



Custodia: Journal of Legal, Political, and Humanistic Inquiry

Vol 1 No 1 September 2025, Hal 31-39
ISSN: XXXX-XXXX (Print) ISSN: XXXX-XXXX (Electronic)
Open Access: <https://scriptaintelektual.com/custodia>

Local Strongmen, Capital Conversion, and the Rise of Political Dynasties in Post-Decentralization Indonesia: The Case of Aras Tammauni in Central Mamuju

Pramita Khanifatul Khusna^{1*}

¹ Universitas Islam Negeri Walisongo Semarang, Indonesia
email: pramita@gmail.com

Article Info :

Received:
16-8-2025
Revised:
28-8-2025
Accepted:
20-9-2025

Abstract

This study examines how local strongmen in post-decentralization Indonesia convert economic, social, and symbolic capital into enduring political dominance, using Aras Tammauni in Central Mamuju as a case study. Drawing on qualitative fieldwork including interviews, observations, and document analysis the research explores the mechanisms of capital conversion that underpin the consolidation of local power and the reproduction of political dynasties. Findings reveal that Tammauni's authority derives from the strategic transformation of economic resources into patronage networks, reinforced by kinship ties, customary legitimacy, and symbolic recognition. These interrelated forms of capital enable the institutionalization of dynastic rule through control of party structures, bureaucratic appointments, and public resource distribution. The study also situates Central Mamuju within the national trend of rising dynastic candidacies, showing that nearly one-fifth of candidates in Indonesia's 2024 local elections are dynasty-affiliated. The analysis concludes that decentralization, rather than democratizing local politics, has facilitated elite entrenchment and capital-based domination, necessitating stronger regulatory and civic mechanisms to restore accountability and inclusiveness in regional governance.

Keywords : *Political dynasties, local strongmen, capital conversion, decentralization, democratic accountability.*



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INTRODUCTION

Decentralization, which began with the enactment of Law Number 22 of 1999 on Regional Government, redistributed political authority from the central government to local administrations and created significant opportunities for the rise of powerful local elites (Lambelanova & Jaelani, 2022; Ramesh, 2025; Khambule, 2021; Hutchinson & Negara, 2025). This policy granted broad autonomy to regional governments to manage their own affairs including political and economic governance thus opening the way for individuals or groups with substantial resources to dominate local political arenas. Within this environment, figures known as local strongmen emerged as central actors capable of combining economic, social, and symbolic power to consolidate their dominance (Foa, 2021). This phenomenon has occurred not only at the provincial level but has also extended to regencies such as Central Mamuju, which serves as the locus of this study.

The emergence of local strongmen represents a distinctive post-decentralization phenomenon, marking a transformation from authoritarian rule to a form of local democracy with oligarchic characteristics (Mimin, 2025). Local actors are no longer merely implementers of central government policies but have become key decision-makers in determining public resource allocation and policy direction within their jurisdictions (Howdon et al., 2022). In many cases, their authority is built through the conversion of economic capital into political capital, which is subsequently reinforced by social networks and traditional patronage structures (Aiyede, 2023). This pattern reveals that local democracy in Indonesia is often characterized by the personalization of power and capital-based political reproduction.

Aras Tammauni in Central Mamuju Regency stands as a prominent representation of this pattern of power, as his influence derives not only from formal political positions but also from his ability to mobilize local social, cultural, and economic networks (Rusdin et al., 2024). He served as the head of Tobadak Village for 26 years before ascending to the position of Chairman of the West Sulawesi

Provincial Parliament (DPRD) and later winning the 2015 Central Mamuju local election with an extraordinary 97.69 percent of the vote. This victory illustrates a form of domination built upon the systematic accumulation and conversion of multiple forms of capital within a pluralistic and agrarian local society. A figure like Aras Tammauni demonstrates how local strongmen can effectively control the political arena through legitimate means under the formal mechanism of electoral democracy.

Studies on local politics from Yusuf (2023) and Nawawi & Sukri (2021) indicate that the success of actors such as Aras Tammauni cannot be separated from the broader systemic dynamics involving political parties, bureaucracy, and local economic networks. Regional political parties are often pragmatically driven, endorsing candidates who possess significant financial resources or strong social bases rather than those with ideological competence (Mutawalli et al., 2023). Under such circumstances, local elections tend to become markets of capital exchange among local elites rather than competitions of policy ideas. This environment strengthens the entrenchment of political dynasties, which often emerge from the power base of local strongmen across Indonesia.

National data reveal that the phenomenon of political dynasties is not an exception but rather a growing trend across various regions in post-decentralization Indonesia. Research conducted by the Corruption Eradication Commission (KPK) and the Indonesian Institute of Sciences (LIPI) shows a significant increase in the number of local election candidates originating from political dynasties since the implementation of direct regional elections:

Tabel 1. Trends in the Electoral Success of Political Dynasty Candidates in Indonesia (2015–2020)

Election Period	Number of Dynasty Candidates	Winning Candidates	Winning Percentage
2015–2018	202	117	57.9 %
2020	124	71	57.2 %

Source: Kompas (2020); Suara Indo (2020)

This tendency demonstrates that local politics in Indonesia has increasingly exhibited a pattern of power reproduction through hereditary lines, which has become deeply entrenched at the regional level. The conversion of capital is central to understanding the success of *local strongmen* in maintaining their influence. Economic capital in the form of personal wealth, business ownership, and access to regional resources is often transformed into social capital through patronage practices and the distribution of social assistance (Young, 2021). Symbolic capital such as social status, customary titles, or leadership reputation further strengthens political legitimacy in the public eye, and the combination of these three forms of capital enables figures like Aras Tammauni to dominate regional political arenas sustainably and even prepare for family-based power succession.

This phenomenon has serious implications for the quality of local democracy, as it narrows the space for fair political competition and inhibits the emergence of alternative figures outside the ruling network. When power is concentrated within a single family or patronage circle, mechanisms of public oversight and accountability tend to weaken (Yahya, 2025). Political participation among citizens often takes on a transactional nature, relying on direct aid or economic promises from ruling candidates (Noak, 2024). Such conditions create a paradox between the ideals of electoral democracy and the persistence of oligarchic practices operating within local scales of governance.

In Mamuju, the interconnection between bureaucracy, political parties, and business actors forms a political ecosystem highly favorable to *local strongmen*. Many strategic positions within both government and party structures are occupied by individuals directly related to Aras Tammauni or his family members, reinforcing control over public resources. This illustrates that his political success is not merely personal but rather the outcome of an entrenched patronage system at the local level. The hierarchical social structure of the region further consolidates his symbolic legitimacy among communities that continue to value kinship ties and loyalty.

The consolidation of power by *local strongmen* has long-term implications for local governance and institutional performance (Zulueta-Fülscher & Murray, 2025). Research by Casal Bértoa et al. (2024) and Sule (2021) found that regions dominated by entrenched elites tend to exhibit lower fiscal

transparency compared to those with more open political competition. Paradoxically, citizens in such regions often report higher levels of satisfaction due to tangible benefits like infrastructure development and social assistance. This suggests a complex political exchange between public legitimacy and oligarchic control, operating under the formal mechanisms of democracy.

Based on these realities, this study aims to examine how Aras Tammauni, as a *local strongman*, converts economic, social, and symbolic capital into sustainable political power in post-decentralization Indonesia. It also seeks to analyze how these practices contribute to the emergence of political dynasties and influence patterns of political competition at the regency level. This approach is expected to provide a deeper understanding of the relationship between local power structures, capital conversion, and dynastic reproduction within a democratic political system. The case study of Central Mamuju is anticipated to offer an empirical contribution to the international literature on the transformation of local power in developing countries.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study adopts a qualitative descriptive–analytical approach to explore how *local strongmen* convert various forms of capital economic, social, and symbolic into political dominance within Indonesia’s post-decentralization context. The qualitative design enables an in-depth interpretation of political behavior, power structures, and patronage relations embedded in the local democratic process. Data were collected through triangulation methods, combining in-depth interviews, field observations, and documentary analysis. Primary data were obtained from semi-structured interviews with political elites, bureaucrats, community leaders, and party officials in Central Mamuju Regency, while secondary data were drawn from official election records of the General Elections Commission (KPU), regional government documents, and scholarly publications. Central Mamuju was selected as the research site because of its distinctive political dynamics marked by the overwhelming electoral success of Aras Tammauni and the entrenchment of familial networks in local governance.

The analysis employed Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña’s (2002) interactive model, encompassing data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing to derive analytical depth and theoretical insight. Themes such as capital conversion, patronage, and dynastic power were identified through iterative coding and cross-verification among different data sources. The validity of findings was strengthened through data triangulation and member checking, ensuring consistency between field evidence and interpretation. Research ethics were strictly observed by obtaining informed consent, safeguarding participant anonymity, and maintaining neutrality throughout the research process. This methodological design allows for a contextual yet systematic understanding of how *local strongmen* sustain political authority through the interplay of capital and social networks in decentralized Indonesia.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Capital Conversion Mechanisms in Aras Tammauni’s Local Political Dominance

Aras Tammauni effectively mobilized his economic capital through ownership of local assets and privileged access to development resources at the subdistrict and village levels, which he strategically redirected into community empowerment initiatives and public assistance programs to reinforce his image as a benevolent leader among constituents (Yuliarmi et al., 2023). This approach was not merely material distribution but a calculated social support strategy designed to cultivate long-term loyalty and patron–client relationships. His social capital was consolidated through kinship networks, religious figures, customary leaders, and extended family ties, enabling him to reach both traditional rural communities and migrant groups within Central Mamuju. Meanwhile, symbolic capital embodied in the prestige of his family name, longstanding leadership reputation, and recognition through customary titles strengthened his formal and informal legitimacy, ensuring that public support rested not solely on material benefits but also on cultural values and communal recognition. The combination of economic, social, and symbolic capital was deployed systematically to control local institutions such as political parties, village bureaucracies, and local media, allowing Tammauni to effectively limit the entry of rival actors with weaker capital endowments.

Voter behavior studies in Central Mamuju reveal that economic assistance and infrastructure projects initiated by Tammauni before the election were widely perceived as tangible proof of leadership capacity rather than mere campaign promises, reinforcing a sense of reciprocal obligation between citizens and their “provider” (Yusuf, 2023). Emotional and traditional ties rooted in kinship

respect and the historical standing of the Tammauni family were crucial in shaping public perception of him as part of the community he served, rather than a distant political elite. Research by Tjahjoko (2020) found that newly settled migrant voters were particularly responsive to direct aid and social security initiatives but continued to rely on traditional legitimacy, customary titles, and local family recognition as decisive indicators of credibility. The process of capital conversion therefore unfolded not only in formal political arenas but also through cultural interactions, traditional belief systems, and moral expectations framed as communal obligations toward a respected local figure.

The following table presents national data on the electoral success of political dynasty candidates in Indonesia's regional elections, reinforcing the argument that capital conversion significantly increases the probability of electoral victory. This pattern is particularly relevant when contextualized with Aras Tammauni's overwhelming success in Central Mamuju, which exemplifies how the effective interplay of multiple forms of capital translates into enduring political dominance:

Table 1. Trends in the Electoral Success of Political Dynasty Candidates in Indonesia (2015–2020)

Election Waves	Number of Candidates from Dynastic Background	Number of Wins	Winning Rate (%)
2015–2018	202	117	57.9
2020	124	71	57.2

Source: Kompas (2020); Suara Indo (2020)

The data in the table indicate that more than half of candidates with dynastic backgrounds succeeded in regional elections, demonstrating that dynastic capital provides a highly significant advantage; this aligns with the finding that Aras Tammauni utilized his dynastic capital as a source of legitimacy that few non-dynastic contenders could match. While the national success rate of dynastic candidates hovers around 57–58 percent, Tammauni's overwhelming victory in Central Mamuju recorded well above the national average suggests that his local capital, including symbolic prestige and interpersonal networks, provided him with a substantial competitive edge. It is evident that economic capital alone would not have sufficed without the reinforcement of social and symbolic capital; Tammauni skillfully wove these three forms of capital into a mutually reinforcing system of power. Consequently, the empirical pattern observed in Central Mamuju not only exemplifies an extreme case of the national trend but also highlights how, in the local setting, dynastic and network-based capital plays a decisive role in mobilizing electoral support and securing victory.

The mechanisms of control over village bureaucracies and local political parties reveal how social and symbolic capital were translated into institutional authority. The name "Tammauni" occupies a central place in the structure of local party organizations and informal village leadership, serving as a nexus of influence through which public resources are allocated, party endorsements are secured, and loyal candidates are appointed. Patronage practices such as the distribution of development projects and social assistance became key tools of power consolidation, with recipients often belonging to the network of clients who benefitted directly from Tammauni's rule. Field observations indicate that small-scale infrastructure projects in remote villages such as road paving, clean water systems, and public facilities were completed more swiftly in areas supportive of Tammauni than in those aligned with rivals, reinforcing the perception that affiliation with the local elite network yields tangible benefits. His symbolic capital as a provider and cultural leader further strengthened public trust, positioning his leadership not as a mere administrative role but as part of the community's cultural identity and historical continuity.

Although the overall success rate of dynastic candidates is high, dominance is not uniform across all regions, which makes the Central Mamuju case essential for revealing local variation. Factors such as social structure (ethnicity, customary institutions), geography (remoteness and accessibility), and voter characteristics (migrant versus native populations) significantly shape how effectively capital conversion operates. Communities that are less dependent on assistance or more politically aware tend

to reduce the effects of patronage and symbolic appeals, favoring programmatic and competence-based politics. Yet in Central Mamuju, loyalty to local figures and kinship networks remains strong despite growing education levels and media exposure, suggesting that symbolic and social capital continue to play a determinative role in societies where traditional values and customary ties remain deeply rooted.

Field research also shows that Tammauni's economic capital extended beyond personal wealth, flowing through a network of family members and local enterprises. This structure expanded his base of support across business sectors, local trade, and government contractors, providing a steady financial foundation for campaigns and continuous local influence. Such financial power generated a "coattail effect," where public evaluations of government performance manifested in physical infrastructure and welfare programs translated into increased electoral support for candidates within the dynasty in subsequent elections. His strong social and symbolic capital made public criticism of nepotism or patronage less resonant, as these practices were often normalized or justified as cultural traditions. As a result, the political dominance established under his leadership was not confined to a single electoral cycle but was likely to be reproduced in future leadership successions within the same family.

Another crucial element is the role of political parties as mediators of capital conversion. Tammauni successfully secured both local and national party support through his political networks, family name, and incumbency power. Parties in Central Mamuju tended to endorse candidates deemed most electable based on their accumulated capital rather than on ideological or programmatic credentials, facilitating dynastic candidates' access to nominations, campaign financing, and formal legitimacy. Documentary evidence from party archives reveals that Tammauni-aligned candidates were frequently backed by dominant party coalitions and prominently featured in local media coverage. The combination of party endorsement, resource access, and localized networks amplified the effects of capital conversion, ensuring that formal political structures reinforced his informal authority.

Local voters, however, are not entirely passive recipients of elite influence. Communities in Central Mamuju have exhibited various forms of resistance and social accountability, such as through traditional councils, independent local figures, or local media that scrutinize campaign promises and project implementation. Public forums and civic dialogues on the transparency of aid distribution, infrastructure accountability, and public service performance reflect an emerging expectation that political support should correspond to tangible results rather than familial loyalty. These interactions have narrowed the space for purely symbolic dominance and increased demands for performance-based legitimacy. Nonetheless, given the enduring inequalities in capital access, such resistance tends to have limited impact, particularly against candidates who have long maintained entrenched and culturally legitimized networks of power.

Based on the empirical evidence, it can be concluded that the mechanism of capital conversion employed by Aras Tammauni involves several interrelated processes: accumulation of economic capital through asset ownership and local business connections; redistribution of public aid and infrastructure projects; consolidation of social capital through kinship, religious, and customary networks; and preservation of symbolic capital through reputation and traditional titles. The dominance of local political parties and privileged access to formal state resources through incumbency further accelerated the process of capital conversion. Political dynasty formation thus emerges not merely from hereditary succession but from a structural interplay between capital, networks, and symbolic legitimacy embedded within local political systems. The case of Central Mamuju under Aras Tammauni illustrates how these convergent forms of capital produce enduring domination and facilitate family-based political succession within Indonesia's decentralized democratic framework.

The Implications of Political Dynasties for Local Democracy and Political Competition in Central Mamuju

Political dynasties such as the one entrenched in Central Mamuju exert influence not only over the structure of power but also over the broader landscape of political competition, where candidates outside dynastic networks encounter systemic barriers in accessing campaign funding, party endorsements, and local media coverage. Economic, social, and symbolic forms of capital have become decisive variables not merely for electoral victory but also for entry into the electoral arena as candidates deemed "viable" by political parties (Ghaem-Maghani & Kuuire, 2022). These structural constraints reinforce asymmetric competition, compelling non-dynastic challengers to work disproportionately harder to establish credibility equivalent to that of their dynastic counterparts. Consequently, the

political field in Central Mamuju has grown increasingly homogeneous in elite composition, as only those endowed with substantial capital reserves can persist or emerge as contenders within the local democratic framework.

Political dynasties also bear profound implications for transparency and accountability within local governance. When power becomes concentrated within a single family or patronage network, mechanisms of public oversight tend to weaken, as criticism or opposition is often perceived as a threat to loyalty and social stability (Darwich, 2025). Practices surrounding public procurement, village budgeting, and the allocation of regional resources are thus vulnerable to private or familial interests, particularly in contexts where local oversight institutions and civil society actors lack sufficient empowerment. Field observations from local government reports in Central Mamuju reveal that the implementation of infrastructure projects tends to be significantly faster in areas supportive of the ruling elite compared to less loyal districts, while public reporting and external audits are frequently delayed or incomplete. This dynamic suggests that dynastic dominance produces systematic disparities in public service delivery across administrative regions within the same regency, undermining both procedural fairness and distributive equity.

The following table presents national-level data on the rising number of political dynasty candidates in Indonesia's 2024 local elections. These data underscore that the phenomenon extends far beyond isolated cases such as Central Mamuju, reflecting a broader structural trend in Indonesian local politics that provides important context for understanding the persistence of elite reproduction in decentralized governance:

Table 2 Increase in the Number of Political Dynasty Candidates in Indonesia's Local Elections 2024

Election Year	Number of Dynasty-Affiliated Candidates	Total Candidate Pairs	Percentage of Dynasty Candidates (%)
2024	605	3,106	19.5

Source: Kompas (2024); Detik.com (2024); IFAR-UGM PolGov (2024)

The data presented in the table indicate that nearly one in five candidates in Indonesia's 2024 simultaneous local elections had ties to political dynasties, revealing that while dynastic candidates have not yet become a majority, their presence is substantial enough to significantly shape local political dynamics. This finding is particularly relevant for Central Mamuju, where similar patterns reinforce Aras Tammauni's position as a concrete manifestation of this broader national trend. The rising proportion of dynastic candidates compared to previous election cycles demonstrates that structural barriers for non-dynastic contenders not only persist but may have become increasingly entrenched. For these outsiders, political parties act as crucial gatekeepers, and access to symbolic capital and social networks becomes indispensable for mounting viable campaigns. As such, the political dynamics in Central Mamuju cannot be understood in isolation from national pressures and regulatory frameworks that either permit or fail to restrain the entrenchment of dynastic control.

The implications for citizen participation are equally significant. When dynastic candidates dominate the political field, voters often perceive their choices as constrained, not by individual preferences but by elite networks that monopolize candidacy. National surveys show that although dynastic candidates are numerous, public support for them is not always uniform; many citizens express dissatisfaction with the scarcity of credible and independent alternatives. Voters often select dynastic figures not because they embody ideal leadership qualities but because they are viewed as more capable of delivering tangible benefits and ensuring local stability. This dynamic generates a local democratic dilemma the ideals of competition and free choice are curtailed by the structural power of capital and social expectations surrounding the continuity of dynastic rule.

The connection between political dynasties and public service delivery warrants close examination. In many cases, regions aligned with dynastic leaders receive more favorable treatment in terms of infrastructure development, access to clean water, and social welfare assistance, while non-aligned areas experience slower or uneven service provision. Surveys in Central Mamuju indicate that

small-scale infrastructure projects in loyalist villages were completed more rapidly than in areas managed by groups less affiliated with Tammauni's network, despite equal village budgets and official funding allocations. Such disparities create visible socio-political inequality that has been widely criticized by local communities. Over the long term, this fosters a system where political loyalty is sustained not through shared ideology or programmatic alignment, but through the distribution of material benefits a process that perpetuates cycles of patronage and dependency.

Political dynasties also affect leadership regeneration at the local level. Members of the Tammauni family and associated clans are strategically prepared for succession through early public exposure, access to party positions, and appointments to village or regional institutions, with their names promoted through local media long before elections (Kenawas, 2024). Voters consequently become accustomed to familiar surnames and family networks, making name recognition a powerful form of symbolic capital in future contests. If current trends continue, subsequent elections in Central Mamuju will likely feature intra-family succession rather than the emergence of external contenders. This reveals that dynastic politics is not merely about who currently holds power but also about how leadership inheritance is institutionally managed to preserve capital continuity and network control.

Regulatory frameworks, both local and national, play a crucial role in shaping how political dynasties operate. Rules regarding term limits, campaign transparency, and the eligibility of incumbents or candidates with kinship ties can either constrain or enable dynastic dominance. Across many regions, these regulations remain weak, inconsistently enforced, and inadequately monitored by external actors such as the media and civil society organizations. In Central Mamuju, formal regulations concerning nepotism or dynastic candidacy do not explicitly restrict family-based succession, allowing political inheritance to proceed unimpeded. More stringent regulatory reforms and active public oversight are therefore essential to maintain a competitive and fair local democracy.

The impact of dynastic politics on local democracy also extends to public perception and political legitimacy. When electoral processes are perceived as formalities constrained by elite networks, public trust in political institutions tends to erode. Both national and local studies have found growing skepticism among citizens regarding whether local elections genuinely offer meaningful choices or merely reproduce existing power structures. Yet, empirical evidence from Central Mamuju suggests that when governance yields tangible outcomes such as improved roads, social assistance, and public security dynastic legitimacy becomes more widely accepted, even amid criticism. This demonstrates that legitimacy in local politics is derived not solely from procedural democracy but also from the government's performative capacity to meet citizens' basic needs and deliver visible development.

The implications of political dynasties in Central Mamuju reveal that while procedural democracy continues to function, the substantive dimensions of political competition, accountability, and equality of opportunity are constrained by systemic capital conversion practices. If the national trend reflected in the 2024 data persists, Central Mamuju is likely to experience continued dynastic succession within entrenched family networks. Meaningful reform requires stronger local policy interventions and more active civil society engagement to expand opportunities for non-dynastic candidates and render local democracy more inclusive and responsive. Strengthening campaign finance transparency, restricting kinship-based candidacies, and reinforcing public monitoring mechanisms must form part of any long-term strategy to prevent the perpetuation of oligarchic dominance under the guise of democratic participation.

CONCLUSION

The case of Aras Tammauni in Central Mamuju demonstrates that post-decentralization local politics in Indonesia is characterized not by the diffusion of power but by its reconcentration within networks of capital, kinship, and symbolic legitimacy. The study reveals that Tammauni's political ascendancy is sustained through a systematic process of capital conversion transforming economic resources into social and symbolic power that, in turn, reinforces political authority. His dominance exemplifies how local strongmen can institutionalize control through bureaucratic patronage, party alliances, and community dependence, transforming democratic mechanisms into instruments of oligarchic reproduction. The interplay of capital accumulation, social networks, and cultural recognition thus forms a durable architecture of power that transcends electoral cycles and legitimizes dynastic succession.

At a broader level, the entrenchment of dynastic politics in Central Mamuju highlights the structural limitations of Indonesia's decentralized democracy, where procedural participation coexists with substantive inequality in political opportunity. While local elections continue to provide the façade of democratic competition, asymmetrical access to capital, party endorsement, and social legitimacy perpetuates elite continuity and constrains citizen choice. To preserve democratic integrity, institutional reforms must strengthen transparency in campaign financing, regulate kinship-based candidacies, and empower civic oversight mechanisms capable of counterbalancing entrenched family networks. Only through such structural and normative transformation can local democracy evolve from a vehicle of dynastic perpetuation into a genuinely inclusive system of political representation.

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