

## **POLITICAL CLIQUES AND THE FORMATION OF POLITICAL PARTY COALITIONS: A Study Of The “Banten Maju” Coalition In The 2024 Banten Gubernatorial Elections**

Glenn Kevin Immanuel<sup>1</sup>  
Muradi<sup>2</sup>  
Caroline Paskarina<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1,2,3</sup>Universitas Padjadjaran  
Jln. Ir. Soekarno KM.21 Jatinangor, Sumedang, Jawa Barat, Indonesia

Correspondence Email: [glenkevingiri@gmail.com](mailto:glenkevingiri@gmail.com)

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### **ABSTRACT**

This study examines the influence of political cliques on the formation of the *Banten Maju* Coalition in the 2024 Banten Gubernatorial Elections. Using the concept of political cliques as the analytical framework, this research adopts a qualitative approach based on four in-depth interviews with regional party leaders from Gerindra, PKS, PAN, and PSI, conducted between March and June 2024. Secondary sources, including party documents, media reports, and academic literature, supported the primary data. The findings reveal that the formation of the *Banten Maju* Coalition was not grounded in ideological alignment or shared political platforms but was instead structured by pragmatic, elite-centered networks of patronage operating across party lines. Central party elites and key clique figures played decisive roles in determining candidate selection and coalition strategies, with limited involvement from lower-level party members. This study contributes to coalition theory by revealing how informal clique networks, rather than institutional or ideological cohesion, drive subnational coalition formation in Indonesia's regional politics.

**Keywords:** Banten; Political Clique; Banten Maju Coalition.

### **INTRODUCTION**

Regional elections represent a genuine form of direct democracy, enabling citizens to elect their regional leaders directly (Anggoro et al., 2020). In practice, political parties actively participate in regional elections to assert their presence, a crucial aspect of the democratic process. (Anggoro et al., 2020). One of the critical decisions made by political parties during these elections is the formation of coalitions.

In the context of gubernatorial elections (Pilgub), party coalitions play a highly strategic role, as they enable parties to pool their voter bases, resources, and political networks (Tomsa, 2008). The size of a coalition and the number of parties involved influence the diversity of interests represented in the decision-making process. Within these coalitions, dominant and subordinate groups often emerge, leading to the formation of political cliques.

Political cliques are small groups within political parties that possess specific interests and agendas, acting as key players in coalition formation. These cliques can significantly influence political processes and decision-making (Bensman & Vidich, 1962). According to Boissevain (1974), two leading indicators signal the emergence of a clique:

first, the objective interconnection among clique members; and second, the shared recognition of a common identity by both members and non-members. This theoretical framework helps explain how informal networks and personal relationships within parties can determine coalition dynamics, often beyond formal institutional mechanisms. However, despite extensive discussions on the sociological basis of cliques, limited research explores how these informal power structures operate in regional coalition-building—particularly in the context of local elections in Indonesia, such as the 2024 Banten Gubernatorial Elections. This study aims to fill that gap by analyzing how political cliques influence coalition formation within the “Banten Maju” alliance.

In gubernatorial elections, political cliques can influence a party’s decision to join a coalition, select candidates, and develop campaign strategies (Chalik, 2017). The presence of political cliques can result in the emergence of informal power structures that operate outside formal mechanisms, with influential individuals often acting behind the scenes.

The province of Banten exhibits distinct political characteristics shaped by the enduring influence of political dynasties, inter-party fragmentation, and the prominence of local issues in shaping voter behavior (Mietzner, 2013). In the 2024 Banten Gubernatorial Elections, the contest between Andra Soni–Dimiyati Natakusumah and Airin Rachmy Diany–Ade Sumardi pairs reflects these dynamics. Both tickets represent competing coalition blocs that illustrate how elite alliances and clique-based networks determine coalition formation and electoral competition in the region. While the Airin–established political forces back the Ade pair, the Andra–Dimiyati ticket emerges as a coalition driven by broader inter-party collaboration.

However, this large coalition also brings potential drawbacks. In comparative perspective, studies on coalition politics highlight that coalition durability and internal coherence often depend not only on institutional design but also on the distribution of power and policy preferences among coalition partners (Laver & Schofield, 1990; Strøm, 1995; Benoit & Laver, 2006). Such dynamics are similarly evident in Indonesia’s local political context, where grand coalitions frequently emerge from pragmatic negotiations rather than ideological consensus. Consequently, loyalty to the leader cannot always be assumed, even when leaders share power with coalition partners as a form of reciprocity. Moreover, within these broad alliances, continuous bargaining over cabinet or bureaucratic appointments often leads to competition over resource allocation and influence (Slater, 2018).

Previous studies have shown that in Indonesia, political coalitions are often formed based on pragmatic power-sharing interests rather than ideological alignment (Slater, 2018). This tendency results in frequent changes in coalition composition during each election cycle. Ideally, coalitions should demonstrate greater stability to ensure adequate checks and balances within government. However, unlike previous studies that primarily focus on national-level coalition dynamics, this research examines the micro-level interactions among political cliques that shape coalition formation at the regional level. By focusing on the “Banten Maju” coalition in the 2024 Banten Gubernatorial Elections, this study provides a

new perspective on how informal relationships and clique-based strategies influence local coalition stability and political bargaining.

Furthermore, the formation of coalitions based on shared party ideology would better align policy programs with the coalition's ideological goals and reduce friction among parties and between regional leaders and their deputies (Muhajir et al., 2021).

Other research highlights the significant influence of political dynasties and oligarchies on local political decisions (Susanti, 2017), while additional studies emphasize the importance of candidate resources, leadership, campaign strategy, and funding in coalition formation (Caswell, 2009). Building on these findings, this study focuses on how political cliques influence coalition formation in gubernatorial elections, particularly in Banten. It aims to explore how these small groups within parties make coalition-building decisions.

Based on the issues and previous studies outlined earlier, this research assumes that the formation of the Banten Maju Coalition in the 2024 Banten gubernatorial election is not rooted in ideological similarity or shared political platforms, but rather influenced by elite political cliques such as Prabowo Subianto through Sufmi Dasco Ahmad, Jokowi through Kaesang Pangarep, and Jazuli Juwaini. The coalition's formation appears to be driven primarily by pragmatic considerations, including power interests, access to resources, and elite influence. In this research, political cliques are conceptualized as informal networks of political elites who operate within and across party institutions to pursue strategic objectives, shape coalition dynamics, and maintain control over political resources.

Therefore, it is crucial to examine the role of political cliques in shaping the formation of the Banten Maju Coalition during the 2024 Banten gubernatorial election. While existing studies, such as Slater (2018) and Mietzner (2013), have extensively analyzed elite networks and party oligarchies in Indonesia, they primarily focus on national-level dynamics and the consolidation of power within central party elites. However, the specific mechanisms through which localized political cliques operate to influence inter-party coalition formation at the regional level, particularly how personal, familial, and patronage-based ties shape coalition bargaining, remain underexplored. This study aims to fill that gap by examining how these clique practices manifest in the Banten political arena, offering a contextual understanding of subnational coalition-building that expands theoretical discussions on elite politics in Indonesia's decentralized electoral landscape.

## **RESEARCH METHOD**

This study employs a qualitative research approach to examine the impact of political cliques on the formation of party coalitions in the 2024 Banten Gubernatorial Election. The unit of analysis is the group, specifically the Banten Maju Coalition and its constituent parties: Gerindra, PKS, PAN, and PSI, with Gerindra and PKS as the main supporting parties and PAN and PSI as coalition partners.

**Data Collection.** Primary data were obtained through semi-structured interviews with five informants, comprising the chairpersons or senior representatives of each party's Regional Leadership Council (DPD/DPW) in Banten. Each interview lasted approximately 45–60 minutes, conducted between May and July 2024. Secondary data included academic literature on political cliques and coalitions, journal articles, journalistic reports, political party statutes (AD/ART), and official documents related to the Banten Maju Coalition. These materials provided theoretical grounding and served as triangulation to enhance validity.

**Data Coding and Analysis.** The data were analyzed using thematic analysis, focusing on identifying recurring patterns and categories related to the influence of political cliques in coalition formation. Coding was conducted manually through three stages: (1) data reduction, by selecting relevant interview and document excerpts; (2) categorization, by grouping codes into themes such as elite influence, patronage networks, and inter-party negotiation; and (3) interpretation, by linking empirical findings to theoretical frameworks on elite and clique politics.

**Researcher Positionality and Limitations.** The researcher acknowledges limited access to elite actors, which constrained direct observation of high-level decision-making processes. Consequently, the analysis relies partly on secondary data to complement the insights gained from interviews. While this approach ensures data triangulation, it may limit the depth of internal party dynamics that can be captured. The researcher maintained a neutral stance throughout the data collection and interpretation process, minimizing personal bias and ensuring analytical objectivity.

## **RESULT AND DISCUSSION**

### **The Dynamics of Political Coalitions in the Gubernatorial Election**

Before the formation of coalitions in the 2024 gubernatorial election, each political party and individual political actor expressed their interest in the candidacy process as prospective candidates for the 2024 Banten Governor election. This interest generally arose from public attitudes toward the track records of the prospective candidates, as well as the party figures deemed suitable to fill the candidate positions in the 2024 Banten gubernatorial election. Among the prospective candidates were individuals who had previously held leadership roles in Banten or within the province.

At least eight prospective candidates were rumored to be contesting in the candidacy process for the 2024 Banten gubernatorial election. These names were compiled by Litbang Kompas, which conducted an electability survey of the potential candidates for the 2024 Banten gubernatorial election. First, there is Airin Rachmy, who emerged as the strongest candidate in the 2024 gubernatorial race. Airin Rachmy served as the Mayor of South Tangerang from 2011 to 2021 and initially enjoyed high electability, reaching 38.3% of the vote (Suryaningtyas, 2024).

The next prospective candidate is Wahidin Halim, the former Governor of Banten from 2017 to 2022. Wahidin Halim was initially supported by the Nasdem Party and was

elected as a member of the House of Representatives in the 2024 legislative election after contesting in the Banten III electoral district (CNN Indonesia, 2024). According to the survey results compiled by Litbang Kompas, Wahidin Halim ranked second with an electability percentage of 18.1 percent. This figure is below that of Rano Karno, who was Wahidin Halim's opponent in the 2017 Banten gubernatorial election, but higher than Airin Rachmy's score (Suryaningtyas, 2024). Wahidin Halim's strong position as a prospective candidate is attributed to his status as the former governor, making him a familiar figure to the people of Banten.

Another strong prospective candidate in the 2024 gubernatorial election is Rano Karno. Rano Karno has held several key positions in Banten, including Deputy Regent of Tangerang, Deputy Governor of Banten, and later Governor of Banten, succeeding Ratu Atut Choisyah. As a cadre of the Indonesian Democratic Party of Struggle (PDIP), Rano Karno also participated in the 2017 Banten gubernatorial election but was defeated by Wahidin Halim. (CNN Indonesia, 2024).

Another candidate entering the 2024 Banten gubernatorial election is Achmad Dimiyati Natakusumah. Achmad Dimiyati Natakusumah served as the Regent of Pandeglang from 2000 to 2009. Additionally, he has been a member of the Indonesian House of Representatives (DPR-RI) representing the Prosperous Justice Party (PKS) faction since 2009. Owing to this experience, Achmad Dimiyati Natakusumah was initially expected to be nominated by PKS as a prospective candidate for the 2024 Banten gubernatorial election. Furthermore, he also registered his candidacy with the PDIP, PKB, and NasDem parties (CNN Indonesia, 2024). According to the Litbang Kompas survey conducted in mid-2024, Achmad's electability stood at 2.7 percent (Suryaningtyas, 2024).

Other names emerging as prospective candidates for the 2024 Banten gubernatorial election include Arief Wismansyah from the Democratic Party, who participated in the candidate selection processes of PAN, NasDem, and PDIP (CNN Indonesia, 2024). Next is Irma Narulita, who has served as the Regent of Pandeglang since 2016. Following her is Iti Jayabaya, a Democratic Party cadre who served as Regent of Lebak from 2014 to 2023. Lastly, there is Ahmed Zaki Iskandar, who was nominated by Golkar and served as the Regent of Tangerang for the 2018–2023 (CNN Indonesia, 2024).

The 2024 Banten gubernatorial election has been marked by a significant shift in the political landscape, primarily triggered by the actions of the Golkar Party. Airin emerged as one of the strongest prospective candidates in the 2024 Banten gubernatorial election. This strength is underscored by the fact that the Golkar Party officially endorsed her candidacy. Golkar's support not only solidifies Airin's position within the electoral race but also significantly shapes the coalition dynamics in the region. The alliance between Airin and Golkar is expected to be a central focus of political maneuvering and coalition-building efforts in the lead-up to the election. Initially, Golkar endorsed Airin; however, on August 26, 2024, this support shifted to the Andra–Dimiyati pair. This change was formalized through a decree issued directly by the Golkar Party Chairman, Bahlil Lahadalia. Airin, a

Golkar cadre who is part of the Indonesia Maju Coalition in the 2024 Presidential Election and also serves as the Chairperson of the Prabowo-Gibran winning team in Banten, surprisingly did not receive support from the parties within the Indonesia Maju Coalition. Despite Airin's popularity, with an electability rate of 38.3 percent, the highest among Banten gubernatorial candidates (Hutajulu, 2024). The coalition parties chose to back Andra-Dimyati, whose electability was considerably lower.

On August 27, 2024, in a surprising move, Golkar withdrew its support from Andra-Dimyati and issued a recommendation letter endorsing the Airin-Ade pair. This event took place at the Golkar Party Central Executive Board (DPP) office. As a member of the Indonesia Maju Coalition, Golkar then formed a political alliance with PDIP for the 2024 Banten gubernatorial contest, jointly endorsing Airin-Ade as the candidates for governor and deputy governor. The shift in Golkar's support from Andra Soni-Dimyati to Airin-Ade was influenced by pressure from senior Golkar figures. The Secretary-General of DPW PSI Banten stated that Jusuf Kalla, Aburizal Bakrie, and other Golkar seniors did not want Airin to be "hijacked" by PDIP. Initially, PDIP had supported Airin by pairing her with Ade as the deputy gubernatorial candidate. However, their plan was hindered by Article 40 of the 2016 Regional Election Law, which sets a nomination threshold of 20 percent of DPRD seats or 25 percent of the valid votes from the previous legislative election. Political dynamics shifted following the Constitutional Court's ruling No. 60/PUU-XXII/2024 on August 20, 2024, which allowed PDIP to nominate Airin-Ade independently in the 2024 Banten gubernatorial election. (Tempo.Co, 2024).

Before the issuance of this Constitutional Court decision, which enabled PDIP to field its own candidates, PDIP and PKS were at risk of being sidelined and forced to join the Banten Maju Coalition. However, after the ruling, PDIP confidently nominated Airin-Ade in the election. This development triggered a realignment in Banten's political landscape ahead of the gubernatorial election, as evidenced by Golkar's shift in support from Andra-Dimyati to Airin-Ade (Tim detikcom, 2024).

Several political parties initially intended to nominate their own cadres as gubernatorial candidates. For example, the Democrat Party sought to advance former Tangerang Mayor Arief Wismansyah, while PKS aimed to nominate Dimyati Natakusumah. However, the political map changed following intense lobbying by the central executive boards (DPP) of the respective parties after the Constitutional Court ruled on the nomination threshold. This triggered responses from political parties that altered their strategies based on various considerations and discussions, including the issuance of candidate selection forms within the parties (Nababan, 2024).

For instance, PSI initially intended to support Airin in the Banten gubernatorial election and to nominate a PSI cadre as her running mate. However, political lobbying conducted by Dimyati Natakusumah in coordination with Kaesang Pangarep, the PSI Chairman, led to a shift. Despite ideological differences between Dimyati and PSI, shared

political interests ultimately led PSI to support Dimiyati as the deputy gubernatorial candidate for Banten fully.

These shifting alliances eventually culminated in the emergence of two major coalitions that would contest the 2024 Banten gubernatorial election. The findings reveal that the formation of the *Banten Maju* and *Banten Maju Bersama* coalitions reflects the dominance of elite-driven alliances rather than ideological coherence. The Airin Rachmy Diany–Ade Sumardi pair was officially nominated by the Indonesian Democratic Party of Struggle (PDIP) and the Golkar Party, with support from several non-parliamentary parties, including the Labor Party, PKN, Gelora Party, and Ummat Party. This coalition, known as *Banten Maju Bersama*, collectively holds 28 seats in the Banten Regional House of Representatives (DPRD), with 14 seats from PDIP and 14 from Golkar. In contrast, the Andra Soni–Dimiyati Natakusumah pair is backed by the *Banten Maju* coalition, consisting of ten political parties: Gerindra, PKS, Demokrat, NasDem, PKB, PAN, PPP, PSI, Garuda, and Prima. Together, these parties command around 72 percent of the DPRD seats. This numerical dominance positions the *Banten Maju* coalition as a structurally stronger bloc, suggesting a pragmatic alignment among party elites to secure political stability and maintain influence in provincial governance.

### **The Influence of Political Cliques in the Formation of the Banten Maju Coalition 2024**

It is undeniable that the formation of the large Banten Maju Coalition was strongly influenced by political cliques operating across both national and local levels. This dynamic can be observed through elite interconnections linking national leaders and local actors. For instance, Prabowo Subianto, as Chairman of the Gerindra Party, exercised decisive influence over the coalition by endorsing the Andra–Dimiyati pair (Hakim, 2024). Through Sufmi Dasco Ahmad, Gerindra’s Committee Chairman, Prabowo directly facilitated the appointment of Raffi Ahmad as the head of the campaign team, illustrating how hierarchical patronage networks shape coalition strategies. Similarly, Jokowi’s informal network, facilitated by Kaesang Pangarep, also strengthened Dimiyati’s political positioning. To better conceptualize these elite relations, a schematic diagram mapping clique linkages—such as Prabowo → Dasco → Raffi Ahmad and Jokowi → Kaesang → Dimiyati—is proposed to visually demonstrate the overlapping structures of influence within the Banten Maju Coalition.

The appointment of Raffi Ahmad by Sufmi Dasco was confirmed by H. Gembong Sumedi, Chairman of the PKS Banten Regional Leadership Board (DPW). The rationale behind appointing Raffi Ahmad as the head of the Andra Soni–Dimiyati campaign team was to attract female voters. Although Raffi Ahmad did not determine the political strategies used to win the election, his popularity served as a magnet to garner votes. This was also acknowledged by Andra Soni, who stated that Raffi Ahmad’s fame as a senior celebrity and founder of the entertainment business group RANS Entertainment positively influenced the popularity of the Andra Soni–Dimiyati pair, which had previously lagged far behind the

Airin–Ade pair. Moreover, Raffi Ahmad’s celebrity status and his business ventures through RANS Entertainment made it easier for the public to recognize both Raffi Ahmad and the candidates he supported. Raffi Ahmad’s involvement significantly contributed to increasing the electability and acceptability of the Andra Soni–Dimiyati pair.

Strategic decisions within the Banten Maju Coalition are made by a select few elites, with Sufmi Dasco being the most influential figure in determining the coalition’s political strategy. As the right hand of President Prabowo, Dasco plays a crucial role in directing the coalition’s course. Andra Soni and Dimiyati do not have full authority in making strategic political decisions. This was conveyed by PSI, stating that the gubernatorial and deputy gubernatorial candidates only receive directives from a Special Team tasked with designing the winning strategy for Andra Soni–Dimiyati. Not all political parties within the Banten Maju Coalition are involved in this team; only a select few elites, including Sufmi Dasco Ahmad and Jazuli Juwaini, determine the coalition’s political strategy.

In a written response, Andra Soni revealed that the Banten Maju Coalition is a derivative of the Indonesia Maju Coalition. The correlation between Banten Maju and Indonesia Maju Plus is very close, grounded in the history of Prabowo Subianto’s consistent victories in Banten across three presidential elections. Furthermore, PKS, PSI, and PAN explained that the formation of the Banten Maju Coalition aims to align central government programs with regional governance.

H. Gembong Sumedi explained that the 2024 Banten gubernatorial contest is an agenda set by Sufmi Dasco. From PKS’s perspective, the Banten Maju Coalition is closely tied to the current central government led by Prabowo Subianto. Specifically, PKS joined the coalition not based on the figure of Andra Soni but instead on who currently holds the most power. At present, the most powerful party is Gerindra.

Similarly, PAN joined the Banten Maju Coalition due to historical factors. According to Syamsuddin Idris, Deputy Chair of the DPW PAN Banten, PAN has supported Prabowo Subianto for 25 years and claims to be the political party most trusted by Prabowo in the current political dynamics. PAN’s entry into the coalition is based on the trust Prabowo has placed in PAN to manage the central government.

In contrast to PAN and PKS, PSI views the formation of the Banten Maju Coalition as heavily influenced by Jokowi’s intervention. PSI considers Jokowi’s change of the direct regional election system before the presidential election as a key factor in the coalition’s formation. According to PSI Banten Secretary-General Heyneken Pandapotan Purba, PSI represents Jokowi within the Banten Maju Coalition. Although PSI holds only three seats in the Banten DPRD, it wields considerable influence within the coalition. This influence is evidenced by specific commitments made between Dimiyati, the gubernatorial candidate, and Kaesang Pangarep, the Chairman of PSI. PSI even regards Dimiyati as a “PSI member dressed in PKS attire.” These claims demonstrate PSI’s strong bargaining power, showing that ideological differences among political parties do not hinder the formation of the Banten Maju Coalition.



The influence of political cliques in shaping the coalition is also inseparable from the internal party system. The mechanisms within political parties support the formation of the Banten Maju Coalition in the 2024 gubernatorial election. Andra Soni stated that ideological differences among coalition parties do not pose an obstacle because political goals have already been resolved at the central level of each party. Furthermore, consolidation among parties in the coalition is facilitated by shared electoral strategies in Banten. The coalition was formed by various parties to defeat the electoral dominance of Golkar and PDIP, which have strong electoral bases in Banten. Moreover, the coalition was initiated by Gerindra, which performed strongly in the 2024 Legislative and Presidential Elections, making it crucial for Gerindra to maintain its electability in Banten. (Akbar, 2024).

As a main supporting party, PKS also explained that its political direction is determined at the central level. The PKS DPW only conducts candidate selection and cannot decide the political direction at the local level; all decisions are centralized at the PKS DPP. This is similar to PAN. In determining gubernatorial and deputy gubernatorial candidates, the PAN DPW has no authority and only follows instructions from the PAN DPP, which are then passed down to the regional level. PAN DPW only conducts candidate screening. However, unlike PKS DPW, which initially wanted to nominate Dimiyati as deputy governor, PAN DPW directly supports Andra Soni without regard to the deputy candidate. This reflects PAN's loyalty to Prabowo Subianto, with PAN considering itself always in coalition with Gerindra.

The same applies to PSI. The PSI DPW also lacks the authority to determine candidates and only screens candidates to propose to the PSI DPP. PSI Chairman Kaesang Pangarep determines PSI's direction to join the Banten Maju Coalition. PSI DPW merely implements direct instructions from Kaesang Pangarep. PSI DPW stated that Kaesang's political decisions in Banten were made under the guidance and knowledge of Jokowi.

The dominance of political cliques in the Banten Maju Coalition illustrates how elite networks can override formal party mechanisms. Decisions that should have been made collectively through party congresses or regional consultations were instead concentrated in the hands of a few central figures, Prabowo, Dasco, Kaesang, and Jokowi, who functioned as power brokers. This dynamic aligns with Mosca and Pareto's elite theory, which posits that political power tends to circulate among a small, interconnected elite rather than through institutionalized structures. Consequently, local party organizations such as DPW PAN, PKS, and PSI lost their autonomy, transforming into mere executors of central directives. This pattern reveals that the strength of political cliques in Indonesia stems from personalized authority and patron-client linkages, which often supersede the formal hierarchy of party institutions.

#### **The Impact of Political Cliques on the Banten Maju Coalition in the Banten Gubernatorial Election 2024**

The formation of political cliques within the Banten Maju Coalition emerged through informal negotiations among elite actors from Gerindra, PKS, PAN, and PSI. These cliques were not institutionalized structures but rather networks based on mutual interests, personal loyalty, and reciprocal exchanges of political resources. The process began when Gerindra's regional leadership initiated a series of closed-door discussions with PKS and PAN to secure a unified gubernatorial candidate. In these meetings, party elites, local business figures, and political strategists formed a core circle that shaped coalition agreements, including the division of campaign responsibilities, candidate pairing, and power-sharing arrangements in post-election governance.

Within this coalition, Gerindra and PKS played dominant roles as core cliques, controlling strategic decisions and resource distribution. At the same time, PAN and PSI functioned as supporting cliques that strengthened the coalition's legitimacy and outreach. The relationship pattern among these groups reflected a hierarchical but cooperative structure: Gerindra acted as the agenda setter, PKS provided organizational and ideological reinforcement. At the same time, PAN and PSI contributed to grassroots mobilization and media engagement. This balance of roles allowed the coalition to integrate both elite-level coordination and public-oriented campaigning effectively.

Empirical findings indicate that the Andra-Dimyati candidacy was the outcome of these clique negotiations. Their pairing represented the compromise between Gerindra's preference for a technocratic figure and PKS's interest in a candidate with religious credentials. This elite consensus translated into cohesive campaign messaging, efficient coordination, and broad-based public appeal. The coalition's success in winning 55.88 percent of the total votes demonstrates how clique-based cooperation can consolidate fragmented party interests into a unified political force.

From a theoretical perspective, the structure and operation of these political cliques align with classical elite theory as articulated by Gaetano Mosca and Vilfredo Pareto, who argue that political power tends to concentrate within small, organized minorities capable of coordinating collective action more effectively than the masses. In the context of the Banten Maju Coalition, these elites, though formally representing different parties, function as an interconnected ruling minority that shapes decision-making and political outcomes through shared interests and reciprocal influence. This dynamic resonates with Pareto's notion of the circulation of elites, as emerging figures within the coalition (such as local business leaders and young politicians from PSI) enter the elite circle through negotiated alliances rather than traditional dynastic inheritance.

Furthermore, the findings can also be interpreted through the lens of the network theory of power, which conceptualizes power not as a possession but as a relational structure distributed through interactions and exchanges (Castells, 2011). The Banten Maju Coalition exemplifies this model, as political cliques form nodes within a broader network that connects national-level party leadership with regional political actors and social organizations. Power is thus exercised through the capacity to maintain and navigate these interdependent

networks, allowing coalition leaders to coordinate resources, control narratives, and influence electoral behavior.

However, the consolidation of elite control through political cliques also raises critical implications for party institutionalization and democratic accountability. While these networks enhance coordination and efficiency in coalition-building, they simultaneously weaken the participatory mechanisms within parties. Decision-making becomes top-down, dominated by elite bargains rather than deliberation among party cadres or voters. This weakens internal democracy and entrenches personalized power structures. In the long term, such dominance of informal elite networks may erode institutional trust, as electoral success increasingly depends on elite negotiation rather than ideological coherence or grassroots participation.

Moreover, the emergence of the Banten Maju Coalition marked a significant shift in Banten's political landscape, which had long been dominated by dynastic networks tied to Golkar and PDIP (Nurfaisal & Sari Inrinofita, 2025). The political cliques within Banten Maju introduced a new power configuration, where leadership was distributed through negotiated alliances rather than inherited lineage. This dynamic generated optimism among voters, reflected in the increased voter turnout from 62.78 percent in 2017 to 66.19 percent in 2024 (Mahmud & Supriyadi, 2025). The study's findings thus reveal that political cliques function not only as drivers of coalition formation but also as mechanisms of elite adaptation and democratic renewal, bridging the gap between hierarchical power structures and participatory electoral mobilization.

## CONCLUSION

This study finds that the formation of the *Banten Maju* Coalition in the 2024 Banten gubernatorial election was not driven by ideological similarity or shared political platforms among its member parties. Instead, the coalition emerged through pragmatic negotiations structured by elite political cliques operating at the national and regional levels. These cliques comprise small groups of political elites who possess access to strategic resources, power networks, and decision-making authority, enabling them to influence coalition dynamics beyond formal party mechanisms.

Theoretically, this study extends coalition theory by demonstrating that subnational coalitions in Indonesia are structured and sustained by elite cliques that act as *informal coordination mechanisms* between and within political parties. This finding highlights that the stability of regional coalitions does not depend solely on institutional or ideological coherence, but instead on the embedded networks of trust, reciprocity, and informal negotiation that bind political elites together. In doing so, this study contributes to the growing literature on political sociology and elite politics in post-decentralization Indonesia by offering an analytical framework that links informal political behavior to formal coalition outcomes.

Empirically, the findings reveal that central executive boards (*DPP*) and key national figures such as Prabowo Subianto, Kaesang Pangarep, and Jazuli Juwaini played a decisive role in shaping the *Banten Maju* Coalition's formation and candidate endorsement process. This top-down dominance indicates that loyalty to elite networks often outweighs local representation or programmatic vision. While such coordination ensures short-term coalition cohesion, it simultaneously perpetuates the influence of informal power structures, limiting opportunities for participatory political development at the local level.

From a policy standpoint, the results suggest that internal party reform is necessary to reduce overdependence on elite patronage networks. Strengthening internal democratic mechanisms such as transparent candidate selection, regional decision-making autonomy, and program-based coalition agreements could enhance accountability and improve the quality of coalition governance. In addition, reinforcing local political institutions and empowering regional branches of political parties can balance the influence of centralized elites and promote more programmatic, citizen-oriented coalition politics.

However, this study acknowledges several limitations. The research primarily focuses on the coalition formation process leading up to the 2024 election. It does not yet capture the post-election governance performance of the elected Andra-Dimyati administration, which will take office in 2025. Future studies should therefore examine how clique-based coalition structures influence policy implementation, governance accountability, and intra-coalition conflict management after the election. Longitudinal and comparative research across different provinces would also provide deeper insights into whether the clique-centered coalition pattern observed in Banten represents a broader trend in Indonesian subnational politics.

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