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# THE ROLE OF PUNGGAWA IN INFLUENCING FISHERMEN'S POLITICAL AFFILIATION: A SOCIO- POLITICAL STUDY IN POLEWALI MANDAR, INDONESIA

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**Abstract:**

This study analyses the pattern of working relationships between punggawa and sawi in Pambusuang Village, Polewali Mandar, which reveals a close relationship between economic dependence and political loyalty in the context of local politics. The purpose of this study is to explore the role of punggawa as micro-elites in controlling the fishing economy and mobilising political votes in regional head elections. This study uses a qualitative approach with a case study design, involving in-depth interviews with 13 informants consisting of punggawa, sawi, and local political actors using grounded theory data analysis techniques. The main findings of this study show that punggawa not only play a role as controllers of capital and distribution of catches, but also as informal political agents who direct fishermen's votes through socio-economic assistance and built loyalty. Fishermen's economic dependence on punggawa leads to clientelistic politics, where political decisions are influenced by patron-client relationships, not just individual preferences. The significance of these findings lies in the expansion of patron-client theory, which shows the role of micro-elites in vote mobilisation at the local level, as well as changes in the dynamics of political power in fishing communities. These findings are useful for enriching our understanding of clientelistic politics in Indonesia and can be used as a reference for improving socio-economic policies that are more inclusive and fair for coastal communities.

**Keywords:** Role of Punggawa; Sawi; Fishermen; Patron-Client; Politics

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## I. INTRODUCTION

Polewali Mandar in West Sulawesi is a fishing community centre with a distinctive social structure [1], [2], where the relationship between punggawa (capital/boat owners) and sawi (fishing labourers) forms a strong patron-client system. Approximately 5,013 people live in coastal areas and small islands in this region, relying on the traditional fishing sector as their main source of livelihood. However, behind these economic activities lie complex power relations, in which punggawa not only play a role as economic controllers, but also become strategic actors in the local political landscape. In the 2024 Regional Head Elections (Pilkada), these relations show how the political affiliations of the fishing community are significantly shaped by the capital and symbolic authority possessed by punggawa. As micro-elites, the punggawa have a strategic position in mobilising political support, placing them within the spectrum of local elitism as described by Syamsuddin, who states that elites are the top actors who influence the course of the political process. This condition is reinforced by the reality of structural poverty faced by fishing communities.

West Sulawesi ranks 9th among the poorest provinces in Indonesia, with a poverty rate of 11.49%[3]. Polewali Mandar is the district with the highest rate in the province, at 15.68%. Social inequality and limited access to resources make sawi economically and socially dependent on punggawa, who provide capital for fishing, daily necessities, and informal loans (panjar) without interest. This dependence creates an exploitative relationship that is often perpetuated through kinship ties and local morality. Income fluctuations due to the risky western monsoon season make fishermen even more vulnerable, strengthening the dominance of the punggawa in all aspects of their lives, including in shaping political preferences. In this system, the sawi have almost lost their political agency because political affiliation decisions are often collective and controlled by patrons (punggawa), who also have close ties to the formal elite and political parties.

This phenomenon is evident in the relational structure of Pambusuang Village, Balanipa Subdistrict, where the punggawa have complete control over the means of production and distribution of marine products. In this hierarchical system, the punggawa control most of the surplus value of marine catches, while the sawi receive a share that is highly dependent on the mercy and unilateral policies of their superiors. Structural and emotional ties make the process of migrating patronage affiliations nearly impossible, even when economic

returns are uneven. In the context of electoral politics, this relationship becomes an effective channel for the collective mobilisation of fishermen's votes by the local political elite, through an unwritten social contract that combines economic, social and political loyalties. Thus, the role of the punggawa in local elections is not only as an intermediary, but also as a guardian of electoral interests, making them a key instrument in the clientelistic strategies that have developed in coastal areas.

A study of the relationship between punggawa and sawi in fishing communities shows that the patron-client system remains the dominant framework for explaining the social, economic and political dynamics of coastal communities in Indonesia, with variations influenced by geographical context and electoral intensity. The study [4] emphasises the importance of the cultural dimension in maintaining the patronage structure through the education of life values in Bugis migrant fishing families, with differences in participatory patterns in punggawa families and repressive patterns in sawi families. Meanwhile, [5] focuses on the economic dimension of patron-client relationships, showing how the dominance of capital by punggawa encourages structural dependence and hinders sawi's access to formal finance, with solutions offered in the form of strengthening fishermen's cooperative institutions and financial technology. Other studies, such as those by [6] in Senegal and [7] in Indonesia, add an electoral political dimension, where patron-client relationships turn into clientelism strategies used for vote mobilisation in highly competitive electoral conditions, causing political elites to utilise local patrons such as punggawa as intermediaries for the distribution of patronage in order to secure collective votes.

The studies [8] and [9] reinforce these findings by emphasising how clientelism in fishing communities is not only traditional in nature but has also been transformed through the role of state actors and integration into capitalist urban markets. Another study,[10] , shows the complexity of the punggawa-sawi relationship, which involves economic, social and political dimensions, where resource inequality is the main instrument for maintaining loyalty and control. Collectively, these studies map out that the main variables at stake in patron-client relations in fishing communities include access to economic resources, socio-cultural education, and political affiliation. with research designs dominated by qualitative-descriptive approaches and case studies, which reveal the structural reproductive power of patronage relations and the challenges in transforming them into a more equitable and inclusive model of relations.

There are no studies that integrate patron-client theory with the concept of micro-elites in explaining the position of punggawa as informal political agents who actively influence elections. Most studies are still limited to describing punggawa as providers of capital and economic controllers. Not much has been analysed about their role as micro elites in local electoral democracy contests, even though this is relevant to broadening the reading of clientelism models in local democracy in Indonesia. This study offers a new conceptual approach by integrating Gaetano Mosca's Elite Theory and James C. Scott's Patron-Client Theory to understand the role of punggawa as informal political actors in the fishing community in Polewali Mandar. Mosca states that in every society there is a minority class that organises and regulates power as an elite, while the majority of society is subject to that authority. In this context, punggawa can be positioned as a micro-elite, not only because of their ownership of the means of production (boats, capital, and distribution networks), but also because of their power to regulate the mindset, political preferences, and electoral affiliations of the fishing community. On the other hand, Scott's patron-client theory highlights a hierarchical but personal reciprocal relationship, in which patrons provide access to resources in exchange for political loyalty. This relationship is reflected in the punggawa-sawi system, which is not only based on economic aspects but also involves social and moral, even spiritual, ties.

The purpose of this study is to analyse in depth how punggawa act as micro-elites in influencing the political affiliations and behaviour of the fishing community in Polewali Mandar through the integration of Gaetano Mosca's Elite Theory and James C. Scott's Patron-Client Theory. This study argues that the position of punggawa in the socio-economic structure of coastal communities not only makes them providers of capital and controllers of the means of production, but also informal political agents with the strategic capacity to direct electoral preferences based on social loyalty, economic dependence, and moral-cultural relations. By utilising their position as a minority elite that organises and distributes resources, punggawa are able to consolidate the political support of fishermen through patronage mechanisms that are personal, hierarchical, and repetitive in nature. Therefore, this study aims to show that clientelism practices in fishing communities are not only a reproduction of economic relations, but also a form of structured political control, thereby enriching our understanding of the dynamics of local democracy, maritime patronage, and the reproduction of informal power in the Indonesian coastal context.

## II. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

### 3.1 Type and Approach of Research

This study uses a qualitative approach with a case study design to explore [11], [12] in depth the role of punggawa as informal political agents who influence the political affiliations and choices of the fishing community in Polewali Mandar, West Sulawesi. This type of research was chosen to understand the dynamics of patron-client relations in a specific socio-political context, where punggawa not only act as providers of economic capital but also as political connectors who shape the political orientation of fishermen

in local election contests. The main focus of this study is to explore how the punggawa-sawi system shapes dependency relationships and forms patterns of vote mobilisation in the 2024 regional elections.

### 3.2 Unit of Analysis

The unit of analysis in this study is individuals who play key roles in the patron-client relationship structure, including land stewards, sea stewards, sawi, and local political actors, such as members of the Polewali Mandar Regional Representative Council and village officials. The selection of this unit of analysis is based on their direct involvement in economic, social, and political practices that influence the relationship between patrons and clients, as well as political decisions made by fishing communities.

### 3.3 Data Sources and Collection Techniques

Data collection techniques in this study involved participatory observation and in-depth interviews [13], [14]. Participatory observation was conducted to understand the social interactions between punggawa and sawi, as well as the socio-economic dynamics that influence their political decisions, including daily behaviour at the port and fishing-related activities. In-depth interviews were conducted with 13 key informants selected through purposive sampling, including punggawa, sawi, and local political figures involved in clientelistic political practices in the village. These interviews aimed to explore the subjective perspectives and narratives of informants regarding the role of punggawa in mobilising political votes, as well as the social relations formed within the patron-client system.

Table 1. Data List of Key Research Informants

No.	NAME	Gender	Age	Occupation
1	Muh Fatahuddin	M	38	Member of the Polewali Mandar Regional Representative Council (Golkar Party)
2	Ardan Aras	L	41	Member of the Polewali Mandar Regional Representative Council (Pan Party)
3	Ahmad Joko	L	40	Employee of the Polewali Mandar Fisheries Department
4	Tiswan	M	58	Pambusuang Village Official, Polewali Mandar (Village Head)
5	Tasrip	L	48	Village Officials of Pambusuang, Polewali Mandar (Village Secretary)
6	Tapsir	L	53	Land Chief
7	Muh Ilham	L	47	Land Commander
8	Sahrin	L	50	Land Commander
9	Gratitude	L	34	Sea Warrior
10	David	L	25	Sawi Fisherman
11	Ismail	L	23	Sawi Fisherman
12	Didi	L	29	Sawi Fishermen
13	Usman	L	37	Sawi Fishermen

Source: Results of Researcher Data Processing, 2025

Table 1 above shows the informants we analysed, representing 13 key roles within the fishing community in Polewali Mandar, who play a part in the patron-client system connecting punggawa and sawi in the local social, economic and political context. Informants from the political sector, namely Muh Fatahuddin and Ardan Aras, who serve as members of the Polewali Mandar Regional Representative Council, as well as Ahmad Joko from the Fisheries Service, play an important role in influencing local policy and mobilising votes from the fishing community. As formal political actors, they have access to influence policies that can benefit fishermen, while also having relationships with punggawa who play a role in mobilising votes in elections. In the local government sector, Tiswan (Village Head) and Tasrip (Village Secretary) act as liaisons between government policies and the fishing community, managing the village budget and assistance programmes, and having the authority to determine the allocation of resources that can influence the political affiliations of the community.

Informants from the fisheries sector, such as Tapsir and Muh Ilham (land-based leaders) and Sahrin and Syukur (sea-based leaders), play a crucial role in the fishing community's economic system. They are not only controllers of capital and fishing gear, but also informal actors who play an important role in local politics, mobilising the community to provide political support in elections. As owners of boats and fishing gear, they control the distribution of profits from catches and often provide informal financial assistance

(advances) to fishermen who depend on them. In this case, the leaders also function as political brokers who mobilise voter loyalty in exchange for economic assistance.

On the other hand, sawi fishermen such as Daud, Ismail, Didi, and Usman, who are at the bottom of the patron-client hierarchy, describe their economic dependence on punggawa for their daily survival. They receive loans or capital to go fishing, but are often trapped in income uncertainty and difficulty repaying their debts. In this context, their political choices are largely influenced by their relationship with the punggawa, who can determine their access to resources and government assistance. Each of these informants contributes to a picture of how patron-client politics works within the social structure of fishermen, where political and economic loyalty are intertwined, and the punggawa play a major role in mobilising political affiliations in elections.

### 3.4 Data Analysis Procedures

Data analysis was conducted using thematic analysis [15], [16], [17] based on Grounded Theory Data Analysis Techniques to identify key themes that emerged in the data [18], [19], [20]. The analysis process began with the transcription of interviews, followed by initial coding to mark data units relevant to the main research topic, namely the role of punggawa in economic and political relations. After that, thematic analysis was conducted to group the data into main themes that reflected patterns of patron-client relationships, social dependence, and political affiliations. Grounded Theory Data Analysis Technique is a qualitative approach used to construct theories derived directly from the collected data, without relying on existing theories. In this approach, researchers follow three interrelated stages of analysis, namely Open Coding, Axial Coding, and Selective Coding. In the Open Coding stage, data obtained from interviews or observations are separated into small relevant units, such as keywords or phrases that describe important elements in the phenomenon being studied. Each unit is labelled or coded to describe the initial themes or categories that emerge from the data. Next, in the Axial Coding stage, researchers connect the categories created in the previous stage to identify patterns or relationships between categories. The purpose of this stage is to understand the cause and effect and the context that governs the relationships between these elements. After that, in the Selective Coding stage, researchers select the most relevant core categories to construct a theory and connect them with other categories. This stage involves compiling a coherent narrative based on the selected core categories, which will lead to the development of a theory that explains the phenomenon being studied. With this approach, Grounded Theory allows researchers to explore a deep understanding of complex phenomena and construct theories that truly originate from the data found in the field.

Table 2. Examples of Stages of Data Analysis Techniques with Open Coding, Axial Coding, and Selective Coding

Stages	Description	Purpose	Output
Open Coding	Reading interview or observation data and dividing the information into small units relevant to the research theme.	Identifying initial categories from the data, such as concepts, keywords, or phrases that emerge from the data.	Coding or labelling data units, identifying initial themes.
Axial Coding	Connecting categories identified in open coding to identify cause-and-effect relationships between categories.	Organising relationships between categories, as well as looking for deeper relationships between data elements.	Relationships between categories, more structured sub-categories.
Selective Coding	Selecting the most relevant core categories and linking them to other categories to form a theory.	Organising a coherent narrative and connecting the main themes that emerge with a larger theory.	Core categories that form relevant narratives and theories.

Source: Results of Researcher Data Processing, 2025

Table 2 shows the stages of analysis using Grounded Theory, which consists of three main stages: Open Coding, Axial Coding, and Selective Coding. In the Open Coding stage, researchers begin by dividing interview or observation data into small relevant units, such as keywords, phrases, or statements that emerge from the data. The purpose of this stage is to identify initial categories that can provide insights into the phenomenon being studied. Each data unit is coded or labelled to describe the initial theme relevant to the research topic. In the Axial Coding stage, researchers connect the categories identified in the previous stage, identify cause-and-effect relationships between these categories, and explore the deeper context of these relationships. This allows researchers to understand how different categories interact with each other to form larger patterns. The final stage, Selective Coding, involves selecting the core categories that are most relevant to the research and linking them to other categories to construct a broader theory. At this stage, researchers construct a coherent narrative and connect the main themes to a broader theory, forming conclusions and theories that emerge directly from the existing data. By following these stages, Grounded Theory allows researchers to systematically construct theories based on empirical data found in the field, without relying on pre-existing theories.

### III. FINDINGS RESEARCH

#### 4.1 Patterns of Working Relationships between Punggawa and Sawi

The findings of this study reveal that the pattern of working relationships between punggawa and sawi in Pambusuang Village, Polewali Mandar, is formed within a patron-client framework that is highly dependent on economic and social dependence. Punggawa, both those who act as land punggawa and sea punggawa, hold significant control over production capital and the distribution of catches, which binds sawi in a complex relationship of dependence. This dependence is not only economic, in that sawi require capital assistance to go to sea, but also encompasses social relationships that lead to strong loyalty to punggawa. This loyalty is reinforced by kinship ties, whereby fishermen feel morally and socially bound to support punggawa in matters related to political assistance and support in elections. Overall, this relationship describes an informal vote mobilisation system, in which the punggawa acts as a political agent who can influence the political choices of the fishing community through the distribution of assistance, both in economic terms and in terms of access to resources. This patron-client relationship model serves a dual function, as a form of social and economic control and as a political strategy in the context of local election contests.

Table 3. Results of Grounded Theory Analysis of the Working Relationship Patterns of Sawi Leaders

Informant	Statements (Description)	Open Coding	Axial Coding	Selective Coding
Tapsir (Land Chief)	"The land-based crew provides the capital and deals with buyers. We (the sea crew and sawi) only manage the ship."	Capital, buyers, ship management, land-based crew	Capital control, purchasing relationships, the role of brokers in distribution	Agents as informal economic and political elites in fishing villages
Muh Ilham (Land-based middlemen)	"The land-based middlemen provide the capital, but the management and profits are handled by the sea-based middlemen; we only manage the boats."	Capital, management of proceeds, working relationships of land-based officials	Economic dependence, regulation of catch, dominance of land-based punggawa	Punggawa as economic controllers and political intermediaries
Usman (Sawi Fisherman)	"We need capital to go fishing; without capital, we cannot bring home any fish. Our economic situation is highly dependent on the land-based operators."	Dependence, capital, yield management, fishing	Dependence on landlords, capital assistance cycle, socio-economic relations	Punggawa as rulers who control access to resources
Daud (Sawi Fisherman)	"I prefer to work with my punggawa because he always helps me when I need money for my family, unlike the bank."	Money lending, assistance, kinship, trust	Social ties, loyalty, trust in loans	Emotional and economic ties strengthen patron-client relationships
Sahrin (Sea Steward)	"If any member wants to borrow money, I just refer them to the boss, because I don't handle financial matters."	Loans, assistance, financial arrangements	The role of the sea chief as a mediator in lending relationships	The influence of sea stewards in directing loans to land stewards

Source: Results of Researcher Data Processing, 2025

Based on the results of the analysis using Grounded Theory in Table 3, it can be concluded that the working relationship between the punggawa and sawi in Pambusuang Village forms a patron-client structure that is highly dependent on economic dependence and social loyalty. As micro-elites, the punggawa hold significant control over the production capital needed by fishermen to go to sea, such as boats and fishing gear. For example, Tapsir and Muh Ilham, who act as land-based punggawa, explain that they control capital and buyers, while sea-based punggawa, such as Sahrin and Syukur, manage boat operations and fishing equipment. This creates a relationship of dependency between fishermen and punggawa, in which fishermen not

only rely on punggawa for capital to go to sea, but also for financial assistance in the form of interest-free loans, as explained by Daud and Usman.

In Axial Coding analysis, this relationship appears increasingly complex with social and moral ties that strengthen the fishermen's political loyalty to the punggawa. These ties create a mutually beneficial social network, in which sawi feel bound to punggawa not only because of economic dependence, but also because of strong trust and kinship. When fishermen need loans or assistance, they prefer to approach their punggawa because of the relationships that have been established, as revealed by Usman and Daud. On the other hand, the punggawa act as political connectors, who also mobilise fishermen's votes in elections, either through social assistance or political promises. This underlines the role of the punggawa as political agents who exploit economic dependence to shape political loyalty, as expressed by Muh Fatahuddin and Ardan Aras, who see the punggawa as strategic partners in mobilising fishermen voters.

At the Selective Coding stage, these findings show that this patron-client relationship serves a dual function, namely as economic control and political mobilisation. Punggawa hold key positions in resource control and political affiliation, which leads to political clientelism. On the one hand, they provide much-needed capital to fishermen, but on the other hand, they also act as driving forces in local politics by ensuring that the votes of fishermen who depend on them are directed towards certain candidates, as explained by Muh Fatahuddin and Ardan Aras. Iy, this relationship illustrates how informal power through patron-client relationships influences economic and political dynamics in fishing communities, demonstrating the relevance of elite and patron-client theories in explaining power relations at the local level.

#### 4.2 Punggawa-Sawi Relationships in Regional Head Elections

The findings of this study reveal that the punggawa-sawi relationship in Pambusuang Village plays an important role in local political dynamics, particularly in regional head elections. Punggawa, both those who act as land punggawa and sea punggawa, not only control the economic capital necessary for fishing activities, but also function as the main drivers of political consolidation among fishermen. In this context, punggawa act as informal political agents who mobilise fishermen's votes by directing them to support certain candidates or parties based on the socio-economic assistance provided. Social dependence and economic loyalty to punggawa strengthen their position as micro-elites who have significant control over election results, where fishermen's votes are often influenced by the patron-client relationships formed between them. These findings highlight how clientelistic politics functions within coastal social structures, where power is built not only through the distribution of economic resources, but also through the mobilisation of votes influenced by strong social relationships, loyalty to punggawa, and their influence in local political networks.

Table 4. Results of Grounded Theory Analysis of the Relationship between Sawi Leaders in Regional Head Elections

Informant	Statements (Description)	Open Coding	Axial Coding	Selective Coding
Tapsir (Land Manager)	"Land stewards provide capital and deal with buyers, while sea stewards manage ship operations."	Capital, buyers, ship management, land steward	Capital control, the role of stewards in the economy, distribution of profits	Land stewards as a micro-elite controlling the economy and politics
Muh Ilham (Land Officer)	"Land-based officials manage ships and the distribution of catches, while sea-based officials only lead ship operations."	Ship management, distribution of proceeds, economic control	The influence of land lords in the economy and distribution, patron-client relationships	Punggawa as a political liaison who mobilises votes
Usman (Sawi Fisherman)	"Dependent on the punggawa for capital to go fishing, I feel bound to vote according to the punggawa's decision."	Dependence, capital, political choice, attachment	Socio-economic dependence, political loyalty to the punggawa	The influence of punggawa in mobilising political choices
Daud (Sawi Fisherman)	"If I need money for my family, I borrow from the punggawa. I feel helped and not burdened."	Money lending, assistance, dependence	The influence of kinship in patron-client relationships, informal assistance	Economic dependence as the basis for political loyalty
Sahrin (Sea Chief)	"Money loans are provided by the boss; I only manage the ship's operations and take care of repair tools."	Money lending, ship management, economic relations	The role of the sea captain in operations, the relationship between the captain and the crew	Sea captain as operational leader who manages the economy
Ardan Aras (Member of the Regional Representative)	"The crew has full control over a group of fishermen and can efficiently secure votes in elections."	Vote control, political control, vote mobilisation	Leaders as political liaisons, power in elections	Punggawa as political agents who mobilise votes in elections

Council				
Muh Fatahud-din (Member of the Regional Representative Council)	"Punggawa is the fastest route to consolidating votes; they are the ones who direct the fishermen's votes in elections."	Vote consolidation, the influence of punggawa in elections	Punggawa as the main channel for gaining votes	Punggawa as micro-elites in organising electoral support

Source: Results of Researcher Data Processing, 2025

Based on the analysis in Table 4, it was found that punggawa play a crucial role not only in economic aspects but also in local political dynamics. Land punggawa, as described by Tapsir and Muh Ilham, act as economic controllers, providing capital for fishing and managing the distribution of fish catches, while sea punggawa are responsible for ship operations and repairing fishing equipment. Both, despite having different roles in economic activities, still function as the main pillars in patron-client relationships that bind sawi in economic and social dependence.

Further analysis at the Axial Coding stage shows that this relationship is not limited to economic aspects, but also extends to political mobilisation. Fishermen's dependence on leaders for capital and financial assistance creates a very strong social loyalty, which in turn influences their political decisions. For example, Daud and Usman revealed that they felt obliged to vote according to the direction determined by their punggawa, due to the trust and assistance provided by the punggawa during difficult times. The role of punggawa as a liaison between the government and fishermen is further emphasised in the context of elections, where Muh Fatahuddin and Ardan Aras, members of the Polewali Mandar Regional Representative Council, emphasise that punggawa are the fastest and most efficient way to gain votes in elections.

During the Selective Coding stage, it was found that punggawa act as micro-elites who control both economic and political aspects through mutually beneficial patron-client relationships. Punggawa not only provide economic assistance, but also play an important role in mobilising fishermen voters, making them strategic actors in clientelistic politics. This is in line with Gaetano Mosca's Elite Theory, which describes elites as power holders who control resources and political decisions, and James Scott's Patron-Client Theory, which shows how social and economic dependence strengthens the position of patrons in influencing political decisions. Overall, these findings show that punggawa in Pambusuang Village function as liaisons between the fishing community and the political elite, consolidating support for certain candidates in elections through socio-economic assistance and political loyalty formed from long-established patron-client relationships.

## V. DISCUSSION

Based on findings obtained from interviews with various informants, this study shows that the pattern of working relationships between punggawa and sawi in Pambusuang Village, Polewali Mandar, not only forms an interdependent economic structure but also functions as a mechanism that connects the local economy and politics. Punggawa play the role of micro-elites who control production capital and the distribution of catches, as well as acting as informal political agents who can mobilise fishermen's votes in regional head elections. The sawi's dependence on the punggawa for capital loans and economic assistance leads to the creation of political loyalty that binds them to support the candidates or parties desired by the punggawa. This reflects clientelistic politics, where political decisions are not only based on personal preferences but are more influenced by patron-client relationships formed on the basis of economic and social assistance provided by the punggawa.

In addition, the findings also reveal that social ties in the relationship between punggawa and sawi strengthen political loyalty, which is utilised in consolidating votes during elections. Punggawa not only function as economic controllers, but also as political liaisons between fishermen and the formal political elite, as seen in the vote mobilisation practices carried out by political actors such as Muh Fatahuddin and Ardan Aras. Here, the punggawa act as the main drivers who guarantee vote support in elections by exploiting established social dependencies and trust. These findings reinforce the understanding that in the context of local coastal politics, the informal power wielded by the punggawa has a significant impact on election results, making them strategic actors in political contests through the distribution of resources and cultivated political loyalty. Based on research findings that reveal that punggawa play a role not only as economic controllers in fishing communities, but also as informal political agents who mobilise fishermen's votes in regional head elections, these findings clearly confirm Gaetano Mosca's Elite Theory. According to Mosca, in every society there are two separate classes—the ruling elite who hold power and the unorganised masses[21], [22]. In the context of this study, the punggawa function as a micro-elite that has considerable control over production capital, distribution of yields, and political vote mobilisation. They are an organised minority that leads and directs political decisions, both through economic influence (capital for fishing) and social relations (dependence and loyalty). [23], [24] This reinforces Mosca's assumption that even in local democratic systems, elite groups continue to control power by organising and manipulating patron-client relationships, ensuring that they retain the power to mobilise the masses and influence election results.

On the other hand, James Scott's Patron-Client Theory is also highly relevant in explaining the pattern of relationships between punggawa and sawi[25], [26], [27]. Scott argues that patron-client relationships are based on socio-economic inequality, where patrons (in this case, officials) provide protection, resources, and assistance (fishing capital and money loans) to clients (sawi fishermen) in exchange for their loyalty, labour, and political support. The findings of this study are very much in line with Scott's assumptions, whereby the punggawa provide capital and social assistance, while the sawi repay them with strong loyalty, including during elections, by directing their support towards candidates backed by the punggawa. This pattern of relationship shows that the patron-client relationship is mutually beneficial, but unequal, with the punggawa always holding dominant power, while the sawi act as parties dependent on the patron's assistance and protection in economic and political aspects.

Our findings verify both theories used. Mosca's Elite Theory was applied in analysing the role of the punggawa as a micro-elite, who control and manipulate resources and votes in elections, while Scott's Patron-Client Theory was reinforced through observations of the economic dependence and political loyalty formed in patron-client relationships that are mutually beneficial but reflect inequality. These findings also show that punggawa function as agents in mobilising votes and consolidating political support, which strengthens their position in local coastal politics. Therefore, this study not only verifies the theories used but also broadens the understanding of how micro-elites can manipulate and direct clientelistic politics in the context of fishing communities in Indonesia.

The findings of this study broaden and deepen the study of the punggawa-sawi relationship in the context of Indonesian fishing communities by adding a dimension that has not been widely touched upon in previous studies, namely the role of punggawa as micro-elites who actively intervene and direct the political behaviour of fishermen in regional head elections. Irawan's (2022) research emphasises the reproduction of values and educational patterns in the punggawa-sawi relationship as part of local wisdom, while Jafar et al. (2024) highlight the structural economic dependence that places sawi in a subordinate position. However, neither explicitly links this economic and social dependence to political vote mobilisation in electoral contests. The findings of Poteete (2019), Noak (2024), and Haryanto (2017) do discuss clientelism and patronage in elections, but more in the context of formal political patrons or coastal patrons on a broader scale, rather than the internal structure of fishing communities such as the direct relationship between punggawa and sawi, which is closely tied to economics and kinship. Similarly, the research by Sudarmono (2012) and Firzan & Erawan (2020) describes the socio-economic structure and hierarchy in fishing communities, but does not show how these structures are mobilised as electoral machines by local elites. Thus, this study makes a new contribution by showing that the traditional economic dependence of punggawa-sawi has now been transformed into a political instrument, whereby punggawa are able to consolidate the collective votes of hundreds of fishermen in regional head elections. This finding not only adds to the literature on patron-client relationships in coastal communities, but also reveals the strategic political role of punggawa as brokers connecting the formal political elite and the fishing masses a dimension that has not been clearly identified in previous studies of fisheries patronage in Indonesia.

The implications of these findings show that the patron-client relationship between punggawa and sawi not only plays a role in controlling the fishing economy, but also serves as an effective political strategy in local elections, emphasising the importance of punggawa as micro-elites who mobilise fishermen's votes. This provides new insights into local political dynamics rooted in economic and social dependence, as well as how political clientelism develops in coastal communities. However, this study has several limitations, including its geographical scope, which is limited to Pambusuang Village and may not fully represent the pattern of punggawa-sawi relationships in other coastal areas of Indonesia. In addition, a more in-depth analysis of the influence of government policies on patron-client dynamics is still limited, which could be an area for further research. Recommendations for future research include expanding the scope of the study to several other coastal areas in Indonesia, as well as including an analysis of government policies that support or hinder clientelistic political practices. Further research could also explore the transformation of patron-client relationships in the context of the modernisation of the fisheries sector and the socio-economic changes that have occurred as a result of technological developments and global markets.

## VI. CONCLUSION

This study examines the patron-client relationship between punggawa and sawi in Pambusuang Village, Polewali Mandar, as a phenomenon that shows that economic relations in the fisheries sector not only regulate the distribution of resources but also function as a tool for political mobilisation in elections. The findings reveal that punggawa play a dual role as micro-elites who control production capital and the distribution of catches, while also influencing fishermen's political choices by offering economic assistance and social support. The sawi's dependence on punggawa for fishing capital, money loans, and social assistance creates deep political loyalty, which in turn mobilises their votes in elections. This leads to political clientelism, where fishermen's political choices are more influenced by patron-client relationships than personal political preferences. The significance of these findings lies in the new understanding they provide of local coastal politics in Indonesia, where the power of micro-elites who control the economy through socio-economic dependence

can direct and influence the results of local elections. These findings also contribute to the literature on political clientelism and vote mobilisation, showing how informal power can work in local democracies. However, this study has limitations, including a sample size restricted to only one village, which limits the generalisability of the findings to other coastal areas. Future research could expand the geographical scope and include government policy variables to further understand how government social and political programmes influence the dynamics of patron-client relationships in fishing communities. A recommendation for further research is to use a comparative approach between villages or districts to identify variability in patron-client relationships in the fisheries sector.

#### FUNDING

This research did not receive funding from any party. The entire research process was conducted independently without any financial support from external institutions, organisations, or sponsors. All costs and resources used in this research came entirely from the researchers themselves.

#### ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to express my deepest gratitude to all those who have provided support and contributed to this research. Thank you to the informants who took the time to share their valuable experiences and insights about the lives of fishermen in Pambusuang Village. I also appreciate the guidance and direction from colleagues and parties who provided constructive input during this research process. Finally, I would like to thank my family for their unwavering moral support and motivation, which enabled me to complete this research successfully.

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