

THE BARGAINING POWER OF THE MAYBRAT AND BUGIS- MAKASSAR ETHNIC GROUPS IN THE LOCAL POLITICAL DYNAMICS OF SORONG CITY

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Abstract

This study explains how the bargaining power of both groups is constituted within the local political dynamics of Sorong City. It employs a qualitative approach with an interpretative phenomenological design, drawing on in-depth interviews, observation, and document analysis. The analysis combines Bourdieu's framework of capital and capital conversion with Emerson's theory of power-dependence relations. Three findings emerge. First, the bargaining power of both groups is not formed on the eve of electoral contestation but results from layered, intergenerational accumulation whose earliest stages occur largely outside the political arena. Second, the two groups follow distinct conversion pathways: the Maybrat move from a competitive habitus and a tradition of out-migration toward institutionalised cultural capital through rotating collective financing of higher education, then into the bureaucracy, reinforced by customary authority as symbolic capital; the Bugis-Makassar move from migration and trade toward economic capital, institutionalised through the South Sulawesi Family Association (KKSS) as an ethnicity-based organisation. Third, the two positions are asymmetrically interdependent: the normative closure of the top executive seat to indigenous Papuans prevents the direct conversion of migrant economic capital into that office, so conversion takes indirect forms through the deputy seat, candidate financing, and brokerage. The study contributes to the ethnic politics literature by showing that ethnic bargaining power is determined more by control over the supply of eligible candidates and over campaign financing than by demographic advantage alone.

Keywords: *bargaining power; ethnic politics; Maybrat; Bugis_Makassar; local_election*



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1. Introduction

Regional head elections are an important arena to read the quality of democracy at the local level. It is not just a procedure for changing leadership, but also a meeting room for various interests that have been working separately in the social, economic, and cultural spheres. In a multiethnic society, the process of selecting leaders becomes increasingly complex because ethnic identities interact with political interests, social networks, economic resources, and elite strategies simultaneously. Recent studies show that ethnicity in local politics is not primordial and static. As Barth (1969) emphasized, ethnic boundaries are

relational and maintained through interaction, not through fixed cultural content. Consequently, ethnicity can be mobilized as a resource to build support, organize voters, form coalitions, and influence the outcome of contestation. Warganegara and Waley (2024) show that *ethnicity and religion-based organizations* (ERBOs) still play an important role in Indonesia's local politics through candidate selection, campaigning, voter mobilization, and organizing electoral support. These findings are a correction to the claim that ethnicity has lost relevance in post-decentralization Indonesian politics (compare Aspinall, 2011; Aspinall & Berenschot, 2019).

Sorong City has a multiethnic social structure, where the interaction between indigenous Papuans and various immigrant groups has formed a complex social configuration. In this configuration, ethnicity is not only related to cultural identity, but also related to kinship networks, social organizations, economic activities, access to government institutions, and political relations. So that in the local political dynamics in Sorong City, it can be understood as an arena where various groups accumulate, exchange and use resources to obtain political representation and influence.

The 2024 Sorong City regional head election was attended by four candidate pairs, including; the Petronela Kambuaya-Hermanto Suaib (PAHAM) pair, the Septinus lobat-Anshar Karim pair (LOSARI), the Aguste Sagrim-Syaiful Maliki Arief (GASFUL) pair, and the Abner Reinal Jitmau-Muhammad Said (ASA) pair. The contest was won by the Septinus Lobat-Anshar Karim pair with 50,255 votes or 40.89 percent of the total valid votes, as determined by the Sorong City General Election Commission (Sorong City KPU Decision Number 249 of 2024; followed up through the Sorong City KPU Decision Number 6 of 2025 after the Constitutional Court Decision Number 264/PHPU. WAKO-XXIII/2025). The inauguration of the selected pair will be held on February 20, 2025. (Wikipedia, Free Encyclopedia, n.d.2024). Of these four candidate pairs, many are dominated by the Maybrat and Bugis-Makassar ethnicities. The position of the Maybrat ethnicity as one of the indigenous Papuan community groups and the Bugis-Makassar ethnic group as an immigrant community group that has developed in the social and economic life of Sorong City. The two groups have relatively different bases of strength. The strength of the Maybrat ethnicity can be attributed to identity as an indigenous Papuan people, kinship and clan networks, customary relationships, political experience, and the existence of elites in the government and political parties. Meanwhile, Bugis-Makassar has a social and economic network that develops through trade activities, entrepreneurship, community organizations, kinship relations and inter-group networks.

The difference in the resource base makes the relationship between Maybrat and Bugis-Makassar interesting to study. In political studies, tidal groups always need the same resources. Groups that have political and symbolic legitimacy may need social and economic networks owned by other groups. On the other hand, groups that have economic capital and social networks may need political access and representation owned by other groups' elites. This condition can be understood through the concept of developed capital, namely economic, social, cultural and symbolic capital that can be converted into valuable resources in a certain arena (Bourdieu, 1986).

2. Method

This study uses a qualitative approach with a type of interpretive phenomenology aimed at understanding the experiences and meanings of political actors and community leaders towards the process of forming the power of the Maybrat ethnic and Bugis-Makassar

ethnic bargaining positions in the dynamics of the Sorong City Regional Head Election. Personal experiences are studied in depth and interpretively because humans are seen as subjects who actively give meaning to their social experiences (J.A. Smith, P. Flower and M. Larkin, 2009). This research is located in Sorong City, Southwest Papua Province. Research data were obtained through in-depth interviews, observations and literature review. Informants were selected purposively based on involvement or direct knowledge of local political dynamics in Sorong City, then it could be developed through snowball techniques. The interviews were directed at the informants' concrete experiences about how the bargaining position process was formed, building networks, building coalitions, communication and negotiations. Data analysis is carried out interpretively by paying close attention to the experiences of each informant, then identifying themes that have similarities and differences between informants. The phenomenological approach emphasizes an in-depth examination of the experiences of each case before the author moves towards a more general pattern or theme. This stage allows the author to maintain a wealth of individual experiences while finding socio-political patterns that explain the process of forming the bargaining positions of the two ethnic groups.

3. Results and Discussion

This section presents the findings of the field regarding the process of forming the strength of the bargaining position of the Maybrat ethnic and the Bugis-Makassar ethnic in the local political dynamics of Sorong City. The results of the study show that the bargaining position of the Maybrat ethnic and the Bugis-Makassar ethnic group is not formed suddenly ahead of the electoral contest, but is the result of layered accumulation that takes place across generations.

a. Maybrat Ethnic Bargaining Position Strength Base

The strong bargaining position of the Maybrat ethnic in the local politics of Sorong City is basically an anomaly that demands explanation. Traditionally, Sorong City is not the customary territory of the Maybrat people, but the territory of the Moi people. Demographically, the number of Maybrat voters in this city is also not the largest, even far inferior to the immigrant group concentrated in the city's economic centers. However, from one election cycle to the next, this group is the most consistent in supplying figures at the same time in the contest. The question that needs to be answered is not just how big their bargaining position is, but where the bargaining position comes from when the two most prevalent sources of legitimacy, namely ownership of customary territory and the superiority of the number of voters, are not possessed. This anomaly is also an empirical critique of the dominant demographic explanation in the study of ethnic politics, and supports the argument of Chandra (2004) that what determines the success of ethnic mobilization is the availability of qualified elites within the group, not the size of the group itself.

The results of interviews with informants show that Maybrat's ethnic bargaining position was not formed suddenly before the electoral contest, but was the result of a multi-layered accumulation that took place across generations, where each layer became the basis for the next layer. Analytically, most of the initial stages were not at all in the political arena. It started from the domestic space, namely on the rules of competing and working in turns, then moved to the education space through the financing of education that was borne together, and only then entered the bureaucracy and the electoral arena.

This is in line with the capital conversion framework (Bourdieu, 1986) used in this study. Each inter-layered transfer is basically a conversion stage, namely the transfer of one form of capital into another form of capital that is of value in the next arena. These multi-layered stages will be described.

1. Competitive Ethos as Cultural Capital

Competitive orientation or competitiveness as a basic value that shapes the collective behavior of the Maybrat people, both in the social and political spheres. This does not start from region and lineage, but from two habits that are inherent in them, namely migrating and liking to compete. In the framework of Bourdieu (1990), this kind of thing can be read as habitus, which is a scheme of perception and action formed through social habituation and work without having to be recalculated every time. Habitus does not determine actions mechanically, but directs what feels reasonable, urgent, and worth fighting for. In this competitive ethos, what feels urgent is to equal or surpass the achievements of others and it is expressed not as a personal ambition but as a general necessity. The two characteristics conveyed by the informant can be a unit, the habit of migrating provides an arena, while the habit of competing provides encouragement. Competence requires a wider space than the hometown to be able to produce measurable achievements, while overseas without the encouragement of competition will only result in the spread of the population without accumulation. The combination of these two results in why the presence of the Maybrat people in Sorong City and in various other regions in the Land of Papua does not stop as a migration phenomenon, but continues to be a mastery of position. If analysed in a bargaining position, this competitive ethos is important because it works on the supply side. It produces the resources of figures who are formally qualified to advance, and it is that resource that makes the Maybrat group always have a name to offer at every moment of the regional head election. In Emerson (1962) terms, this surplus decreases Maybrat's dependence on other groups while increasing the dependence of other parties on Maybrat, because affirmatively qualified figures are a scarce resource in this arena.

2. Collective Education Financing as a Capital Conversion Mechanism

The competitive ethos that has been described above will not produce educated figures or figures without a financing mechanism that supports it. The results of an interview with one of the informants of traditional leaders, Mr. Buce Ijie, said that there is a practice of financing education collectively and rotating between families.

"I have a college child. As long as my child is in college, if there is a family there

If he has a child who has not yet gone to college, he participates with me — we will pay for my child to finish first. Later after his turn comes, I will participate again to finance his child." (interview with Mr. Buce Ijie, September 08, 2026).

This practice is a tangible form of conversion of social capital into cultural capital in the sense of Bourdieu (1986), namely a network of kinship capitalized to produce formal documents and formal qualifications. What is theoretically interesting is that this rotating mechanism also solves the problem of collective action that is prevalent in preventing long-term investment in groups with limited economic capital. The

rotating nature creates deferred and collectible mutual obligations, resulting in what Coleman (1988) calls obligations and expectations that function as a form of social capital, with a high level of trust as a prerequisite. The informant himself views this practice as a continuation of the pattern of mutual cooperation in traditional production work, so that in the perpetrator's consciousness the practice is not perceived as a political investment. This is precisely where the effectiveness lies: conversion that is not recognized as conversion does not generate resistance, and this is precisely the mechanism of misrecognition that Bourdieu (1986) describes as a condition for the functioning of symbolic capital.

3. Customary Authority as Symbolic Capital

The next process is customary legitimacy, namely one of the informants as the leader of a cross-tribal institution that oversees the indigenous Papuan chiefs in Sorong City and partners with the provincial government and elements of Forkopimda in matters of public security and order. In the context of the Regional Elections, this institution becomes the entrance to legitimacy for candidates through the provision of public recommendations and declarations. For example, with a declaration that aims to inform the media and the public that the person they support is ready to run as Mayor or Regent. So that with the declaration from the leader of the institution who gave the recommendation, the community will also follow.

The value of customary recommendations therefore lies in two things. First, symbolic recognition of the candidate's eligibility as a representation of indigenous Papuans — this is symbolic capital in Bourdieu's (1991) sense, that is, capital that has been recognized and recognized as legitimate so that it appears as authority, not as pressure. Second, the efficiency of the reach of political communication, because a single act of declaration can reach many tribal communities at once. In the framework of Citizen and Waley (2024), this cross-tribal customary institution functions precisely as an ethnicity-based organization that works at the stage of candidate selection and mobilization of support, even though it is formally in the socio-cultural realm and not a political organization.

It should be noted that the effectiveness of customary recommendations is conditional. It works as a marker of eligibility, not as a guarantee of victory, and its value is diminished when customary institutions are divided or if recommendations are given to more than one candidate. In Bourdieu's language, symbolic capital can be inflated if it is issued too often or by too many parties.

4. Affirmation of Special Autonomy as a Structural Locking

All the above accumulations are strengthened through the framework of special autonomy in the Land of Papua. However, at this point, normative prudence is needed, because there is an important difference between the political norms that apply in the field and the legal provisions that apply formally. Legally, the obligations of indigenous Papuans as a condition for candidacy only apply to the positions of governor and deputy governor, as stipulated in Article 12 letter a of Law Number 21 of 2001 concerning Special Autonomy for the Province of Papua. Law Number 2 of 2021 concerning the Second Amendment to the law does not extend this obligation to the positions of regent/deputy regent and mayor/deputy mayor. The absence of this specificity has been tested at the Constitutional Court by the applicant from among the traditional leaders of Sorong City, and through Decision Number 93/PUU-XXII/2024 pronounced on August 20, 2024, the Court declared the

provision constitutional. Nevertheless, the special autonomy framework still creates a strong normative lock-in at the district/city level through three channels. *First*, Article 28 paragraph (3) of the Special Autonomy Law stipulates that political recruitment by political parties in provinces and districts/cities in the Papua region is carried out by prioritizing indigenous Papuans. *Second*, the Explanation of Article 20 paragraph (1) letter e of Law Number 2 of 2021 places the consideration of the Papuan People's Assembly to the Regency/City People's Representative Council in terms of determining candidates for regents/deputy regents and mayors/deputy mayors. *Third*, and most decisive in practice, there is an established local political norm that the seat of regional head is the right of indigenous Papuans, a norm that is enforced not by legal sanctions, but by the cost of legitimacy that must be borne by anyone who violates it.

These findings actually strengthen, rather than weaken, the argument of this article. If the closure of the seat of regional heads is fully guaranteed by law, then the symbolic capital of customary capital will not be very valuable, because the candidate's eligibility is sufficiently proven through administrative verification by the election organizer. On the contrary, because the closure rests on social norms and not on binding legal norms, recognition of the status of authenticity and of worthiness as a representation of indigenous Papuans must be socially produced in every election cycle. This is where customary institutions derive their economic function as issuers of legitimacy, and this is where symbolic capital becomes a scarce and needed resource.

Thus, the seat of the candidate for regional head in Sorong City functions as a normatively closed market, although it is legally open. Because the Maybrat ethnic group has a reserve of figures who have met the prerequisites for education, bureaucratic experience, and financing networks, this group occupies a position as a supplier of candidates, even though Sorong City is traditionally the territory of the Moi people. This is where the Maybrat ethnic bargaining position lies: not in the number of voters, but in the availability of figures who are both affirmative and resource-ready.

b. Strength Base of the Bugis-Makassar Ethnic Bargaining Position

As with the Maybrat ethnicity, the strength of the Bugis-Makassar ethnic bargaining position was also formed through a process of accumulation that took place across generations, albeit through different paths, namely migration, trade and institutionalization of kinship organizations.

1. Association as a Container for Accumulation and Filter Figures

Unlike the Maybrat group which distributes bargaining positions through customary institutions, the Bugis-Makassar group in Sorong City distributes through a modern kinship organization, namely the South Sulawesi Family Harmony or abbreviated as KKSS. This association organization was founded by a number of nomadic figures and early settlers was designed as an association that oversees residents from South Sulawesi from the Bugis, Makassar, Mandar and Toraja families. This organization has a tiered management from the central level, provincial areas, to district and city areas. So that in every region of the region, including Sorong City, there is a management structure that becomes a meeting point for residents.

KKSS is relevant to explain the formation of the Bugis-Makassar bargaining position that is characterized. First, KKSS membership is not only determined by birth,

but also by ancestral origins, marital ties, experience of living in South Sulawesi, and appreciation of South Sulawesi cultural values. This inclusive membership criterion is theoretically important because it shows ethnic boundaries that are relational and negotiable, as stated by Barth (1969). Second, the internal structure based on the region of origin. In the KKSS, there are kinship organizations formed according to the district and city of origin in South Sulawesi, which function as the pillar of the parent organization. Third, the normative position that declares itself not affiliated with any political party. With the membership of the KKSS, it is not only a forum for friendship, but also as a gathering place for various types of capital. This organization has another function, namely to be a space where capital that was originally separate is met and can borrow value from each other because of the membership of KKSS with diverse backgrounds.

Another role, which is most related to the bargaining position, is the figure screener. Ahead of the Regional Elections, the seekers of candidate pairs come to the association with questions about who is the best figure owned by the group, and from that process the name is submitted. Requests come from outside the group, so KKSS does not need to offer itself, it is enough to provide a name when asked. The position as the requested party, not the requesting party, is the most tangible form of the bargaining position. The analysis quoted LIPI researcher Muridan S. Widjojo said that in various matters, the role of the KKSS is very vital, especially to bridge the interests between businessmen and local bureaucrats. But the perception is different from the other side: for the indigenous Papuans, the presence of the KKSS is seen as a corporate institution close to the military and the government. The same assessment adds that although the number of Javanese in Papua is more dominant, in terms of bargaining power, South Sulawesi people through KKSS are far superior (Adya, 2014).

2. Economic Capital

The economic capital of Bugis-Makassar in Sorong City cannot be directly converted into a top position, because the political norms of indigenous Papuans and the special autonomy framework limit it. Consequently, conversion tends to take an indirect form through candidate financing, deputy positions, legislative seats or the role of a vote broker. This capital conversion can be seen in the results of the 2024 Sorong City Regional Elections, the elected Deputy Mayor of Sorong Anshar Karim has his professional footprints before the Regional Elections as the Treasurer of the Sorong DPC Hiswan oil and gas, namely the Association of Fuel and LPG distribution entrepreneurs. In addition, a study of stereotypes in Sorong City found a view that continues to position immigrants as "immigrants" forever. This economic capital inequality often fuels campaign issues and it means that economic capital can become a symbolic liability, not just an asset (Fachrul Najamudin, 2026) .

4. Conclusion

This study explains the process of forming the power of the Maybrat ethnic and Bugis-Makassar ethnic bargaining positions in the local political dynamics of Sorong City and produces three conclusions. *First*, the bargaining positions of the two groups were not formed before the electoral contest, but were the result of layered accumulation across generations, most of which initially took place outside the political arena. In the Maybrat

ethnicity, accumulation began from competitive habitus and migratory traditions, continued to the financing of rotating collective education that converts social capital into institutional cultural capital, then to the mastery of bureaucratic positions, and obtaining ratification through customary authorities as symbolic capital. In the Bugis-Makassar ethnicity, accumulation begins with migration and trade that produces economic capital, then is institutionalized through KKSS which functions as a forum for collecting capital as well as filtering figures.

Second, the bargaining position is not determined by demographic advantage. The Maybrat ethnic group is not the owner of the customary area of Sorong City and is not the largest group of voters, but occupies the position as the most consistent supplier of candidates because they control the rarest resources in this arena, namely figures who simultaneously meet the requirements for authenticity, qualifications, and network. On the other hand, the Bugis-Makassar ethnic group has a real economic advantage but cannot convert it directly into a top position. This finding strengthens the argument that what determines ethnic politics is the structure of resource scarcity and the intermodal conversion rate, not the size of the group. *Third*, the two bargaining positions are asymmetrically interdependent. The closure of regional head seats for indigenous Papuans, which in practice is enforced by local political norms and political recruitment priorities within the framework of special autonomy, and not by legal obligations at the district/city level, makes immigrant groups categorically dependent on indigenous Papuan figures, while the dependence is otherwise gradual. This asymmetry is what results in a uniform pattern of candidate pairs in the 2024 Sorong Mayoral Election.

Theoretically, this study demonstrates the benefits of combining Bourdieu's capital and capital conversion framework with Emerson's theory of power-dependency relations to analyze ethnic politics at the local level. The first framework explains the origins and trajectories of resources, while the second framework explains why the control of certain resources generates pressure on others. Practically, these findings suggest that affirmative policies that only target the control of office without touching the financing mechanism of contestation risk perpetuating an unequal division of roles, i.e. the original group controls formal positions while the immigrant group controls the resources that determine who can run for office.

This study has limitations. The scope is limited to one city and one election cycle, so generalizations to other regions in the Land of Papua need to be done carefully. Data on the composition of structural positions and on contestation financing patterns also rely on informant information and have not been verified through complete administrative data. Further research is recommended to examine the framework developed here in other districts/cities in Southwest Papua, as well as explore in more detail the relationship between contestation financing and post-election position allocation.

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