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# The Role of Intermediaries in the Dissemination of Political Messages within the Tambak Lorok Fishing Community during the 2024 Presidential Election

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## Abstract

Political participation in marginalized communities is often assumed to be low or purely transactional, a 'politics of the stomach'. This article challenges this assumption by examining the empirical anomaly of Tambak Lorok, an Indonesian coastal fishing community that exhibited 81% voter turnout in the 2024 election despite profound socio-economic precarity. Using a qualitative case study design, this research draws on in-depth interviews (N=11) with political brokers, community members, and local leaders, supplemented by ethnographic observation. The findings reveal that high participation was not spontaneous but was mobilized by a hybrid 'ecosystem' of activist, clientelist, and opportunist brokers. These actors synthesized long-term relational maintenance (e.g., trust-building, community presence) with short-term, compliance-gaining strategies. This study argues that brokers' effectiveness lies in their role as 'cognitive and normative translators,' reframing material rewards (like *Bansos*) and political choices into the binding, local language of moral obligation (*balas budi*) and subtle social coercion. The resulting participation is a form of 'constrained agency' rather than autonomous choice. This research contributes to brokerage theory by shifting the focus from purely transactional functions to the crucial work of *translational* and *communicative* mobilization.

**Keywords:** Political Brokerage, Clientelism, Political Participation, Communicative Coercion, Indonesia, Marginalized Communities

## 1. Introduction

Political participation among marginalized communities presents a persistent paradox within the study of electoral democracy (Alelaimat, 2023). Foundational scholarship, often anchored in the Socio-Economic Status (SES) model, posits that political engagement requires a surplus of resources, namely time, financial capital, and specific civic skills (Verba et al., 1995). From this perspective, marginalized populations, defined by the very precarity and scarcity of these resources, are theoretically predisposed to political disengagement. The dominant assumption is

that their economic precarity culminates in low political participation, if not outright apathy (Farkas & Szabó, 2025; Jungkunz & Marx, 2025; Laurison, 2016).

This deterministic view, however, has been challenged. When the economically precarious *do* engage, scholarship often frames this activity through the reductive lens of clientelism or what has been termed the 'politics of the stomach' (Omilusi & Omilusi, 2019; Scott, 2017). This literature assumes that for subsistence populations, the prioritization of immediate livelihood often supersedes abstract ideological commitments. Consequently, their participation is often dismissed as purely transactional, ephemeral, and 'low quality,' a form of mobilized apathy rather than genuine political expression (Berenschot, 2018; Pellicer et al., 2021). This creates a theoretical impasse where marginalized communities are seen as either politically absent or instrumentally co-opted.

This theoretical tension is particularly acute in Indonesia, where fishing communities frequently confront a complex matrix of social and economic vulnerabilities. While this vulnerability has long been documented (Helmi & Satria, 2012), it has intensified in recent years. The fishing community of Tambak Lorok in Semarang, Central Java, serves as a potent case study. Their vulnerability is not an abstract concept; it is a daily, lived reality. This community perennially grapples with existential threats that compound income instability, most notably severe coastal abrasion and recurrent tidal flooding (*rob*), which damage infrastructure, disrupt livelihoods, and threaten land tenure (Furwon Ulya Himawan & Ayomi Amindoni, 2025; Isrofi & Gunawan, 2025). These persistent environmental and economic crises, according to the conventional SES and 'politics of the stomach' models, should create a near-insurmountable barrier to formal political engagement.

It is precisely in this context of extreme precarity that Tambak Lorok presents a compelling empirical anomaly. Contrary to theoretical expectations, data indicate a markedly high and sustained level of community participation in recent elections. Voter turnout in the 2024 Presidential Election reached 81% (KPU Kota Semarang, 2024).<sup>1</sup> This figure is not only high in absolute terms, significantly exceeding the national average, but also represents a sustained increase from an already high 78% in the 2019 election (KPU Kota Semarang, 2024). This phenomenon suggests the presence of specific, powerful mobilization factors that have successfully overcome, or perhaps even repurposed, the community's extant socio-economic barriers.

This anomaly cannot be summarily dismissed as a simple case of transactional, clientelistic mobilization. While vote-buying and patronage are endemic features of Indonesian politics, a purely transactional model is insufficient to explain these findings. It fails to account for the *sustained increase* in participation over time, nor does it adequately explain the *electoral coherence* of the community's choice. Such a model reduces community members to passive recipients of handouts, overlooking the complex internal dynamics and agential choices that shape their collective political behavior (Sadat & Basir, 2025). This puzzle, therefore, demands a more nuanced explanation focused on the role of strategic intermediaries.

This study postulates that this anomaly is not a spontaneous phenomenon but is driven by the strategic interventions of political brokers. While the literature on Indonesian electoral politics points to the crucial role of brokers (Aspinall, 2014; Hidayaturrehman et al., 2022; Tawakkal et al., 2020), much of the scholarship focuses heavily on their role as distributors of material patronage. This article argues that this focus on transactional logic obscures a more critical, and perhaps more powerful, function: the broker as a 'cognitive and normative translator.' Departing from the assumption of brokers as passive conduits, mere bridges for resources (Gallego et al., 2020), this article argues that in Tambak Lorok, broker effectiveness lies in their role as active 'translators'. We demonstrate how they reframe complex political messages into resonant local narratives and analyze their management of community expectations, often by linking candidates' abstract promises to pressing local issues such as boat assistance and fuel subsidies.

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<sup>1</sup> KPU is the acronym for *Komisi Pemilihan Umum*, Indonesia's independent General Elections Commission. The citation "KPU Kota Semarang" refers to the official data from the commission's municipal-level branch responsible for administering the election in Semarang City.

The strategic importance of this 'translational' function is highlighted by the electoral outcome in Tambak Lorok, where Candidate Pair number 2 secured a dominant victory (KPU Kota Semarang, 2024).<sup>2</sup> This suggests a strong correlation between the brokers' executed "translation" strategies and the community's ultimate political choices. Drawing on this background, this study provides an in-depth analysis of the mechanisms and impacts of this political brokerage. This article seeks to answer the central research question: How does the combination of personalized communication strategies and sustained relational maintenance allow political brokers in Tambak Lorok to influence community political choices, ultimately contributing to the significant victory of Candidate Pair number 2?

In answering this question, this article offers distinct contributions. Empirically, it provides a crucial counter-narrative to the 'politics of the stomach' thesis by demonstrating high-efficacy participation in a deeply marginalized community. Theoretically, it refines the concept of political brokerage, shifting the analytical focus from purely transactional functions to more complex translational and normative work. Methodologically, it underscores the value of deep ethnographic inquiry in uncovering the micro-dynamics of electoral mobilization that large-N studies often miss. To develop this argument, the article first details the research methodology, followed by a thick description of the socio-economic and political context of Tambak Lorok. The subsequent analysis explores the primary mechanisms of 'translation' used by brokers, leading into a discussion of the broader implications of these findings before concluding.

## 2. Method

This research adopts a qualitative approach, chosen for its exploratory and interpretive nature, which allows the researcher to delve into the social context comprehensively (Baxter & Jack, 2015). The specific method employed is a single-case study, deemed most appropriate for achieving the necessary depth of analysis (Yin, 2018). The case is defined as the mobilization process in Tambak Lorok, which represents a critical, anomalous case: a community exhibiting high participation despite conditions that theoretically predict apathy (Creswell & Poth, 2024). The research site was purposively selected in this Tambak Lorok Fishing Village, situated in Tanjung Mas Urban Village. This site's selection is highly strategic, not for statistical *representation*, but as a "thick" context (Geertz, 1977) uniquely suited for observing these embedded political dynamics.

The process of identifying and engaging informants, or interlocutors, was iterative and emergent, following a qualitative sampling logic. The inquiry began with purposive sampling, making initial contact with highly visible community leaders and known political *gatekeepers* deemed to possess deep knowledge of the mobilization process. From this initial set of interlocutors, snowball sampling was employed to trace less-visible social networks and access brokers who were not public figures. The study's interlocutors were thus selected based on their deep, experiential knowledge and were organized into three primary groups to ensure a holistic view: (1) Political Brokers, the core subject group; (2) a diverse cohort of Community Members to triangulate the brokers' narratives; and (3) a small group of Key Informants, such as formal campaign officials, to contextualize the brokers' actions. This dual sampling strategy continued until theoretical saturation (Corbin & Strauss, 2008) was achieved, defined as the stage where new interviews no longer yielded new insights.

To ensure methodological triangulation and credibility, data were collected from January 2025 to June 2025 using three primary sources. The primary source of information was a series of in-depth, semi-structured interviews with 11 key interlocutors, comprising five political brokers, five community members, and one *Lurah* (the official Village Head). These interviews were designed to elicit rich narratives concerning informants' experiences and perceptions of the political brokering process. This was supplemented by ethnographic participant observation, involving *nongkrong* (deep hanging out) at key community gathering points (such as *warung kopi* and fish auction sites) to contextualize and triangulate interview data in real-time. Finally, relevant documents and archival data, including official KPU results and local campaign materials, were collected to support and contextualize the qualitative findings.

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<sup>2</sup> In the 2024 Indonesian Presidential Election, Candidate Pair number 2 referred to the ticket of Prabowo Subianto and Gibran Rakabuming Raka, who were ultimately declared the winners of the national election.

The data analysis stage was inductive and iterative, running concurrently with data collection, and employed thematic analysis (Naeem et al., 2023) integrated with the explanation building technique (Yin, 2018). All transcripts and field notes were systematically and manually analyzed. This process involved a multi-pass reading of the data; transcripts were first subjected to open coding to identify initial patterns. This was followed by axial coding, where codes were compared, contrasted, and clustered into conceptual categories (e.g., "Personalized Communication," "Relational Maintenance"). The final stage involved selective coding to construct the explanatory model presented in this article.

### 3. Results

The analysis of field data, comprising 11 in-depth interviews and sustained participant observation from January to June 2025, reveals a sophisticated, multi-layered brokerage system. The findings demonstrate that the mobilization in Tambak Lorok was not a simple transaction, but a complex process built upon distinct broker roles, deep long-term relational investment, and specific, high-pressure persuasion tactics. These findings are presented in three thematic sections, which detail the architecture of the mobilization that led to the victory of Candidate Pair 2.

#### 3.1. Broker Typologies: An Ecosystem of Influence

The research first identified that "broker" is not a monolithic role. Informants described a network of actors with distinct motives, sources of legitimacy, and operational tactics. This ecosystem allowed the campaign to penetrate different layers of the community simultaneously. These brokers align with, and expand upon, Aspinall's (2014) typology and are classified as Activist, Clientelist, and Opportunist brokers.

##### 3.1.1. The Activist Broker

This broker was driven by a perceived long-term ideological or community-based commitment. Their legitimacy was not derived from money, but from a proven track record of community advocacy, often through formal positions in local organizations. They "translated" the candidate's abstract platform into the language of ongoing, tangible community struggles. As Informant 3, a respected leader in the local Fishermen's Group (KUB<sup>3</sup> Nelayan), stated:

"Bagi saya, ini bukan soal pemilu lima tahunan. Ini perjuangan. Saya ini dari dulu di KUB, berjuang soal solar, soal pukat yang dilarang. Saya pelajari visi-misi Paslon 2 ini, dan di programnya, itu paling sejalan dengan kami. Saya yakinkan warga ya dari situ, bukan dari uang. Makanya mereka (warga) percaya. Saya tidak *ngoyo* (rakus) cari materi."

*(For me, this isn't about the five-year election. It's a struggle. I've been in the KUB forever, fighting about diesel fuel, about the banned trawls. I studied the vision and mission of Candidate Pair 2, and in their platform, it is the most aligned with us. I convince the residents from that angle, not from money. That's why they (the residents) trust me. I am not greedy for material things.)*

This *activist* legitimacy was confirmed by community members. Informant 6 (Community Member) differentiated this type clearly:

"Kalau Pak [Informan 3] itu beda. Beliau itu mikir *njlimet* (rumit), mikir jangka panjang buat nelayan. Beliau tidak pernah *ngurusi* amplop. Waktu beliau kumpulkan kami dan bilang Paslon 2 paling bagus untuk nelayan, kami *manut* (ikut). Kami percaya beliau, karena beliau yang paling paham perjuangan kami."

*(Mr. [Informant 3] is different. He thinks in detail, thinks long-term for the fishermen. He never deals with envelopes [cash]. When he gathered us and said Candidate Pair 2 was the best for fishermen, we followed. We trust him, because he understands our struggle the best.)*

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<sup>3</sup> KUB is the acronym for *Kelompok Usaha Bersama* (Joint Business Group). The KUB Nelayan (Fishermen's KUB) is a formal, state-recognized cooperative. In Indonesia, these groups are the primary institutional channel for fishermen to access government programs, subsidies (e.g., for fuel and gear), and technical assistance. Leadership in a KUB thus provides significant social and political capital.

### 3.1.2. The Clientelist Broker

This broker, often holding a formal community position like an RT<sup>4</sup> Head (Rukun Tetangga/Neighborhood Head), viewed politics as a long-term instrumental exchange. They provided consistent, tangible services to residents (e.g., processing administrative documents, ensuring inclusion in social aid/Bansos<sup>5</sup> lists) in exchange for political loyalty. Their legitimacy was relational and reciprocal, a core part of the village's "moral economy." Informant 2, an RT Head for over a decade, explained this pragmatic relationship:

"Ya jelas, Mbak. Warga itu kan harus *diopeni* (diurus). Saya ini RT, 24 jamurus mereka. Ada yang butuh surat, saya bantu. Ada Bansos, saya pastikan mereka dapat. Nah, pas pemilu, saya kan tinggal mengingatkan saja. *Mosok wis dibantu ora ngerti bales budi?* (Masak sudah dibantu tidak tahu balas budi?). Ini kan timbal balik saja. Wajar itu. Saya *ngopeni* mereka, mereka *ngopeni* saya (secara politik)."

*(Of course, Ms. [researcher]. Residents must be taken care of. I am the RT Head, 24 hours taking care of them. If someone needs a letter, I help. If there's social aid, I ensure they get it. So, when the election comes, I just remind them. How can you be helped and not know how to reciprocate? This is just reciprocity. It's normal. I take care of them, they take care of me (politically).)*

The Lurah (Informant 11) confirmed this function, viewing these brokers as essential, quasi-state actors:

"Pak RT (Broker) itu kan ujung tombak. Data warga, siapa yang layak dapat bantuan, siapa yang belum, itu semua di dia. Wajar kalau dia punya 'massa'. Dia yang sehari-hari menyelesaikan masalah. Jadi kalau dia *ngarahkan* (mengarahkan) pilihan, itu pasti didengar. Itu sudah jadi sistem di sini."

*(The RT Head (Broker) is the spearhead. Resident data, who deserves aid, who doesn't, it's all with him. It's normal that he has a 'mass base'. He's the one who solves problems day-to-day. So if he 'directs' their vote, he will definitely be heard. That's already the system here.)*

### 3.1.3. The Opportunist Broker

This broker was characterized by flexibility and was driven by short-term material incentives during the election period. They were uncommitted to ideology and aligned with whichever candidate offered the most significant immediate financial gain. Informant 1, a local youth leader (*tokoh pemuda*), candidly described his role:

"Kalau saya jujur saja, Mbak. Saya lihat siapa yang 'bensin'-nya (logistik/uang) paling kuat. Tim Paslon 2 ini kemarin paling berani. Ya saya kerja untuk mereka. Warga dapat sembako, saya dapat 'uang rokok' (komisi). Pemilu depan? Ya kita lihat lagi siapa yang paling siap. Politik kan begini, cari makan."

*(If I'm honest, Ms. [researcher]. I just see who has the 'strongest fuel' (logistics/money). The team for Candidate Pair 2 was the 'bravest' [most willing to spend] this time. So I worked for them. Residents get staple goods, I get 'cigarette money' (a commission). The next election? Well, we'll see again who is the most prepared. Politics is like this, finding a living.)*

Interestingly, the Clientelist Brokers viewed these Opportunists as necessary but unreliable. Informant 2 (The RT Head) commented:

"Oh, si [Informan 1] itu? Beda kelas. Dia itu 'tim sukses musiman'. Kita butuh dia untuk *nyebar* (menyebarkan) logistik, untuk acara-acara. Tapi dia tidak punya loyalitas. Warga juga tahu dia gerak karena uang. Beda sama kita yang *ngurus* warga bertahun-tahun."

*(Oh, [Informant 1]? Different class. He is a 'seasonal success team'. We need him to distribute logistics, for events. But he has no loyalty. The residents also know he moves because of money. Different from us, who have taken care of residents for years.)*

<sup>4</sup> RT is the acronym for *Rukun Tetangga* (Neighborhood Association), the smallest administrative unit of governance in an Indonesian urban or rural village. The Kepala RT (RT Head) is a community leader, typically elected by the residents, who serves as a crucial (often voluntary) intermediary between households and the formal state bureaucracy (the *Lurah* or Village Head).

<sup>5</sup> Bansos is the acronym for *Bantuan Sosial* (Social Assistance), a large-scale Indonesian government social welfare program. It typically involves the distribution of cash transfers (BLT) or staple goods (like rice and cooking oil) to registered low-income households. Access to Bansos lists is often controlled or mediated by local leaders like the RT Head, making it a significant source of clientelistic leverage.

### 3.2. The Architecture of Influence: Relationship Maintenance Strategies

The brokers' effectiveness during the campaign was not spontaneous. It was built upon a deep, sociological foundation of long-term, deliberate relationship maintenance. Analysis revealed five dimensions of this strategy, which brokers used to build and sustain social capital long before the election began.

Brokers actively practiced Positivity and Openness. They ensured a consistent, friendly, and non-transactional presence in daily community life. Field observations confirmed this: brokers were fixtures at key social hubs (*warung kopi*), attending social gatherings (*arisan*), recitation groups (*yasinan*), and communal work (*kerja bakti*). This proximity was vital for building personal intimacy and positioning themselves as accessible conduits for community grievances. As Informant 7 (Community Member) noted:

"Kenapa kami percaya Pak [Nama Broker]? Ya karena beliau itu ada terus. Acara *yasinan* ada, *kerjabakti* beliau ikut. Beda sama yang lain, yang datang pas mau pemilu saja. Kalau kita ada keluhan soal solar langka atau rob, beliau yang pertama *nggrungokke* (mendengarkan). Jadi pas beliau bilang 'pilih 02 saja', kita ya *manut* (ikut)."

*(Why do we trust Mr. [Broker's Name]? Because he is always there. He attends Yasinan (prayer groups), he joins the community work. Different from others who only show up near the election. If we have complaints about scarce diesel or tidal floods, he is the first to listen. So when he says 'just vote for 02', we just follow.)*

This trust was solidified through Assurances (consistency) and the leveraging of Social Networks. Brokers demonstrated a clear, unwavering direction of political support, which built social trust and made them appear reliable. This was particularly important for female community members. Informant 10 (Female Community Member) explained:

"Ibu-ibu di sini itu *ora neko-neko* (tidak macam-macam). Yang penting jelas. Pak [Broker] itu dari awal sudah *mantep* (mantap) ke 02. Beliau *ngomong* alasannya jelas, programnya jelas. Kita jadi ikut *ayem* (tenang). Daripada yang lain, hari ini A, besok B, kan kita jadi bingung. Konsistensi beliau itu yang bikin kami yakin."

*(The mothers here are not complicated. The important thing is clarity. Mr. [Broker] was firm on 02 from the very beginning. He stated his reasons clearly, the program was clear. It made us feel calm. Unlike others, who today say A, tomorrow say B, it just confuses us. His consistency is what made us sure.)*

Furthermore, brokers did not work in isolation. They practiced **Sharing Tasks**, collaborating with other brokers who held different forms of legitimacy. The Lurah (Informant 11) described this network:

"Oh, di sini itu kompak timnya. Si A (Broker Aktivist) itu pegang KUB Nelayan. Si B (Broker RT) pegang warganya per RT. Nanti mereka ketemu, bagi-bagi logistik. Jaringannya rapi, tidak jalan sendiri-sendiri. Dari *getok tular* (dari mulut ke mulut) di pengajian ibu-ibu sampai di *warung kopi*, semua sudah diatur."

*(Oh, the team here is solid. Mr. A (Activist Broker) handles the Fishermen's Group. Mr. B (RT Broker) handles his residents per neighborhood block. Later they meet, distribute logistics. The network is neat, they don't work alone. From word-of-mouth at the mothers' prayer groups to the coffee stalls, everything is organized.)*

### 3.3. Persuasion in Practice: Compliance-Gaining Strategies

During the election period, brokers "activated" the social capital they had built using a multi-pronged compliance-gaining strategy that skillfully combined rewards (the "carrot") and subtle, powerful coercion (the "stick").

The Reward component was twofold. It involved direct Gifts, such as the *serangan fajar* ("dawn attack," a pre-dawn cash distribution on election day). But more importantly, it involved Hoping, or the promise of future, larger-scale community-wide programs. Brokers explicitly linked these promises to the candidate. As Informant 8 (Community Member) explained:

"Ya, H-1 pemilu itu pasti ada 'serangan fajar'. Kami dikasih amplop isi Rp 100.000. Tapi bukan cuma itu. Timnya juga janji kalau Paslon 2 menang, perbaikan *talud* (tanggul) penahan rob ini sama bantuan alat tangkap mau *dikaver* (dicukupi) semua. Ya kita kan jadi berharap. Uang Rp 100.000 itu habis sehari, tapi kalau *talud*-nya jadi, itu kan buat selamanya."

*(Yes, the day before the election, there's always a 'dawn attack'. We were given envelopes with IDR 100,000. But not just that. The team also promised that if Candidate Pair 2 wins, the repair of this tidal flood embankment and*

*fishing gear aid will all be covered. So, of course, we become hopeful. The IDR 100,000 is gone in a day, but if the embankment is built, that's forever.)*

More critically, brokers combined these rewards with Threat/Coercion Tactics. This was not a physical threat, but a powerful psychosocial one, leveraging the community's dependence and the broker's relational authority. The threat was twofold: the implied loss of future aid and the social pressure of being labeled "ungrateful" (*ora ngerti balas budi*). Informant 4 (Broker-RT) articulated this strategy perfectly:

"Kita tidak pernah *maksa*, Mbak. Kita cuma ingatkan. '*Nek wis dikasih ya harus tanggung jawab*.' (Kalau sudah dikasih ya harus tanggung jawab). Itu saja. Ini kan soal *balas budi*. Kalau dia *mbalelo* (membelot), ya kita tahu. Nanti kalau ada jatah Bansos (Bantuan Sosial) lagi, ya kita *skip* (lewati) dulu. Kan masih banyak yang lebih butuh dan lebih *ngerti* (paham). Saya *ndak* ngancam, saya cuma *ngatur* mana yang prioritas."

*(We never force them, Ms. [researcher]. We just remind them. 'If you've been given something, you must be responsible.' That's all. This is about reciprocity. If they defect, well, we know. Later, if there is another round of social aid, we'll just skip them. There are many others who are more in need and more 'understanding'. I'm not threatening, I'm just managing priorities.)*

This strategy, Leveraging Image and Relational Legitimacy, effectively framed the political choice as a moral obligation. The community's decision was ultimately shaped by the fear of social sanction and the desire to maintain community harmony, as summarized by Informant 9 (Community Member):

"Ya *ndak* enak (tidak enak hati), Mbak. Pak [Broker] itu kan yang urus kita sehari-hari. Masa cuma karena Rp 100.000 dari calon lain kita berkhianat? Itu namanya *ora ngerti balas budi* (tidak tahu balas budi). Kita milih 02 ya karena menghargai beliau. Ini soal *jogo roso* (menjaga perasaan) dan *jogo* (menjaga) hubungan baik. Biar ke depannya kalau butuh apa-apa, tetap gampang."

*(It just feels bad, Ms. [researcher]. Mr. [Broker] is the one who takes care of us day-to-day. How could we betray him just for IDR 100,000 from another candidate? That's called being ungrateful. We vote for 02 to respect him. This is about protecting feelings and maintaining good relationships. So that in the future, if we need anything, it remains easy.)*

#### 4. Discussion

The findings of this study offer a significant intervention into the scholarly debate on political participation among marginalized communities. The high voter turnout (81%) and the dominant victory of Candidate Pair 2 (Prabowo Subianto-Gibran Rakabuming Raka) in Tambak Lorok directly refute the conventional 'politics of the stomach' thesis, which presumes that socio-economic precarity leads to political apathy (Omilusi & Omilusi, 2019; Scott, 2017). This research demonstrates that high-efficacy participation is possible, but that it is not spontaneous. Instead, as the findings show, it is the product of a dense, multi-layered, and strategically managed brokerage system. The central argument emerging from these findings is that broker effectiveness in Tambak Lorok is contingent not on any single strategy, but on their ability to synthesize long-term relational legitimacy with short-term transactional persuasion.

First, the analysis fundamentally deconstructs and enriches the concept of clientelism. The 'politics of the stomach' literature (Pellicer et al., 2021) often portrays transactional voting as a simple, ephemeral cash-for-vote exchange. The findings from Tambak Lorok, particularly the distinction between the Activist, Clientelist, and Opportunist brokers, demonstrate that this is a gross oversimplification. The mobilization was not driven by the Opportunist Brokers alone; they were merely the "seasonal" logistical arm, as Informant 2 noted. The core of the mobilization rested on the Activist and Clientelist brokers, whose influence was non-transactional or, at minimum, long-term relational. The Clientelist Broker (the RT Head, Informant 2), for instance, did not simply "buy" votes on election day; he "cashed in" on years of *relational debt* built by *diopeni* (taking care of) his residents. This finding aligns with more nuanced clientelism studies (Berenschot, 2018) but specifies the mechanism: clientelism in this context is not just an exchange of *goods*, but an exchange of *long-term care and administrative access* (like *Bansos* lists) for *political loyalty*. The Activist Broker (Informant 3), meanwhile, operated on an entirely different logic, "translating" ideology (the candidate's platform) into the language of the fishermen's struggle. This demonstrates



that mobilization in marginalized communities is not monolithically material; it is simultaneously ideological, relational, and material.

Second, the findings on Relationship Maintenance Strategies provide the crucial sociological architecture for our "broker as translator" hypothesis, which was posed in the introduction. The literature on brokers often focuses on their "bridging" function (Gallego et al., 2020), but our findings detail *how* this bridge is built and maintained. The strategies of 'Positivity' (being present at *yasinan* and *kerja bakti*) and 'Openness' (listening to grievances at the *warung kopi*) are not just social niceties; they are calculated, long-term investments in social capital. As Informant 7 described, this constant presence is what differentiates the "true" broker from the seasonal campaigner. This process allows brokers to perform two critical "translation" functions. First, they conduct upward translation: they gather community grievances (e.g., "solar langka," "rob," "susah Bansos") and translate them into actionable political demands. Second, during the election, they perform downward translation: they take the abstract platform of Candidate Pair 2 and translate it into a direct solution for those pre-existing grievances. The promise of the *talud* (embankment) (Finding 3.3) was so potent precisely because the brokers had spent years listening to complaints about the *rob* (tidal flood). This long-term relational groundwork provides the *trust* necessary for the community to believe the brokers' promises over those of an outside campaigner.

Third, this research offers a significant refinement of brokerage theory by proposing an "ecosystem model" of mobilization. Much of the literature (Aspinall, 2014) tends to analyze broker *types* in isolation. The findings from Tambak Lorok, particularly on 'Sharing Tasks' and 'Social Networks' (Finding 3.2, confirmed by the Lurah, Informant 11), show that these different broker types function collaboratively and symbiotically. The Activist Broker (Informant 3) provided the *moral and ideological cover* for the operation, appealing to the community's sense of collective struggle. The Clientelist Broker (Informant 2) provided the *structural access and control* over state resources (like Bansos) and the neighborhood (RT) network. The Opportunist Broker (Informant 1) provided the *short-term logistical muscle* to distribute materials and manage "dawn attacks." This hybrid ecosystem is far more resilient than a system based on a single broker type. It can simultaneously appeal to the community's ideological aspirations (via the Activist), their pragmatic-material needs (via the Clientelist), and their short-term desires (via the Opportunist). This distributed network of legitimacy explains the mobilization's overwhelming success and coherence.

Finally, this study complicates the narrative of community agency and empowerment. The high participation in Tambak Lorok should not be romanticized as purely autonomous or agentic. The findings on Compliance Gaining Strategies (Finding 3.3) reveal a powerful, albeit subtle, element of coercion. This suggests that participation here is a form of constrained agency. The community members are not "duped" or "false-conscious," as Informant 9's testimony makes clear. They are making highly rational, pragmatic calculations within a system where the social and material costs of non-compliance are severe. The threat articulated by the RT<sup>2</sup> Head (Informant 4) to *skip* non-compliant residents from future social aid lists is a credible and existential threat. This transforms the vote from a private preference into a public performance of loyalty. The "moral" language of *balas budi* (reciprocity) and the fear of being labeled "*ora ngerti balas budi*" (ungrateful) is, in this context, a powerful tool of normative coercion. The community's decision to vote for Candidate Pair 2 is thus a *moral and economic* imperative, not just a political one. It is aimed at *jogo roso* (protecting feelings) and, more importantly, ensuring their own future access to the essential resources brokered by these powerful local figures.

In sum, the paradox of Tambak Lorok is solved by understanding the broker as a multifaceted actor. They are simultaneously patrons (Clientelists), advocates (Activists), and entrepreneurs (Opportunists). They succeed not by merely distributing goods, but by translating the abstract act of voting into the tangible, moral, and high-stakes language of everyday community relations.

## 5. Conclusion

This study set out to resolve the empirical paradox of high political participation in the deeply marginalized fishing community of Tambak Lorok. The research answers its central question by demonstrating that this anomaly is not spontaneous, but the result of a sophisticated, multi-layered brokerage system. The success of brokers in

mobilizing votes for Candidate Pair 2 was not contingent on any single factor. Instead, it was achieved through a strategic synthesis of long-term relational maintenance and short-term, coercive persuasion.

This research makes three distinct contributions. Empirically, it provides a crucial counter-narrative to the 'politics of the stomach' thesis, showing a case of high, albeit constrained, participation. Theoretically, it advances brokerage theory beyond static typologies by proposing an "ecosystem model," where activist, clientelist, and opportunist brokers work symbiotically. Most importantly, it operationalizes the "broker as translator" concept, demonstrating that their primary function is not merely transactional (distributing goods) but translational, reframing material aid and political choices into the powerful, binding language of local moral obligations (*balas budi*) and social pressure.

The findings of this qualitative single-case study, while "thick" in description, are not intended to be statistically generalizable to all marginalized communities in Indonesia. The specific "broker ecosystem" found in Tambak Lorok is contingent on its unique coastal and administrative context. Future research should, therefore, explore these dynamics comparatively. Quantitative studies might also be designed to measure the relative weight of these different mobilization strategies, ideological, relational, and material, in compelling voter compliance. Ultimately, this study confirms that to understand the vote in communities like Tambak Lorok, we must look beyond the cash and analyze the deep, relational architecture of trust, dependency, and moral coercion that governs community life.

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