five elements serve as guidelines in social management, conflict resolution, and community decision-making. In the practice of local government, the Bone aristocracy has always been positioned as figures capable of providing guidance, role models, and protection to the community because, in the belief of the Bone community, the aristocracy has various advantages that the general public does not have. Based on data obtained at the research location, some of the advantages of the aristocracy include leadership skills, knowledge, and wealth in the form of land ownership or natural resources. Rooted in the history of the liberation of the Bone people from the shackles and exploitation of the Gowa Kingdom, through the Makassar war of 1666-1669 led by Arung Palakka, this has shaped the community's belief in the leadership abilities of the nobility. The aristocracy had easy access to education, giving them more knowledge than the common people. This was a supporting factor in their ability to understand, manage, and apply social, cultural, political, and traditional knowledge to carry out their leadership roles. This knowledge included traditional literacy, ethics, decision-making strategies, and communication skills to maintain harmony and authority within the community in every social and political task carried out. Furthermore, the wealth of land ownership among the nobility is a material capacity that contributes to economic, political, and social capital in leadership. The nobility's ownership of agricultural rice fields is a means of employing people who do not have jobs, thus creating a reciprocal relationship between the nobility and the general public.

The advantages enjoyed by the aristocracy have become social and symbolic capital that continues to be maintained through cultural doctrines in the form of teachings or value guidelines that are passed down from generation to generation and shape the mindset and behaviour of the community. Cultural doctrines that have taken root and become internalised in rural communities are caused by several factors, namely: a) low levels of education, b) low economic levels, and c) community culture. The three factors above greatly influence the community's trust in the nobility to lead the village. The community's level of education is still relatively low due to a lack of awareness among parents to continue their children's education to university level. Based on the data obtained, the community tends to work after completing their secondary education, which results in a lack of critical awareness of the situation they face. Furthermore, the economic status of the community remains low, as seen from the types of work they do, which are farming and fishing. Some members of the community are also employed by the nobility as farm labourers and crew members on large fishing boats. The community's dependence on the nobility arises from social relationships that have been established for a long time and are deeply rooted in the social structure. Moreover, the nobility often acts as providers of economic assistance, mediators of conflict, or decision-makers on important matters, so the community is always dependent on them, reinforcing the nobility's position as a highly influential group. Furthermore, local cultural principles deify the nobility as charismatic and symbolically authoritative figures and place the nobility's kinship network at the centre of the social structure. Based on the above description, the trust and dependence of the Pude Village community on the nobility is deeply rooted as a cultural doctrine due to historical factors, socio-economic status and local beliefs, which then became a means of instilling hegemony and domination where leadership and domination (especially of the upper class) did not only rely on physical power or coercion, but also through consensus and ideological persuasion. The hegemony and domination of the nobility have transformed into a cultural doctrine because the values, norms, and ways of thinking of the nobility have been internalised by the community as universal truths that must be obeyed without question. When the community believes that the power structure is normal, domination becomes abstract and is no longer considered coercion. Thus, cultural doctrine serves to maintain the stability of power through consent, not only through formal authority or coercive force. In the context of local politics through the election of the Pude Village Head, the community is easily mobilised, conditioned, and directed by feudal power because the aristocracy is considered a role model, a figure to be obeyed and respected. Furthermore, the authority, dignity, and stability of the Pude Village community remain preserved when led by the nobility. The mobilisation of the community by the nobility can be seen in the Figure 2.

**Figure 2.** Mobilisation of the community by the village head candidate



This visual documentation of the field (Figure 1) confirms that feudal hegemony in Pude Village is not merely a theoretical assumption, but a structured and measurable sociological reality. The power structure diagram, which places the nobility at the center of a “spider web” of power, is empirically confirmed through spatial politics in photographs of community meetings, where the physical

segregation between the elite (a combination of traditional, religious, and business leaders) and the passive masses reflects the mechanism of “capital conversion” at work. This visualization proves that procedural democracy has been co-opted by a strategic alliance of three pillars: economic capital (logistics), cultural capital (historical legitimacy), and symbolic capital (religious authority), which effectively transforms democratic socialization forums into stages for the reproduction of patron-client obedience, thereby closing the space for substantive political participation and equality.

### **The Impact of Feudal Power on Local Political Democracy in Pude Village**

In essence, the implementation of democracy in political contests is a process of governance that places the people as the source of sovereignty and the main determinant of political direction. Every citizen has the same rights and opportunities to participate in the decision-making process, either directly or through freely elected representatives, as stated by Lincoln (1863), which is a government of the people, by the people, and for the people. The political democratic system emphasises the importance of *the rule of law* or the supremacy of law, so that every decision and action of the government must be based on fair laws. Thus, political democracy is not merely a mechanism and form of government, but contains a set of values and procedures that guarantee people's involvement, protection of human rights, and a balanced distribution of power in state affairs. In the context of democracy, the Pude Village community, through the election of its village head, has its own characteristics in accordance with the culture that has been established for a long time. The contest for the election of the Pude Village Head was carried out procedurally in accordance with the applicable election law, namely Permendagri No. 112 of 2014, which was adjusted to changes in the applicable laws at the regency/city level.

The culture of Pude Village, which still adheres to a feudal system in its social and cultural life, is integrated with a democratic system in village administration. Patterns of feudalism can be seen through the social structure that forms a differentiated vertical hierarchy between the nobility as the upper strata and the common people as the lower strata. This feudal power is converted into cultural political capital in the contest for the election of the Village Head of Pude, thereby creating power that is inherited from generation to generation based on the lineage of the nobility, as described in the introduction above through Table 1, which lists the names of the Village Heads of Pude.

The practice of dynastic politics and kinship networks has become a strong basis for legitimacy and access to power, so that political hegemony remains within a single family line or certain family networks. The position of Village Head of Pude has always been held by members of the aristocracy, giving them a major influence on the governance of the village. Through in-depth research, data were obtained showing that village officials, in this case, staff, were appointed based on political connections rather than competence. Similarly, the technical management of the Village-Owned Enterprise (BUMDes) was managed by political networks and aristocratic families. Basically, there are many human resources who could be involved in developing and advancing the village, but do not have sufficient access. Various factors limit community access to participate in the village development process, namely: not being of noble descent, not being involved in political networks, and being part of the political opposition. It can be explained that this condition continues to occur as a form of emotional encouragement that influences political actions, commonly referred to as political sentiment. The complexity of feudal power dynamics in the contest for the position of Village Head of Pude has an impact on political democracy, including: (1) Local Elite Domination; The involvement of local elites in every village head election contest is an opportunity to continue to assert their dominance over the direction of the democratic process. (2) Lack of Community Participation: The continuation of feudal power has resulted in a lack of community participation in village development because it has been taken over by the local elite's political network. (3) Lack of Transparency: Feudal power in political democracy results in various political policies lacking transparency because the local elite formulate and make decisions without involving representatives of the Pude village community. (4) Slow Development Process: Feudal power, which stifles critical thinking among the community, results in village heads having little moral responsibility or accountability for the progress of village development.

The impact of feudalism on political democracy in Pude Village shows that the still-strong traditional power structure is a major factor in the weakening of the quality of village governance. Feudalism is

practised not only through economic control, but also through cultural domination and local ideological beliefs, which make the community resigned to inequality. Local elites continue to perpetuate their power through customary legitimacy, status symbols, and control over village resources, making it difficult to realise an ideal and substantive democratic process. Political democracy in Pude Village should be based on social participation, openness, equality, and fairness in decision-making, rather than being dominated by local elites who have greater social, cultural, and economic capital. Another implication that we can see from the above reality is the weakening of the function of public space as an arena for democratic discussion, and the community feeling that they have no influence on village development policies. This condition causes village policies to often be unresponsive to the real needs of residents, resulting in slow and ineffective development. In addition, the lack of transparency can worsen social conditions because the community does not clearly understand the budget allocation process and the implementation of village development projects. Thus, feudal power in the political democracy of Pude village creates an unequal political structure, weakens government transparency, and slows down development. Political democracy in Pude village can only be strengthened if feudal power relations are reduced and replaced with more inclusive, open, and participatory governance.

## DISCUSSION

The practice of feudal power in village head elections demonstrates the dominance of local elites who control economic, social, and symbolic resources. This dominance is not solely exercised through coercive power, but also through social hegemony, namely, the process of forming collective consciousness that makes the values and interests of the dominant class accepted as "common truth" by the wider community (Gramsci & Palan; 1971). Local elites in this context can be understood as *local strongmen*, namely individuals or groups who have significant influence even though they are not at the top of the formal government structure. This influence stems from their control of wealth, intellectual capacity, and religious authority, which enables them to control resources and influence the political decisions of the community. This is in line with (Putnam; 1994) view, which places *strongmen* as key actors in the informal decision-making process within a community. The power relations established by local elites are networked and not rigidly hierarchical. Each element of the elite is connected in a power relationship that serves to facilitate certain village head candidates in winning political contests. (Foucault; 1970) asserts that power is not centralised but rather dispersed in social networks and closely intertwined with the production of knowledge. Power is productive, emerging from below through processes of interaction, normalisation, and regulation, and forming socially accepted truths. In addition, economic power plays an important role in village head elections because it can mobilise and control community political participation. McClosky (1972), in (Damsar; 2010), explains that political participation is a voluntary activity of citizens in electing rulers and engaging, directly or indirectly, in the formation of public policy. In this context, patron-client relationships become the main mechanism of political mobilisation rooted in traditional power systems, where legitimacy is obtained through customs and trust in the old order (Weber, 1947).

The cultural doctrine that developed within society was deeply rooted in local history, particularly the liberation of the Bone people from the domination of the Gowa Kingdom through the Makassar War (1666–1669) led by Arung Palakka. This history shaped a collective belief in the leadership abilities of the nobility, as stated by (Setiawan; 2019). The nobility's ownership of agricultural land served as both an economic and social instrument to create dependence among the unemployed members of society. This condition builds a reciprocal patron-client relationship, in which patrons with higher socioeconomic status provide protection and access to resources, while clients provide loyalty and political support (Scott, 1972). The structural advantages possessed by the nobility then accumulate into social and symbolic capital that continues to be reproduced through cultural doctrines. These doctrines are manifested in teachings, values, and guidelines for life that are passed down from generation to generation, thereby shaping the mindset and behaviour of the community.

This process, as stated by (Koentjaraningrat; 2015), strengthens the legitimacy of feudal power in local social and political life.

Conceptually, democracy as described by (Lincoln; 1863) is defined as *government of the people, by the people, and for the people*. This concept places the people as the main subject in the political process, both in decision-making and in the oversight of power. In modern political democracy, this principle is reinforced by the rule of law, which affirms that all government actions and policies must be based on fair and rational laws that apply equally to all citizens. Thus, democracy is not only understood as an electoral mechanism but also as a value system that guarantees justice, participation, and accountability of power. However, in practice, democracy often faces traditional feudal socio-political structures. (Weber; 2019) explains that in a patrimonial-feudal system, power is in the hands of the aristocracy or traditional elite who occupy the upper social strata. This power does not derive from rational-legal law, but from traditional legitimacy, personal loyalty, and patron-client relationships. The lower strata of society are in a subordinate position, dependent on the protection and generosity of the elite, resulting in asymmetrical and personalistic power relations. This condition contradicts the principles of democracy, which demand equality for all citizens before the law and in politics.

Furthermore, the inheritance of power based on lineage is a characteristic of dynastic politics or *political families* (Jerphagnon & Kurtz; 1970) defines this phenomenon as the involvement of at least two family members in the same political arena and holding public office. Dynastic politics implies the concentration of power, the practice of nepotism, and limited political participation for the wider community. Power is no longer openly contested based on competence and leadership capacity, but is reproduced within certain family circles. In this context, (Budiardjo; 2008) refers to this phenomenon as a form of patrimonial oligarchy, which has the following main characteristics: (a) power is concentrated in one family or close relatives, (b) the selection process for leaders is based on blood relations, not ability, (c) there is a high potential for abuse of power due to weak public control, and (d) there is a tendency for the political system to become undemocratic. Patrimonial oligarchy narrows citizens' access to politics and hinders the healthy circulation of elites in a democracy. The continuity of this feudal and dynastic power structure is inseparable from the psychological and cultural factors of society. (Lasswell; 1930) explains that political actions are often influenced by emotional impulses or *political sentiment*, such as excessive respect for elite figures, fear of losing protection, or traditional loyalty. These political sentiments make the community inclined to accept and reproduce the dominance of the feudal elite, even though this is normatively contrary to the principles of democracy.

In the context of the contest for the position of Village Head of Pude, the complexity of these feudal power relations had a direct impact on the quality of political democracy in the village. Although the election was carried out procedurally, in substantive terms, community participation was still superficial. This is in line with (Arnstein; 2020) perspective on *the ladder of citizen participation*, where the position of the Pude Village community is at the level of *tokenism*. At this level, the community is included in formal forums but has no real control over decision-making. Residents' aspirations are heard but do not determine the direction of policy. As a result, village policies tend to be unresponsive to the real needs of the community. The development process is slow and ineffective because it is more oriented towards the interests of the ruling elite than collective welfare. This condition ultimately reduces community awareness and social participation (Rukminto & Adi, 2012), weakens the transparency and accountability of village administration, and hinders the realisation of substantive political democracy. Thus, feudal power in the political democracy of Pude Village creates an unequal political structure, reinforces the dominance of the traditional elite, and distances democratic practices from their fundamental values. Democracy, which should be a means of emancipation for the people, is reduced to an instrument of legitimising inherited feudal power

## CONCLUSION

The practice of feudal power in the contest for the position of Village Head of Pude is demonstrated in power relations based on traditional principles that are strongly entrenched in society through two

things, namely: 1) The involvement of local elites as the most dominant actors influencing and even regulating the direction of ongoing political dynamics. These local elites consist of aristocrats, businesspeople, community/traditional leaders, and religious leaders, each of whom is connected through dialectical relationships. 2) Cultural doctrines that were born through a long historical process and then internalised into the socio-cultural structure of the Pude village community. The community believes that the village has honour and authority if it is led by nobility, who have advantages (knowledge, wealth, and social capital) over ordinary people, so they are figures who must be obeyed, respected, and not opposed. In addition, they can provide protection to the community so that the stability of the village is maintained.

The impact of feudalism on political democracy in Pude Village is as follows: 1) The dominance of the local elite in every village head election contest is an opportunity to continue to assert their dominance over the democratic process. 2) Lack of social participation of the community in village development because it has been taken over by the local elite's political network. 3) Lack of transparency through community involvement in formulating and making political decisions. 4) The slow development process is due to the critical thinking of the community being shackled and silenced by the local elite, resulting in the village head not having a significant moral burden and responsibility for the progress of village development. Furthermore, the writing team will integrate the findings of this article into the material for the political sociology course as a reference for learning in accordance with the expertise and skills of the writing team.

The power struggle in Pude Village illustrates the continuing relevance of Foucault's and Kurtz theory on power relations, in which legitimacy does not derive from rational legal codes, but from the sanctity of long-standing rules and customs. From a political sociology perspective, this case highlights the phenomenon of "elite hostage-taking" of local democratic institutions; when local elites (aristocrats and businesspeople) dominate the political sphere, they bridge the gap between social status and political office, creating a hybrid regime in which modern elections only serve to reinforce the pre-existing feudal hierarchy.

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