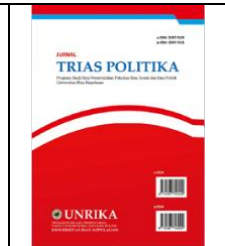


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Journal Homepage : <https://www.journal.unrika.ac.id/index.php/jurnaltriaspolitika>STREET INFORMAL CONTROL: PARKING, THUGGERY NETWORKS, AND
LOCAL POWER IN URBAN INDONESIARaegen Harahap^{1*}, Devi Desmiwar², Mujiburrahman³^{1, 2}, Faculty of Economic and Social Science, Universitas Negeri Sultan Syarif Kasi, Indonesia³ Faculty of International Relations, Gujarat University, India

Abstract: : This study explores the phenomenon of political thuggery in the management of parking business in Pekanbaru City through a patron-client perspective. In the parking business, the patron-client relationship involves political actors, government officials, and thugs forming a network of mutual benefits. This practice has an impact on increasing social injustice and hampers transparent parking governance. This study uses a qualitative approach with data collection techniques in the form of in-depth interviews, observations, and document analysis. The results of the study showed that patrons provided legal and political protection to clients who were in charge of managing and securing parking areas informally. This study recommends the digitization of the parking system, strengthening regulations, and the involvement of civil society to break the chain of thuggery. This reform is expected to create fairer and more sustainable parking governance.

Keywords : politics of thuggery, parking business, patron-client, city of pekanbaru, parking governance.

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INTRODUCTION

Ahead of Hari Raya 2025, the number of cities in Indonesia, the practice of drunkenness under the guise of tradition has resurfaced. For example, in Bekasi City, business actors complained about requests for "THR allotment" from a number of individuals on behalf of community organizations (Kompas.com, 2025). There was no official letter, no clear legal basis only demands delivered in half-threatening language and pretexts of social solidarity. This phenomenon is not just an act of individual deviance, but part of a pattern of informal power that thrives in the midst of institutional neglect. By relying on the identity symbols of CSOs and cultural proximity, the practice of "forced THR" became a socially legalized, albeit legally illegal, mechanism. Behind this seemingly trivial ritual is hidden an informal network of power that emphasizes the grip of thuggery in the city's public spaces. This kind of practice is not just a form of making a living, but a reflection of a culture of wild power that is institutionalized in the form of pseudo-traditions. By taking refuge under the pretext of annual customs, "THR parking" becomes a tool to normalize illegal levies that take advantage of citizens' negligence and institutional neglect (Prayudi, 2025). Furthermore, this story also reveals a paradox in the relationship between civil society and civil society organizations in Indonesia an irony that does not occur in just one region. On the one hand, CSOs are imagined as part of the power of civil society that bridges the voices of citizens with the state. But on the other hand, in practice, some CSOs are integrated with informal power and turn into pressure actors who practice drunkenness under the guise of social tradition. The phenomenon of "forced THR" carried out by CSOs shows how institutions that are supposed to be pillars of

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democracy are trapped in clientelistic practices and street power. This paradox confirms that the line between civilian representation and extortion can become blurred when it is not accompanied by legal oversight and strict institutional restrictions.

The story in the city of Bekasi is not much different from the city of Pekanbaru. In recent years, Pekanbaru has gone from being a symbol of urban progress once dubbed the City of Adventurer (*Bahasa Indonesia as Kota Bertuah*) to a city that is often satirically labeled as the "city of a million parking attendants." This transformation is not just semantic. This reflects the increasing influence of informal actors often organized gangs or "which, under the protection or tacit approval of certain state actors, have dominated lucrative urban sectors such as parking management. Social media platforms are sometimes filled with citizen complaints about increased parking fees, extortion, or even intimidation. But beyond the digital noise, little has changed. The actors responsible for order are often embedded in the networks that maintain chaos. This paradox reflects a broader pattern observed in other parts of Indonesia, where informal networking is not only tolerated but also instrumentalized by political elites. Just as digital platforms in Myanmar oscillate between tools for democratic resistance and machines of ethnic hatred, so too are local actors in Pekanbaru exploiting systems meant to serve the public such as parking infrastructure for personal and political gain. Behind the layers of local regulation and income generation is a complex client protective structure, where it functions as a grassroots enforcer while political patrons offer impunity and access to space. In other words, Pekanbaru is not only facing parking governance issues, but also the dilemma between formal law and informal practices that are increasingly rampant.

In the study of urban politics and informal economy in post-New Order Indonesia, scholars have consistently highlighted the strengthening of the practice of thuggery as a political tool in the governance and control of public space (Klinken & Aspinall, 2011; I. D. Wilson, 2015). The study highlights two main approaches to understanding political economy: political-institutional protection and protective-client relationships. The first approach, as presented in Wilson's early works (Wilson, 2006; Wilson, 2013, 2015), emphasizes the role of the state in maintaining the network as an informal extension of formal authority. These actors are not only tolerated, but often mobilized to maintain political stability or provide security alternatives in the midst of weak state institutions. This approach is institutional because it sees forces rooted in a state-facilitated system of impunity. Through legal ambiguity and protection from political elites and law enforcement officials, it gains dominance over territory and economic resources, especially in lucrative urban sectors such as parking and nightlife security. The second approach, derived from patron-client theory (Scott, 1972), views the relationship between local elites (patrons) and grassroots actors such as parking attendants (clients) as a reciprocal relationship that is firmly embedded in local political culture. acting as "clients" who manage parking areas and collect levies, while "protectors" made up of bureaucrats, politicians and security forces provide legal and political protection. This relationship benefits both parties, creating a stable informal governance system even outside the framework of formal legality. In this context, the management of illegal parking has become a de facto form of government in urban public spaces. Furthermore, Klinken & Aspinall (2011) remind that thuggery is not understood solely as a criminal pathology. Instead, they see that these networks often contribute to political stability, serving as intermediaries in a system of government that blends legality and illegality. As with incumbent studies that highlight power and vulnerability, the literature on thuggery also acknowledges the dual role of informal actors: undermining formal governance but at the same time filling the void of state function. Empirical studies confirm these relational dynamics. For example, Samsa (2019) notes how the Kaaba Youth Movement in Yogyakarta, with the support of a strong political network, managed parking in public spaces as part of a "shadow state" mechanism. Similarly, Mudhoffir (2022) notes that in North Sumatra, thuggery has shifted from electoral violence to land and business-related

violence, in line with changes in political incentives and economic pressures. These findings emphasize the geographically and sectorally specific nature of the informal political economy in the context of post-Suharto Indonesia.

In the context of parking management in Pekanbaru, this is a typical illustration of the encounter between informal coercion, formal delegation, and political patronage. Unlike Jakarta or Yogyakarta where the network has been organized in the form of a large organization, thuggery in Pekanbaru is more fragmented but highly integrated in daily governance practices. Therefore, this study fills an important gap by analyzing how the local patron-client structure works in a decentralized central city, where parking syndicates serve as economic actors as well as informal political control tools. This literature shows that, like incumbents, it cannot be understood in black and white as a mere advantage or disadvantage; rather, it is a contextual political mechanism, shaped by institutional arrangements, socio-political networks, and local power imbalances (Müller, 2013). The survival of such networks in parking management in Indonesia highlights the serious challenges of building transparent and accountable urban governance amid strong informal power relations. As such, it highlights the dual roles of actors and proxies simultaneously feared and empowered, disruptive and instrumental (Walters et al., 2021). The findings suggest that informal parking governance through coercion and collusion is not just a failure of state capacity but a deliberate arrangement that benefits those at both ends of the patronage ladder. In areas where governance is increasingly mediated through both formal institutions and informal mechanisms, understanding this symbiosis is critical. Just like the contested terrain of political utility, the story of the Pekanbaru parking syndicate illustrates a deeper ambivalence: the same network that promises order and service is the one most responsible for the chaos and exclusion. Within this ambivalent space between legitimacy and lawlessness urban thuggery flourishes.

In the last five years, academic attention to thuggery has grown significantly, reflecting a broader debate about informal governance and the entanglement between legality and illegality in urban politics. The new study no longer views thuggery as criminal or deviant behaviour, but as part of a complex network of patrons and clients that shape city governance and public services. One important trend is the shift in focus from mere violence and coercion to an understanding of thuggery as an essential component of *hybrid governance*. Mudhoffir (2022) show how informal actors, including thugs, occupy strategic positions in managing economic sectors such as markets, transportation, and land by negotiating with local bureaucracies and political elites. These studies highlight how decentralized reforms indirectly strengthen the role of local intermediaries, allowing them to institutionalize illegal levies under the pretext of community representation. Correspondingly, recent research also emphasizes the economic logic inherent in these practices. However, there are still some research gaps. First, research that specifically analyzes the parking sector as an economic and political space for patron-client clients is still limited, especially in medium-sized cities such as Pekanbaru. Second, although it is assumed that illegal parking networks are involved in the mobilization of votes for political gain, few studies have empirically proven how the mechanism works. Third, there have not been many studies that have explored how the digitalization policy of the parking sector affects the role of informal actors: whether they are displaced or adapted. Thus, this study seeks to fill this gap by exploring the patron-client dynamics in the control of illegal parking lots in Pekanbaru, as well as questioning the role of informal networks in local power structures and political contestation, as an effort to enrich the literature on thuggery and informal governance in urban Indonesia. Therefore, this article aims to answer two important questions; (1) how are the dynamics of parking land ownership in the city of Pekanbaru; and (2) what is the patron-client relationship and the agreement that is established from the control of the parker land?

In this article, we found that the control of parking lots is under the power of a persistent illegal network in the city of Pekanbaru cannot be understood simply as a failure of law enforcement or city management. In this practice, we will explain through the lens of patron-client theory, which offers a conceptual framework for analyzing the relational dynamics between actors who have formal political power and those who exercise informal street-level control. Drawing from the work of Scott (1972), patron-client relationships are defined as vertical, reciprocal, and asymmetrical arrangements, in which patrons usually state officials, bureaucrats, or politicians provide protection, resources, or political access to their clients in exchange for loyalty, service, or material benefits. In the context of Pekanbaru, this relationship is manifested in how local officials and brokers of certain powers (patrons) facilitate and protect street-level actors such as illegal parking managers, (gangs), or parking coordinators (clients), who, in turn, secure revenues, mobilize community influence, and ensure territorial control.

This article is structured into five main sections to explain the political dynamics of thuggery in the control of parking lots in Pekanbaru City. First, following the introduction, we outline the theoretical framework employed, namely patron client theory and informal governance, as analytical tools to understand non-formal power relations shaping public service sectors, particularly parking. Second, we present data from field observations and in-depth interviews that illustrate how illegal parking attendants operate in various strategic locations from commercial centers to main roads and how the public responds to these illegal levies, both passively and through open protest. Third, we examine the development of Pekanbaru City and its relationship with the strengthening of parking thuggery practices. This section also discusses the configuration of thuggery networks and their reciprocal relationships with formal actors such as bureaucrats and law enforcement officers. Furthermore, it explains how the city government has engaged in covert legalization processes by granting parking management licenses to specific politically affiliated groups, thereby reinforcing the dominance of informal actors as economic and political power holders. Fourth, we discuss how patron client and clientelist practices operate in the context of parking lot ownership in Pekanbaru, through mechanisms such as regular payments, control over strategic land, and political protection that normalize illegal practices as part of hybrid urban governance. Finally, the article concludes with a critical reflection on the challenges of building urban governance free from informal relations and provides policy recommendations, including digitalizing the parking system to improve transparency, strengthening public oversight, and consistent law enforcement to reduce the dominance of informal power within the public service sector.

METHODOLOGY

This study uses a qualitative approach with a case study method. The case study was chosen because it allows for an in-depth exploration of the specific phenomenon of thuggery in parking management in the City of Pekanbaru, which not only represents local governance problems, but also reflects the broader dynamics of informal relations between the state, economic actors, and urban communities. As emphasized by Gerring (2019), case studies are an approach that allows researchers to explore the contextual complexity of a single unit of observation intensively to build a broader theoretical understanding. In this context, the case of parking management in Pekanbaru is positioned as a "typical case" in the study of urban politics in Indonesia, especially in terms of the involvement of informal actors such as illegal parking attendants, thugs, and local patron-client networks. The selection of this case is not intended to make comparisons between cases, but to explore in depth the configuration of informal power that infiltrates the city's public service structure, with a special focus on the parking sector as a space for economic-political production (Yin, 2018).

Data collection was carried out through triangulation techniques, which consisted of in-depth interviews, participatory observations, and documentation studies. Interviews were conducted with various key informants, such as officials of the parking Technical Implementation Unit, official and unofficial parking managers, village officials, and parking service users at several strategic points in Pekanbaru City, such as Jalan Soebrantas, Jalan Tuanku Tambusai, and shopping centers. Field observations were also carried out to directly observe the practice of illegal parking levies, informal distribution of power in the field, and social interaction between parking attendants and road users. In addition, the researcher collected secondary documents, such as online media news, regional regulations on parking, performance reports of the Pekanbaru City Transportation Office, and recordings of residents' testimonies circulating on social media.

To ensure the validity and reliability of the findings, several strategies were applied: first, cross-verification (source triangulation) among interviews, observations, and document analysis to identify converging evidence; second, member checking by sharing preliminary findings with selected informants to confirm the accuracy and resonance of interpretations; and third, maintaining a detailed fieldwork log and coding memos to track the analytical process and reduce researcher bias. Data analysis was carried out through several stages: data reduction to filter relevant information, presentation of findings in the form of thematic narratives, cross-verification between sources, and drawing conceptual and empirical conclusions. The findings were analyzed using the theoretical framework of political patronage and informal governance to explain how the practices of thuggery in parking management do not stand alone, but are intertwined with local power structures and institutional neglect. Through this approach, this study not only documents the practice of thuggery in the parking sector of the City of Pekanbaru, but also examines how the practice reflects a hybrid form of urban governance, where formal legality and informal power are intertwined. Thus, this study contributes to the development of literature on informal economy and urban politics in Indonesia.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Relationship between thuggery in Pekanbaru

The problem of illegal parking in the city of Pekanbaru has become a major issue that reflects the complex relationship between political actors, bureaucracy, and thug groups. The shift of the parking function from a source of regional income to a tool for the distribution of power and personal profit reveals the involvement of the deep-rooted patron-client relationship. According to data from the Pekanbaru City Transportation Department, the loss of potential income from the parking sector reaches Rp 8.9 billion per year due to the rampant illegal practices. This study aims to analyze the dynamics of patron-client relationships in the parking business and its impact on city governance and stability.

The city of Pekanbaru, in recent years, has attracted the attention of many parties and the wider community. Formerly known as the City of Adventurer (*Bahasa Indonesia as Kota Bertuah*), now its image has shifted, becoming popular as the "City of Pekanbaru with a million parking attendants." This shift reflects a significant change in the dynamics of the city, which is now increasingly attached to the rampant activities of thuggery and illegal parking. This activity is increasingly prevalent in various sectors, especially in the trade and service sectors such as contract mastery and business volume in traditional markets, the supply of city transportation and motorcycles. The thugs formed large groups and carried out illegal levies and coercion to be able to control the business land and the communities under it. Behind the strong practice of thuggery, there is generally the involvement and protection of local government officials and local law enforcement officials (Klinken Aspinall, 2011). The patronage relationship in illegal affairs between politicians or law enforcement officials and thugs allows for mutual support, both in financial and political forms. This pattern of

relationship then gave birth to the culture of Money Politics which until now has hindered efforts to eradicate illegal parking in the city of Pekanbaru.

The problem of illegal parking and the rampant unofficial levy in the city of Pekanbaru are increasingly in the spotlight, along with the rapid growth of the city of Pekanbaru and the number of motorcycles, both two-wheeled and four-wheeled, and so on. This rate of increase, mainly dominated by motorcycles, has triggered a surge in parking activity, both legal and illegal. According to data from the Central Statistics Agency of Pekanbaru City, the number of vehicles in 2017 was recorded at 667,897 units, and continues to increase significantly until it reaches 770,836 units in 2019 (Fadhlurrahman, 2025). This growth, on the one hand, opens up great opportunities for city governments to increase Regional Original Revenue through parking levies. However, on the other hand, presenting challenges, especially how to overcome and control illegal parking that is increasingly mushrooming, so that the potential for increasing PAD from this sector can be realized properly. According to data from the Pekanbaru City Transportation Office (See table 1), from 2015 to 2019, despite fluctuations in the setting of targets, the achievement of the realization of the parking levy in the city of Pekanbaru has still not succeeded in meeting the set target. For example, in 2015, the City of Pekanbaru set a target for public roadside parking levy of Rp.14,273,100,000. However, the realization that was achieved was only Rp.7,202,855,000, far below the expected target. This situation continued in 2016, where although the target remained the same, the realization only increased slightly to Rp.8,253,279,000. In 2017, the target decreased to Rp.11,273,100,000, but the realization still did not meet expectations, with a total of Rp.8,804,542,000. Then, in 2018, the target was raised again to Rp.15,273,100,000, but the realization obtained only reached Rp.9,229,878,000. In 2019, the parking levy target was again lowered to Rp.11,905. 673,842, but again, the realization did not reach the desired figure, only Rp. 8,477,971,000. In other words, based on data from the Pekanbaru City Regional People's Representative Council, at least the potential for parking revenue of Rp. 8.9 billion per year due to the rampant illegal and pungli parking practices.

Table 1. Original Revenue Data for the city of Pekanbaru Parking sector

Year	Income	Realization
2015	IDR 14,273,100,000	IDR. 7.202.855.000
2016	IDR 14,273,100,000	IDR 8,253,279,000
2017	IDR. 11.273.100.000	IDR 8,804,542,000
2018	IDR 15,273,100,000	IDR 9,229,878,000

Source: Pekanbaru City Transportation Office, 2019

The parking problem in the city of Pekanbaru is increasingly crucial, after the enactment of Perwawo Number 41 of 2022, which revises Guardian Regulation Number 148 of 2020, regarding parking service rates managed at the Parking Technical Implementation Unit of the Transportation Department (Peraturan Pemerintah, 2022). Since the change in Perwako, the parking mandate has been managed by a third party. In this regulation, PT. Yabisa Sukses Mandiri (YSB), has the power over parking collection, besarta has the responsibility to manage and supervise parking in the city of Pekanbaru for the next 10 years, with a revenue target of Rp. 409 billion (Riaureview.com, 2022). The impact is that parking on public roadsides has increased for example, rates for motorcycles have soared from RP. 1000 to Rp. 2,000 while four-wheeled vehicles, from Rp.2000 to Rp.3000 (Riaureview.com, 2022). Instead of solving the problem, this tariff increase has further triggered new polemics. Illegal parking thuggery is increasingly mushrooming and rampant in various strategic locations in the city, such as near shopping centers, tourist destinations, and even in areas that should be free of parking, such as Indomaret and Alfamart. In fact, it has been recorded only 2500 legal parking officers spread across certain zones, the rest of the locations are still controlled by illegal parking persons and the areas around shops and roadsides are often a land for them to reap profits, under the pretext

of participating in Perwako in 2022 (Andry & Zulkifli, 2023). The impact is that the people of Pekanbaru feel anxious about driving their vehicles, and are even forced to spend more money endlessly (Ombudsman.go.id, 2023).

The rise of illegal parking problems in Pekanbaru City, is often accompanied by intimidation and violence practices by thug groups. According to data from the Head of the Pekanbaru City Parking Unit in 2023, at least 30 cases of illegal parking attendants have been followed up (Betuah.com, 2024). At the same time, incidents of violence and threats against vehicle users continue to occur, with illegal parking persons using violence to forcibly take control of parking lots. These parking thugs often force motorcyclists, public transportation drivers, city buses, base motorcycle taxis, and street vendors around the location to pay parking deposits. As a result, vehicle users have to spend more money every time they park their vehicles on the side of the road. For the people of Pekanbaru and visitors, this situation erodes the sense of security and comfort, considering the weak supervision and enforcement by the authorities. This uncertainty also opens up opportunities for other crimes, including fights between parking attendants and motorists, which further worsens the city's security conditions. With the existence of a patronage relationship with Pekanbaru city government officials, it is suspected to be a protective umbrella for thugs to continue to carry out the practice of thuggery and violence. This means that the relationship between city government officials and thugs is suspected to be a protection for thugs to continue to commit acts of thuggery and violence.

The problem of illegal parking and the practice of thuggery in the city of Pekanbaru is strongly suspected to be facilitated by the existence of patronage and clientelism relationships that exist between city government officials (patrons) or certain community organizations and thugs who control illegal parking (clients). According to Scott (1972), a patronage relationship is a form of exchange in which a person with a higher socio-economic status (patron) uses his influence and resources to provide protection and benefits to someone with a lower status (client). In return, the client provided support and assistance, including violence and election manipulation services for the patron.

Patron-client relationship

Like many other cities in Indonesia, the relationship between city government officials as patrons and thugs who control illegal parking is often referred to as a pattern of reciprocal symbiotic relationships (mutualism), which provides political and financial benefits for the parties involved. In return, the thugs were guaranteed protection from legal bondage and immunity from prosecution for illegally controlling parking lots. This patronage practice ultimately nourishes the vicious circle of corruption and creates a situation of impunity in the government body that increasingly complicates efforts to solve the problem of illegal parking. Scott (1972) defines patronage as a form of exchange in which a person of higher socio-economic status (patron) uses his influence and resources to protect and provided some assistance to people of lower status (clients). In return, clients provide patrons with support and services. In classical contexts, the practice of patronage-clientelism is more often associated with agrarian societies, where the relationship between landlords and cultivators is a classic example of this system.

Although the practice of patronage-clientelism initially developed in agrarian societies, with the passage of time and the development of social, political, environmental and political dynamics were able to adapt to the adaptation of the urban context and enter various sectors, including parking. In large cities, this phenomenon reflects how the relationship between political actors, and the informal economy is intertwined in complex systems. It is often ineffective because it has to deal with entrenched interests. Several studies have examined the phenomenon of control of public space, including parking by groups of thugs. In North Smatera, the findings of Mudhoffir (2022) show that the use of thugs by the ruling elite has

decreased in the political arena, but instead increased in the economic arena. His findings show that money politics has reduced the practice of intimacy to collect votes, leading to a reduction in thugs in election issues. On the contrary, as a consequence, money politics increased campaign costs which led to the expansion of the continent's business, including land grabs using repressive means. As a result, thuggery as a tool of repression has increased the quantity of agrarian conflicts in North Sumatra (Mudhoffir, 2022). Meanwhile, the Jati (2012) study analyzed the Kawulo Alit Association which is an organization formed by a group of thugs who have cooperation with NGOs that defend the community as an effort to build a positive image in the community. They can effectively become government collaborators when they want to persuade the public when the government's persuasion is rejected by the public. Although it is related to security issues, this association moves voluntarily by providing security services for various community activities as well as paid security for commercial activities (Jati, 2012).

In the context, Pekanbaru, the practice of patronage and clientelism in the ownership of public parking land is divided into 2 different aspects. First, legally, the Pekanbaru city government policy has regulated the parking system transparently with the level of cost and type of vehicle and where the area and place can be charged parking fees. In Regional Regulation No. 14 of 2016 concerning Parking Levy on Public Roads, the tariff for two-wheeled vehicles is only Rp. 1000, four-wheeled vehicles are Rp. 2,000. however, in Mayor Regulation Number 41 of 2022 concerning parking service rates in Pekanbaru, there has been an increase in parking levy fees. In this regulation, PT Yabisa Sukses Mandiri (YSB), has the power over parking collection, besarta has the responsibility to manage and supervise parking in the city of Pekanbaru for the next 10 years, with a revenue target of Rp. 409 billion (Riaureview.com, 2022). The impact is that parking on public roadsides has increased for example, rates for motorcycles have soared from RP. 1000 to Rp. 2,000 while four-wheeled vehicles, from Rp. 2,000 to Rp. 3,000 (Riaureview.com, 2022). The increase in parking levy fees is considered by the public to be so expensive, when compared to other big cities in Indonesia. For example, in the city of Palembang, for two-wheelers, only Rp. 1000 is charged, and four-wheelers, only 2 thousand rupiah. Similarly, in the cities of Medan, Jakarta, Bandung and Surabaya. The next problem is the long duration of the contract, which is ten (10) years. Second, the illegal aspect arises when the management of parking lots takes place outside the area that has been stipulated in the Pekanbaru Mayor Regulation Number 41 of 2022. In practice, this parking management involves non-official institutions run by informal actors with significant social and political power. The parking attendants did not have an official permit from the Pekanbaru City Government, causing complaints from the community. This condition often triggers disruptions to the smooth flow of traffic, especially for road users who do not take advantage of the parking facilities. In addition, illegal parking officers in certain locations do not provide proof of payment in the form of a card or parking ticket to service users, but still collect parking fees directly. The tariff that is withdrawn often exceeds the official provisions, and can even reach double the tariff that has been set by the local government. Furthermore, the existence of these illegal parking officers is not accompanied by a guarantee of security for parked vehicles, thus causing uncertainty and potential losses for the parking user community. This phenomenon shows the existence of deviant parking governance practices, which not only harm parking service users, but also hinder the government's efforts to realize an orderly, transparent, and accountable city parking system. As Mi said, *that "Parking in the city of Pekanbaru is a large financial income field, so many parties are trying to control it"* (Interview, December 5, 2024, Marpoyan Damai, Pekanbaru City).

From the two aspects above, the practice of patronage in the context of parking in the city of Pekanbaru is not only related to the distribution of money or goods to individuals with higher authority, but can also operate in a broader mechanism, such as the allocation of funds

from various sources, both private and public. In some cases, this cash or distributed goods can be a tool to maintain political loyalty or strengthen the group's dominance in controlling parking lots. Therefore, They operate under the protection of certain groups that have access to a wider political and economic network. They not only rely on daily levies from parking service users, but also make deposits to customers who provide them with protection. This practice creates a system that is difficult for formal government policies to penetrate, as there are intertwined interests between actors at the lower levels and elites at the top levels.

As revealed by Mr. Joko, a trader in the Road area. HR. Soebrantas, that *"this relationship is just a business. We are often forced to work with certain CSOs who have access to local officials. This is not because we want to, but because of those who have connections. They can keep our business safe, prevent riots, and ensure that we can operate without problems"* (Interview, December 16, 2024). Meanwhile, the results of the interview with Joko, which was reinforced by Pak Ahmad, a food seller in the Simpang Tabek Gadang area, revealed that *"even though there are no parking attendants here, I actually give the parking attendants around 200 thousand per month every month."* (Interview, December 17, 2024).

From the results of the interview above, it illustrates how patron-client and thuggery play a role in local power systems, especially in business relationships involving entrepreneurs and CSOs. This client-protector network, built by combining social, economic, and political forces, enables and CSOs to gain access to critical resources such as licensing, management of public facilities, and political support. In return, they provide protection to entrepreneurs and ensure the smooth running of their businesses, but this also has consequences for people who are often in a position of dependency. From the local government side, they seem to take advantage of this patron-client network to maintain local political stability, but at the same time, this dependence exacerbates the dynamics of local democracy with increasing corrupt practices, illegal levies, and money politics. The control of parking lava in the city of Pekanbaru, is not much different from a study conducted by Samsa (2019) found that the control of illegal parking in a number of places in Yogyakarta is protected by patronage relationships with local government officials. The local official plays the role of a patron who provides political protection, while the parking thug becomes his client.

A symbiotic form of mutualism

In the context of illegal parking in Pekanbaru, this agreement was seen when permission was granted to manage parking spaces in strategic locations such as traditional markets or shopping centers. Instead, give a deposit to a certain transport officer or official, and they are guaranteed not to be disturbed by the control operation. The business and political agreement built in the patron-client relationship between thuggery in the parking and security business with the government elite in the city of Pekanbaru reflects a strategic collaboration based on mutual interests. In the patron-client relationship between thuggery in the parking and security sector and the government elite in the city of Pekanbaru, the business and political agreements that are built are often reciprocal in informal and transactional patterns. Here are the main points of the deal that usually happens. First, deposit money which is an obligation that must be fulfilled by the parking attendant or to customers, such as mass organizations, officials, or certain parties who have influence in the area. The amounts of deposits varieties, depending on the strategic location and the level of income generated, ranging from daily to monthly. These deposits are generally cash and not officially recorded, making them difficult to track administratively. These payments are considered "operational permits" so they can work without disruption or the threat of eviction, even though the system has no legal basis. As revealed by Ajo, a parking attendant near Taman Karya, who revealed that: *"Every month, I have to hand over the deposit money to someone who is said to be close to a certain party."*

However, I am not set a set of how much, if it is crowded, I will give Rp 100 or even above Rp 200." (Interview, December 12, 2024).

The results of the interview with Ajo above, were reinforced by Dedi, a parking attendant in the traditional market area, who revealed that: *"Every week I deposit Rp200 thousand to the person called the regional coordinator. He said the money was for 'parking permits'. If I don't pay, I will be immediately threatened with not being allowed to work here. I was late in paying, but soon someone else took over this place until I paid off the deposit."* Similarly, the results of an interview with Surya, a parking attendant in the Arengka Market area, who revealed that: *"At my place, the deposit is calculated per day. I sometimes have to give Rp 50,000 every week, but sometimes I'm not sure how much it costs, to someone who is said to 'hold territory'. If they don't make a deposit, they will replace the new parking attendant."* (Interview, December 14, 2024).

From all the results of the interview above, it was revealed that parking officers in several locations in Pekanbaru City had to deposit a certain amount of money to certain parties who were considered to control or have authority over their respective areas. This practice is generally carried out on a regular basis, either daily or weekly, and involves individuals or groups informally claiming control of the area. These deposits often have no clear legal basis and are suspected to be part of a long-standing informal mechanism. In addition, it directly affects the income of parking attendants, since they have to divide a portion of their income to fulfill these obligations. This phenomenon shows the existence of power dynamics and parking lot management that is not transparent and tends to involve practices that violate official rules.

Second, land tenure which refers to the practice of granting informal permits to or parking attendants to manage a specific area, such as public facilities (markets, terminals, roadsides, or convenience stores). This permission is usually granted by a protector, such as a mass organization or official, without any formal procedure. In return, it is required to deposit regular money to customers. These controls often ignore formal rules and sacrifice public rights, with safeguards guaranteeing legal protection and ensuring that offenders are not harassed by law enforcement officials as long as deposit obligations are met. As revealed by Jaka, a trader around the Arengka Morning Market, revealed that: *"The people here don't actually have the right to manage the parking lot, but they are still allowed by the authorities. They say that there is permission from 'above'. We can't protest because if we protest, we are usually immediately threatened or our goods are harassed."*

The results of the interview revealed by Jaka, reinforced by an interview with Eko, a parking attendant at Alfamart in the Panam area, revealed that: *"I have been working here for two years. At first, I thought that this minimarket parking was arranged directly by the owner, but it turned out that someone 'managed'. Every week I have to pay Rp300 thousand to the person who is said to be the regional coordinator. If I don't pay, I can't park here anymore, and they say someone else will take over this place."*

Not much different from the results of the interview with the two narsums above, a Bayu, a parking attendant at Indomaret in the Panam area, revealed that: *"Here the place is quite crowded, so I was asked to deposit more, around Rp 100 thousand per month. He said this was a permit from the mass organizations that hold the area."* (Interview, December 14, 2024)

Parking attendants involved in the patronage system receive some form of reciprocity in return for their compliance with regular deposit obligations. As revealed by Anton, a parking attendant who is active on the street. BC. Amen, who revealed that *"I have been a parking attendant here for a year. As long as, I pay to a certain mass organization, there is no interference from the public. If there is a problem, my protector will take care of it. That's why I remain the parking attendant here. The important thing is that this area is safe for me."* (Interview, December 12, 2024)

The results of the interview with Anton were then corroborated by Budi, a parking attendant near a shopping center in West Sidomulyo Village, Tuah Madani, who revealed that: *"Every day I have to deposit IDR 50 thousand to the coordinator. He said the money was for 'operational permits'. If I don't pay, I could be kicked out of here, and replaced by a parking attendant from a certain mass organization."* (Interview, December 12, 2024).

From the interviews conducted, it can be stated that there is a strong pattern of patron-client relationships between parking attendants, and parties who play the role of patrons, including mass organizations, officials, or certain individuals. All speakers stated that they were required to pay regular deposits to the coordinator or patron. The amount varies depending on the work location and strategic level, with the amount ranging from IDR 50 thousand per day to IDR 100 thousand per month. These deposits are considered a form of "operational clearance" so that they can continue to work on site. In addition, Patrons play a role in providing legal protection to parking officers and officers, such as preventing raids, raids, or evictions. They are also parties to resolve conflicts, both with the authorities and with other parties that have the potential to disrupt the operations of these workers, and parking attendants and are heavily reliant on informal electricity networks organized by customers. This dependence can be seen in their powerlessness to resist or seek protection from official authorities. In fact, some sources say that formal security is also under protective control. This conclusion shows the existence of a practice of informal economic domination through a patronage system that involves, officials, and certain groups. This system is not only financially detrimental, but it also reinforces the continuity of informal power that is difficult to eradicate.

Discussion

In the dynamics of the practice of patronage and clientelism often develop in the form of reciprocal relationships between individuals or groups of different socio-economic statuses. The protector, as a party that has access to resources, power, and a wider political network, plays a role in providing protection, economic access, or certain advantages to clients who have a lower position in the social structure. In return, clients provide loyalty, support, and economic contributions to customers, creating a continuous cycle of dependency. In the context of parking management in the city of Pekanbaru, the practice of patronage often appears to be in the form of protection for parking officers from various external disturbances, including competition between groups, pressure from law enforcement officials, or intervention from official authorities. Customers who have influence, both politically and economically, can use their power to ensure that clients in this case parking attendants maintain access to the parking lots they manage. This protection is often provided through informal mechanisms, such as intervening in parking space conflicts, granting unofficial permits, or even by creating control systems outside of government regulations. In addition to the protection aspect, patronage in the parking system also often appears in the form of providing economic assistance. Some customers who have certain political or economic interests may provide personal funds to support the group of parking attendants who are their clients. This assistance is not always in the form of cash, but it can also be in the form of other perks such as work uniforms, access to a wider network of businesses, or even the promise of improved welfare through involvement in certain political campaigns. This creates a form of mutually beneficial relationship, where customers gain a loyal support base, while clients gain protection and access to more stable livelihoods.

The practice of clientelism in the parking sector emphasizes more on control over land and the flow of money generated from parking activities. If patronage tends to be in the form of distributing resources in the form of assistance or protection, then clientelism is more closely related to the deposit system that must be channeled by parking attendants to customers. Parking attendants operating under the control of certain customers are often required to

deposit a portion of their income as a form of loyalty and in exchange for the protection provided. These deposits can be daily, weekly, or monthly, depending on the deal and the control mechanisms implemented by the protector. In addition, clientelism is also closely related to land ownership. In many cases, the ownership of parking spaces depends not only on formal regulations from local governments, but also on informal networks that have been established for a long time. Customers who have access to political or economic resources can often control parking spaces by ensuring that only their clients are entitled to operate in a particular area. This pattern reflects how informal economic structures can be integrated with political practices, where access to public spaces becomes part of the power negotiations between the various actors involved. Thus, the relationship between patronage and clientelism in the parking sector not only impacts the dynamics of the local economy, but also has broader implications for urban governance and regulation of public spaces. The dependency between customers and clients creates an ecosystem that is difficult for formal policies to intervene in, given that their existence has become part of a complex social equilibrium. Therefore, understanding how patronage and clientelism work within the sector is key in formulating more effective policies in dealing with thuggery and informal economic practices in cities.

The practice of illegal possession in the city of Pekanbaru, reveals how informal parking governance has been institutionalized through a dense network of patron-client relationships, in which CSOs negotiate power and profit through non-formal control over public space. These findings echo Wilson (2013, 2015) groundbreaking work on post-New Order extortion, which emphasizes how coercive actors are not only tolerated but embedded in the machinery of urban governance in place of formal institutional control. In Pekanbaru, parking is not a rogue actor outside the system but is functionally integrated as a grassroots enforcer who maintains political patronage through illegal levies. These networks have effectively replaced formal parking systems with informal systems that operate with shared impunity, resulting in hybrid governance arrangements in which legality and illegality are indistinguishable.

Rooting thuggery as a form of informal governance is also in line with the insights of (Klinken and Aspinall (2011), who warn against interpreting such practices solely as criminal deviations. Instead, they argue, such networks often serve as a mediation structure between citizens and states, especially in contexts where state capacity is weak or selectively applied. In Pekanbaru, this network is concrete: formal parking revenues are far from the target, the number of illegal actors exceeds the legal amount, and civil complaints rarely result in structural reforms. This reflects the dynamics found in Yogyakarta (Samsa, 2019) and Bekasi (Sitorus et al., 2020), where CSOs and community organizations become a façade where informal dominance is legalized and electoral support is mobilized. As in previous cases, decentralization has created space for local elites to negotiate political loyalty and street-level control through thuggery under the banner of civil society.

The practice of illegal possession of parking lots in the city of Pekanbaru, is reinforced through routine monetary deposits, informal land ownership, and selective law enforcement that protects from accountability while ensuring a stable political and economic return for their patrons. This reflects what Mudhoffir (2022) describes as "coercive syndicates" systems that are not entirely formal or criminal but exist in a gray zone where actors maintain stability through informal coercion. The Pekanbaru case shows how this gray zone is not a coincidence but is maintained as a long-lasting governance strategy that benefits elites and informal actors. In this context, the practice of parking lot ownership is not just a product of weak enforcement but a deliberate result of patronage politics. The clientelist logic underlying illegal parking arrangements in Pekanbaru resembles the broader trend described by (Mudhoffir, 2022) in North Sumatra where the network shifts from electoral violence to control of urban economic resources such as land and transportation.

In practice, the patron-client relationship formed in the parking sector in Pekanbaru, only runs in the form of a momentary transaction, where the customer provides resources on one specific occasion without the obligation for the recipient to give a recurring gift. In other words, the practice of controlling parking lots is only short-term, which is only related to economic aspects, without touching the political aspect in supporting patrons in political contestation, which is often intertwined with the practice of patronage-clientelism. In this context, government elites with certain political affiliations do not use the network of parking attendant clientelism as part of their informal power network. On that basis, the relationship between patrons and clients in the city of Pekanbaru, reflects a pattern of reciprocity, which is not so widespread, compared to what happens in other cities in Indonesia, where the parking attendant only gets legal and security protection, while the patron which can be CSOs also does not get loyalty and support in various forms, including mass mobilization during elections or control of certain sectors of the economy. such as parking. Similarly, the practice of patron-client in mastering parking in the city of Pekanbaru, is not exacerbated by the paternalistic culture that is still strong in the social structure of the city of Pekanbaru. This culture allows the practice of "protection" provided by customers to their clients to be part of a retaliatory system that is considered reasonable. In many cases, these protections are limited to providing security in a physical sense, informal business licenses, or even intervention in legal cases. In other words, patronage serves not only as a tool of social control, but also as a mechanism that maintains the loyalty and dominance of certain groups in the informal urban economic space. The existence of the informal political and economic system is not just a phenomenon that appears out of nowhere, but is the result of a patron-client relationship that has been rooted in Indonesian political culture. In other words, the practice of controlling parking lots in the city of Pekanbaru, shows that the practice of patronage is not a tool in electoral political contestation, but, they are only part of an informal economic ecosystem that continues to adapt to changes in policies and political dynamics at the local level. This phenomenon is often linked to electoral political practices, such as the purchase of votes funded from private sources, or piggy bank projects financed by government budgets to attract support from certain groups. In Edward Aspinall's analysis, patronage is not always clientelist. He distinguishes between the practice of patronage that has a long-term relational nature and the practice that is transactional and non-repetitive. A candidate or protector who distributes resources, whether in the form of goods or services, to voters whom he has never or will never meet again after an election cannot be categorized as clientelism. This is due to the fundamental character of clientelism that demands a recurring relationship between patron and client, where giving is not just a one-time thing, but is part of a reciprocal mechanism that continues for a longer period of time.

Thus, the practice of clientelism in land tenure in the city of Pekanbaru, does not take the form of long-term relationships, where individuals or groups with influence and authority in a particular area provide access or protection to parking attendants, in exchange for constant loyalty in the form of regular deposits or political support at strategic moments such as elections. In the context of electoral politics, patronage often operates in a more complex way. In other words, customers don't always ask clients to vote for them directly, but rather build a network of influence that can be used for various political and economic interests in the future. In addition, the socio-economic characteristics of people who work in the parking sector also influence how these patron-client relationships develop. In environments with high levels of economic uncertainty, individuals involved in patronage systems often have no choice but to rely on customers who have greater resources. This dependency creates an unbalanced pattern of relationships, where clients in many cases do not have enough bargaining power to change the dynamics of their relationship with customers. In the long run, these systems can reinforce social inequality and maintain power structures that are not easily penetrated by new groups that do not have access to established patronage networks. Thus, the analysis of patronage and

clientelism of parking in Pekanbaru is not only related to the direct distribution of resources, but also touches on broader aspects related to land tenure, the structure of local political economy, and the social dynamics and urban transformation that shape the relationship between patrons and clients.

CONCLUSION

The control of parking lots in Pekanbaru is rooted in a complex system of patron-client relations, which involves political actors, law enforcement, and informal groups in a network of mutual benefits. This phenomenon of illegal parking is not solely due to weak law enforcement or failure of urban management, but has been institutionalized through informal governance and the practice of political thuggery. In this pattern, informal actors control parking lots and attract illegal levies while gaining protection and political support from state officials. This situation has an impact on social injustice, undermines the legitimacy of public services, and results in the leakage of potential regional revenue. Through such arrangements, the public space that should be shared property turns into an arena for transactional and clientelistic interests. Therefore, parking governance reform in Pekanbaru requires an integrated approach, such as digitizing the parking system for transparency, strengthening the regulatory framework to limit discretionary authority, and civil society involvement to monitor informal practices. Without dismantling the patronage structure that underpins illegal networks, efforts to formalize governance will remain superficial.

This study is specifically limited to the analysis of the pattern of patron-client relations in the control of parking lots, with a focus on long-term relationships and the context of political contestation in the city of Pekanbaru. Therefore, further research needs to explore other dimensions, such as the extent of the involvement of parking attendants in mobilizing the vote for political elites, as well as how these dynamics contribute to the strengthening or weakening of clientelistic practices at the local level. A more in-depth study in this area is expected to enrich understanding of political thuggery and informal governance, as well as encourage a more just and accountable institutional reform agenda.

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