

## The role of the plantation elite of PT PTPN IV Bandar Pasir Mandoge Unit in the 2024 presidential and vice presidential elections

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### ABSTRACT

The Role of the Plantation Elite of PTPN IV Bandar Pasir Mandoge Unit in the 2024 Presidential and Vice Presidential Elections, particularly in influencing the political participation of employees in the plantation environment. Although management officially claims neutrality and supports honest and fair democracy, there are indications of systematic mobilisation and political direction by plantation elites, including by managers towards foremen and supervisors. This has led to unrest, demonstrations, and reports to the Election Supervisory Agency (Panwaslu) and the Election Supervisory Body (Bawaslu). This study uses Mosca's elite theory and Soekanto's role theory to analyze elite power in the work structure and its impact on freedom of choice. The results show that despite claims of neutrality, in reality, the practice of elite power has the potential to influence election results in plantation areas. This study emphasizes the importance of election monitoring in closed work areas such as plantations to ensure democratic and pressure-free elections. Based on the methods and theories used, the results of this study show that power in society tends to be concentrated in small, organized groups that have access to strategic resources. In this context, plantation elites such as managers, foremen, and supervisors play an important role in directing the political choices of employees through various forms of mobilization, guidance, and even the installation of campaign materials in the plantation environment.

**Keywords:** Elite Role, Employee Mobilization.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

PT Perkebunan Nusantara IV (PTPN IV) is a state-owned enterprise (BUMN) engaged in agro-industry and agribusiness. This company is the result of the merger of PTPN V, VI, and XIII into PTPN IV as a surviving entity, as well as the non-pure separation of PTPN III (Persero) into PTPN IV. In terms of commodities, PTPN IV manages an area of oil palm plantations covering 434,597 hectares as its largest commodity. This is followed by rubber covering an area of 46,534 hectares, tea covering 6,255 hectares, and coffee covering 501 hectares. For processing plants, PTPN IV processes its raw materials in its own facilities, which consist of 54 palm oil processing plants, 12 rubber processing plants, and 4 tea processing plants. PTPN IV's business units are spread across 8 provinces, with a total of approximately 62,700 employees, one of which is PTPN IV Unit BP Mandoge, located in North Sumatra Province, Asahan Regency, precisely in Bandar Pasir Mandoge Village.

An ideal work environment or plantation is one that is conducive and understands how to balance the careers of its employees. Without coercive pressure, especially in supporting democracy in Indonesia in accordance with the functions, objectives, principles and foundations of elections as stipulated in Law Number 7 of 2017 or Law 7/2017, which is interpreted as elections in which the people exercise their sovereignty to elect members of the House of Representatives, 3 members of the Regional Representative Council, the President and Vice President, and to elect members of the Regional Representative Council, which are held directly, publicly, freely, honestly, and fairly in the Unitary State of the Republic of Indonesia based on Pancasila and the 1945 Constitution of the Republic of Indonesia. Every citizen has the right to vote and be elected in general elections in accordance with the provisions and laws (Sardini, 2011). PTPN IV Bandar Pasir Mandoge Unit itself had a total of more than 3,000 registered voters in the 2024 election, with 76% of votes cast at polling stations in Bandar Pasir Mandoge Village. The Prabowo Gibran pair, who won a landslide victory in the 2024 presidential and vice-presidential elections, therefore controlled the vote count.

The involvement of the present president, Jokowi, especially given Gibran Raka Buming Raka's victory in the 2024 elections, is undeniably tied to it. As the top-ranking officer, his biological son would have a considerable impact on his impartiality. Furthermore very doubtful are the neutrality of state-owned businesses (SOEs) in Indonesia. Questionable, as demonstrated by several news stories and data about the 2024 presidential and vice-presidential election process. Of course, as the highest leader, the president has power relations with SOEs, which are state-owned companies operating under the president's leadership. This has a significant influence on Prabowo Gibran's victory in the 2024 election. This power relationship was reinforced by news that SOEs were deemed not to be neutral in the 2024 presidential and vice-presidential elections, due to the presence of Minister of State-Owned Enterprises Erick Thohir, who was there to support the presidential and vice-presidential candidate pair Prabowo Subianto and Gibran Rakabuming Raka. The man, who also serves as Chairman of the Indonesian Football Association (PSSI), was seen wearing a light blue jacket and standing at the front of the crowd supporting the number two candidate pair. Alongside the Chairman of the Indonesian Solidarity Party (PSI) Kaesang Pangarep, Erick was positioned directly behind Prabowo-Gibran. Not only that, Erick Thohir's presence in the ranks of Prabowo-Gibran supporters during the Vice Presidential Debate on Sunday evening, 21 January 2024, was also shared by Erick on his personal Instagram account. In the caption of his post, he mentioned that it was a special Sunday because he could accompany Prabowo and Gibran in the fourth Presidential Election debate of 2024.

In the 2019 presidential and vice-presidential elections, the legal team of Prabowo Subianto-Sandiaga Uno also suspected various irregularities in the 2019 presidential election. One of the allegations was that incumbent presidential candidate Joko Widodo mobilised state-owned enterprise employees during the 2019 presidential election campaign, winning 55.50% of the vote, while Prabowo-Sandi received 44.50% of the vote, with a total difference of 16.9 million votes. In fact, the Prabowo-Sandiaga National Campaign Team (BPN) mentioned that there was a circular letter for SOE employees to participate in Jokowi's campaign activities. Not even willing to take leave as president, Jokowi took advantage of his uncertain position as president and presidential candidate to use SOEs, SOE resources, funds, and human

resources for his initiatives. Furthermore admitted to receiving SOEs, SOE assets, finances, and human resources for his actions; also, the BPN's economic, research, and development team led by Harryadin Mahardika admitted to receiving Reports of Jokowi's electoral dishonesty in the 2019 presidential election, which included movement of SOE employees for campaigning events.

Understanding the dynamics of power and institutional neutrality in a political setting has been greatly enlightened by several past research. Study (Prabowoadi, 2024) underlines the importance of checking for independence from study, which examined the issue of Civil Service impartiality concerning political influence during regional and general elections. Also, research (Marasabessy, 2024) regarding the President's interference with the National Police's neutrality indicates that the integrity of elections can be undermined through executive power intervention. The importance of the workplace in enabling individual political autonomy, particularly in the Indonesia context, is highlighted in the studies focusing on accountability and the responsibility of corporate leadership concerning the voting rights of employees (Bayujawati, 2023). These three studies illustrate changing perceptions concerning the effect of power on the impartiality of individuals and organizations, especially within the context of Indonesia where democracy is still fledgling (Sitepu, 2012).

This research studies the elites in state plantation PTPN IV Bandar Pasir Mandoge Unit during the 2024 Presidential and Vice Presidential Elections. There is little research on the connection between the political activities of workers in the political class of plantation companies. What distinguishes this work is that it approaches plantation elites as managers and political leaders who have the power to influence the political choices of their workers. The research contributes to the understudied question of the influence relations within SOEs and the translation of SOEs into democracy and elections at the local level.

This research is aimed at studying how elites of the plantations play a role in shaping the political participation of the employees of Unit PTPN IV Bandar Pasir Mandoge in 2024 Presidential and Vice Presidential Elections. The main focus is on the forms of influence, strategies, and power dynamics that emerge between elites (such as managers, foremen, and supervisory staff) and plantation workers in determining their political choices. In addition, this study also explores how these power practices are justified through the hierarchical and paternalistic social and cultural structures of plantation organisations.

The main objective of this study is to describe and analyse the role played by the elite of PTPN IV Bandar Pasir Mandoge Plantation in increasing employee political participation and how their involvement can influence the democratic process at the local level. This study also aims to assess the extent to which the practices of elite power in the plantation environment influence political neutrality and freedom of choice, as well as to provide recommendations for election supervisory bodies to strengthen oversight in closed work areas such as state-owned plantations.

## **2. METHOD**

This study uses a qualitative approach with descriptive methods to describe in depth the role of the plantation elite of PTPN IV Bandar Pasir Mandoge Unit in influencing employee political participation in the 2024 Presidential and Vice Presidential Elections. This approach was chosen because it is capable of revealing the meaning and dynamics of power that occur in hierarchical and closed social environments such as state plantations. The research location was at PTPN IV Bandar Pasir Mandoge Unit, Asahan Regency, North Sumatra, which was selected purposively because its organisational structure is complex and reflects the power relations between the elite and workers. The research informants consisted of managers, department assistants, foremen, plantation workers, and community leaders who were considered to have direct knowledge of the phenomenon being studied. Data was collected through in-depth interviews, field observations, and documentation to obtain a comprehensive understanding of political practices in the plantation environment. Data analysis was conducted using an interactive model Miles dan Huberman which includes data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing (Bungin, 2006). To maintain data validity, researchers apply source and method triangulation techniques, namely by

comparing interview results from various informants with observation findings and supporting documents, thereby obtaining research results that are valid, reliable, and scientifically accountable.

### **3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION**

#### **3.1 The Role of the Elite of PTPN IV Bandar Pasir Mandoge Unit in Increasing Political Participation in Plantation Areas Among Employees**

PTPN IV Bandar Pasir Mandoge Unit is an area surrounded by large plantations and has a majority of registered voters who are employees, which certainly has a very different political dynamic from other areas. Where in a plantation, there are certainly employees who work in demanding jobs and have a very important role in increasing political participation among employees in a plantation. The PTPN IV Bandar Pasir Mandoge plantation has made various efforts and taken measures to increase employee participation in the plantation area, all with the aim of ensuring clean, honest and fair elections. Although there are certainly challenges in ensuring the success of elections in plantation areas, the PTPN IV Bandar Pasir Mandoge Unit plantation always strives to implement various programmes to increase the participation of plantation employees (Interview on 19 May 2025). In addition, Abbas Ramadhan, an employee of the PTPN IV Bandar Pasir Mandoge plantation, also stated that the plantation has implemented many policies and actions to increase employee participation. Of course, the most important thing is the comfort of employees in voting. Even though employees work under the pressure of plantation work, according to Abbas, the plantation protects and gives employees the freedom to vote (Interview on 19 May 2025).

In the hierarchical and paternalistic organisational structure of plantations, elite positions such as managers, department assistants and foremen not only act as economic and administrative decision-makers, but also function as social figures who influence the political attitudes and behaviour of workers. Based on field research, the role of elites in the political context of plantation environments takes three main forms: (1) the role as political communicators, (2) the role as drivers of participation, and (3) the role as guardians of organisational stability (Imani, 2024).

Plantation elites play an active role in conveying information and shaping political perceptions among employees. Through informal communication channels such as meetings, work briefings, or everyday conversations, elites often emphasise the importance of exercising voting rights 'wisely' and 'supporting the continuity of national leadership'. While not explicitly mentioned all the time, these messages do carry some political undertones that guide employees' voting decisions. Certain elites also use symbols, such as posters, narratives of development, or a personal closeness to a particular political actor, as forms of persuasive political communication. Pure elite communication is realized under the condition that it represents an effective instrument of political opinion and attitude formation in the professional environment, and that due to the structural power inherent in superior-subordinate relations, messages/signs of the elites are accepted as they are without being questioned. "Elite communication" here means instrumentality rather than behavior; it is the operating mode of communication, not its specific form that is under discussion.

Elite are also able to influence employees' political participation, beyond their role as communicators (Fakuls, 2018). Supervisors and department heads encourage employees to head to the polls (TPS) in the name of protecting the company's image and doing one's duty as a citizen. Sometimes they go as far as helping to coordinate work shifts so people can make it to the TPS together. What is more, there are signals showing that this mobilisation is not always neutral in this respect, with calls being made to vote for some contenders which are presumed to be closer to its interests or to those of the company or its directorate. The participation-leading role of the elite challenges the assumption that political mobilisation in plantation settings is driven only by individual political consciousness, suggesting that it is also structurally tied to the work hierarchy. Community members and those loyal to the region will be able to determine political behavior.

In addition, the higher class of plantation society performs the function of keeping the working masses in social peace and quiet during the political seasons. The elites see their role in guiding political

participation as a moral imperative in order to avert conflict and protect the company's reputation. In practice this takes the form of limited political discussion in the workplace, reminders to employees not to be divided on the basis of choice, and refrains which encourage them to keep political activity separate from work. But that office might also become an instrument of social control which circumscribes political autonomy of the subject. In the name of maintaining stability, the elite implicitly imposed constraints on the political expression of the rank and file. "It is not just that the harmony produced here is consolidated in democratic awareness; it is rather that the harmony produced here is consolidated in obedience to the authority within the plantation system."

### **3.2 The Role Played by the Elite of PTPN IV Bandar Pasir Mandoge Unit in Increasing Political Participation among Employees**

The manipulation of workers had turned out to a fine art of sophisticated public relations at PTPN IV Banda Pasir Mandoge Unit. Within strict organisational hierarchies, the elite constitute strategic nodes of information flow, work rhythm regulation, and moral exemplification toward below. This situation creates a power relationship where the elite can shape the political attitude of an employee without applying direct pressure to that employee. Based on the results of field research, there are three main forms of elite influence on workers' political choices, namely influence through interpersonal communication, influence through the work hierarchy structure, and influence through economic and social dependence.

Interpersonal communication is the main means by which the elite instil political views among workers. Through casual conversations, work briefings and internal meetings, the elite convey narratives about the importance of electing leaders who are 'pro-development' and 'in line with government policy'. Although they do not explicitly mention the names of candidates, the direction of the conversation often leads to support for certain figures. This communication strategy creates a form of soft persuasion, in which workers feel compelled to align their political choices with their leaders' preferences in order to maintain harmonious working relationships.

The second form of influence arises from a top-down organisational structure, in which the orders and directives of the elite carry considerable normative weight. Workers in lower positions tend to comply with management instructions, both in terms of work and non-technical matters such as politics. Dependence on superiors means that any political appeal or invitation from management is considered part of loyalty to the company. In some cases, employees who do not show conformity with the political direction of their leaders worry about negative assessments or a loss of trust from their superiors. Thus, the work hierarchy becomes an effective instrument for the elite to maintain their political influence.

Economic dependence is also an important factor that strengthens the influence of the elite on workers' political choices. Most employees depend on the company for their economic needs, housing facilities and social access. The elite who have authority over these aspects are able to build patronage relationships, where political support is considered a form of gratitude for the protection or facilities provided. Employees have a tendency to bring their political attitudes in line with elite preferences as a matter of social prudence in this context. This system of patronage demonstrates that power on plantations is not purely administrative but is imbued with symbolic and emotional resonances that the elite uses to politically discipline its labor force.

### **3.3 The Role of the Plantation Elite at PTPN IV Bandar Pasir Mandoge Unit**

The position and functioning of the elite in state plantationscapes is thus inseparable from the societal and cultural organisation of powerrelation between superiors and subordinates that form the very organisation of the state. Based on the findings of the study at PTPN IV Bandar Pasir Mandoge Unit, the plantation elite is composed of unit manager, department assistant and foreman—equally engaged in the strategic position economically and politically. Through these positions, they are in a position to shape the minds and behaviour of employees, directly associated with them and in-directly. This influence is expressed in three key elements: the control over the economy, the control over communication and

information, and the strengthening of a culture highly paternalistic within the workplace (Abdulkarim & Ratmaningsih, 2021).

Firstly, economically the elite has the power to impact the wellbeing of workers as it can make decisions on what work they should do, how well they do it and by rewarding them. This creates structural dependency that makes employees inclined to obey their leaders' directives, including in a political context. The elite utilise emotional closeness and hierarchical working relationships as a means of building loyalty, so that workers' political participation often reflects the political attitudes of their leaders. This phenomenon is in line with elite theory of Gaetano Mosca which states that in every social system, there is always a ruling minority that is able to direct the behaviour of the majority through control of resources and social positions.

From a political communication perspective, plantation elites act as opinion leaders in the workplace. They disseminate political messages both directly through meetings and symbolically through narratives of development and loyalty to the state. In the context of the 2024 Presidential and Vice Presidential Elections, messages such as 'electing leaders who are pro-national progress' or 'maintaining development stability' become subtle instruments of political communication, but they carry certain ideological meanings. According to Averus and Alfina (2020), the social role that a person plays within an organisational structure helps determine how they act and influence others around them. In this case, the plantation elite exercise a covert political role through their social role as respected leaders.

Also, the paternalistic culture on plantations further strengthens the elite's supremacy over the laborers. Work practices that put bosses as 'fathers' and workers as 'children' create patron-client social relations. Employees are submissive not only for economic reasons but also because it is a social norm to be loyal and respectful of the leaders. In such an environment, political choices mostly are read as solidarity with the leadership, not freedom as a political subject. These conditions illustrate the potential for plantation social organizations to shape soft coercion of political influence that is not explicitly coercive, but that nonetheless serves to guide collective political behavior. This analysis reveals that the plantation elite in PTPN IV Bandar Pasir Mandoge Unit has a dual role: they widen political participation by encouraging their workers to vote, at the same time, they steer such participation into certain political directions. Hence, political engagement on the plantation is not the product of critical consciousness, but obedience to the power hierarchy. This is proto-substantive procedural democracy, freedom to choose is in other words still but this time limited by internal power relation within the organisation.

#### **4. CONCLUSION**

This research argues that the role the plantation elites plays is bifold: (1) that of a political submitter which makes its employees politically conscious to participate in elections; (2) and that of a political warden that constrains its members individual freedom through structural and cultural coercion. This dynamic is characteristic of a semi-controlled democracy, whereby political participation is channeled through ties of allegiance, discipline and implicit social control. There are a number of policy implications from these results. Theoretically, for one thing, this research contributes to our understanding of how elite power is exercised within and across the state's economic sphere outside the realm of formal political institutions. Second, empirically, the results of this study confirm the need to strengthen regulations and oversight of the neutrality of state-owned enterprises, especially in the plantation sector, so that workers' political participation is truly free from structural pressure. Third, practically, it is important for election management bodies (the General Elections Commission and the Elections Supervisory Agency) to extend their oversight to closed work areas such as state plantations, involving labour unions and civil society in ensuring that the political rights of every individual are protected.

### **Ethical Approval**

This research was conducted in accordance with the social research ethics guidelines established by the Faculty of Social and Political Sciences, University of North Sumatra. No formal ethical approval was required as this research did not involve direct intervention, and all participants participated voluntarily.

### **Informed Consent Statement**

All research informants were given an explanation of the purpose of the research and assurances that their identities would remain confidential. Verbal and written consent was obtained before the interviews were

### **Authors' Contributions**

AS contributed to conceptualisation, methodology and analysis, data collection, interpretation of results, and writing of the draft article in its entirety. IF contributed to providing guidance, theoretical direction, and editing of the manuscript. Both authors have approved the final version of the manuscript and take full responsibility for its content. The authors would like to thank the ISAS (Indonesian Society for the Advancement of Science) for the support to the publication of this article.

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The author declares no competing interests in this study.

### **Data Availability Statement**

The interview data and documentation are available from the corresponding author on request, with the privacy of the informants respected.

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### **Notes on Contributors**

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Azri Sitorus is a Political Science graduate from University of North Sumatra. His research interests include political behavior, power theory, and local government. He also studies the nexus between social structure, electoral politics, and power relations in institutionally defined space (state-owned enterprises and public institutions).

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Indra Fauzan is a lecturer in the Political Science Study Programme, Faculty of Social and Political Sciences, University of North Sumatra. As a supervisor, he provided constructive academic and methodological guidance in the preparation of this research.

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