

Mosque Development as an Arena for the Contestation of Social Capital Among Community Elites in Lombok

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Abstract

This study examines mosque development in Lombok as an arena for the contestation of social capital among community elites by employing Pierre Bourdieu's theoretical perspective. The analysis focuses on how various actors mobilize symbolic, network, economic, and cultural capital to gain influence, legitimacy, and socio-religious authority. This study uses a qualitative case study approach, employing observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation. The findings show that mosque development is not merely about fulfilling worship needs but also serves as a space for negotiation, coalition-building, and competition for recognition among religious, customary, and political elites, as well as donors. In this context, the mosque has a dual function: as a symbol of collective piety and as an arena for the production of symbolic power. This study contributes to the development of the sociology of religion, particularly by clarifying the relationship among religious institutions, social capital, and local power dynamics in Lombok's Muslim society.

Keywords: Social Capital, Community Elites, Mosque Development.

INTRODUCTION

Mosque development in Lombok does not merely represent society's religious expression; it also reveals social dynamics involving power relations, legitimacy, and competing interests among actors. Lombok's designation as the "Island of a Thousand Mosques" reflects the strong Islamic identity embedded in the social life of the Sasak community. Behind this religious symbol, however, mosque development does not always proceed as an entirely neutral religious practice. In several cases, the processes of planning, funding, management, and direction-setting for mosque activities become spaces for negotiation among religious leaders, customary figures, political actors, donors, and local communities. The data on the number of mosques in this article are drawn from Taufan Hidjaz's record, as cited by CNN Indonesia, which notes approximately 3,767 large mosques and 5,184 small mosques across 518 villages in Lombok (Taufan Hidjaz, 2023). These figures should be understood not merely as quantitative data on religious infrastructure, but also as an entry point for examining how mosques function as symbols of identity, centers of moral authority, and arenas where local elites build their social influence.

This study employs Pierre Bourdieu's theory of social capital as the primary conceptual framework for analyzing social dynamics and elite contestation in the development of mosques in Lombok. Bourdieu defines social capital as the accumulation of resources obtained through networks of social relationships that can be mobilized to achieve particular goals. Social capital is one of the main forms of capital, alongside economic and cultural capital, which can be transformed into one another and operate within competitive and negotiated social contexts. Social capital includes social obligations, networks of connections, and recognition that can be converted into other forms of capital, such as economic or symbolic capital, depending on the field in which it operates (Bourdieu, 1986).

Studies on mosques as social spaces have been widely conducted, particularly regarding their functions as centers of worship, education, social integration, and the formation of Muslim community identity. The studies of Mustain (2018), Sochadha (2020),

and Fahmi (2023) show that mosques in Sasak society play an important role in strengthening Islamic identity, maintaining social networks, and shaping the collective image of Lombok society. In a broader context, Hefner (2011) and Qodir et al. (2022) demonstrate that religious institutions in Indonesia are frequently connected to power relations, identity politics, and the production of social authority. Meanwhile, Bourdieu (1991), through the concepts of field and symbolic power, provides an analytical tool for understanding how social spaces become sites of competition for legitimacy among social actors. The similarity between these studies and the present article lies in the understanding that mosques are not only places of worship, but also spaces for the production of meaning, recognition, and authority. The difference is that this article specifically positions mosque development in Lombok as an arena for the contestation of elite social capital by examining how symbolic, network, economic, and cultural capital are mobilized to gain religious legitimacy and social influence. Through this focus, the article seeks to fill a gap in existing scholarship, namely the relationship between mosque development, elite contestation, and capital conversion practices in the context of local Sasak Islam.

Based on this background, this study aims to understand mosque development in Lombok as a social process that is not only related to the fulfillment of worship needs but is also marked by power dynamics, interest negotiation, and symbolic contestation among various actors. The mosque is positioned as a social arena that brings together religious elites, customary figures, and political actors in complex relations, in which its development and management serve as media for producing religious authority, social legitimacy, and symbolic influence. Mosque development also reflects the encounter and tension between local Islamic traditions rooted in Sasak culture and global Islamic influences in contemporary Islam. More specifically, this study explains three main issues: the configuration of elite actors and patterns of relations involved in mosque development in Lombok; mosque development as an arena of symbolic and political contestation in the struggle for religious authority and legitimacy; and the social implications of this process for religious practice, social cohesion, and the formation of Islamic identity among Lombok society.

Within the theoretical framework, mosques in Lombok are not understood as neutral and ahistorical religious institutions but rather as social arenas marked by power relations and symbolic interests. Mosques become spaces where various actors, particularly religious, customary, and political elites, interact and compete by accumulating and converting social, political, economic, and cultural capital to obtain legitimacy and religious authority. In this arena, community elites play a strategic role in producing and reproducing dominant Islamic narratives, establishing standards of religiosity considered legitimate, and directing the ideological orientation of mosques according to their interests and social positions. The processes of mosque development, management, and interpretation, therefore, do not merely reflect the collective piety of the Muslim community but also represent practices of negotiation, contestation, and symbolic domination among the actors involved. For this reason, mosques in Lombok need to be analyzed as dynamic social arenas that reveal the interconnection between religiosity and power, and as spaces where tensions between locality and globality, harmony and social fragmentation, and religiosity and identity politics are continually produced and contested.

In the context of mosque development, social capital serves as a strategic instrument for community elites to strengthen their social position and legitimacy. Symbolic capital, embodied in social recognition and prestige, becomes particularly important because mosque development serves not only as a religious activity but also as a symbol of status and power. Network capital, consisting of social relations and connections, enables elites to access resources and support needed in the development process. Thus, mosque development becomes an arena of social contestation in which social capital is mobilized to maintain or expand elite influence and power (Bourdieu, 1986).

Other literature affirms that social capital functions not only as a resource for strengthening social cohesion but also as an instrument for the struggle over power and domination in society. Bourdieu (2011) emphasizes the role of social capital in building cooperation and community cohesion, while also adding the dimensions of conflict and inequality in the distribution of social capital, which reflect uneven power structures. Local studies in Indonesia also show that mosque development often becomes a site of

contestation over status symbols and local political power, where elite actors use their social capital to gain legitimacy and strengthen their social positions (Sumaktoyo, 2025).

Therefore, Bourdieu's theory of social capital provides a comprehensive analytical framework for understanding mosque development as an arena of social negotiation and elite contestation. This approach enables the examination not only of religious aspects, but also of the socio-political dimensions embedded in the development process, including how social capital is mobilized and contested within the context of local power.

RESEARCH METHOD

The choice of this research title stems from the social reality of Lombok, where mosques are understood not only as spaces of worship but also as integral to social life, involving diverse actors and interests. Lombok's identity as a region with a very large number of mosques is often perceived as a symbol of harmony and collective piety. In practice, however, mosque development frequently becomes a complex social interactional space, full of negotiation and often marked by differences in views and interests among groups. The title of this study is intended to capture this reality by positioning mosque development as a social space where hidden dynamics among religious elites, customary figures, and political actors shape the direction of mosque management and meaning. Thus, the title functions not only as a thematic marker of the research but also as an analytical framework that guides the reading of social processes occurring behind the religious symbol of the mosque in Lombok society.

This research uses a qualitative approach with a field research design to explore in depth the social dynamics and contestation among community elites in mosque development in Lombok. The qualitative approach was chosen because it can capture social complexity and context that are not easily measured quantitatively, while also allowing the researcher to understand subjective meanings and social interactions in the field holistically and in context (Creswell, 2003; Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). This study focuses on social processes in which social capital serves as an instrument in the struggle for power and legitimacy; therefore, a flexible method open to dynamic social phenomena is required.

Data were collected through three main techniques: participatory observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation. Participatory observation enabled the researcher to directly observe activities, interactions, and patterns of social relations among community elites in the context of mosque development, thereby yielding authentic, context-specific data. In-depth interviews were conducted with community leaders, mosque administrators, and local elites to explore their perspectives, motivations, and strategies in utilizing social capital. Documentation, including archives, activity records, and materials related to mosque development, was also collected to complement and verify field data (Student et al., 2021).

Data analysis was carried out qualitatively using thematic and interpretive approaches, emphasizing the identification of patterns of contestation, strategies for mobilizing social capital, and the relationship between symbolic capital and social networks in mosque development. The analytical process involved data coding, theme categorization, and interpretation informed by Pierre Bourdieu's theory of social capital, enabling the study to reveal how social capital serves as an instrument of legitimacy and power contestation in the arena of mosque development. Data triangulation was applied to strengthen the validity of findings by comparing observations, interviews, and documentation that complemented one another (Sari et al., 2025). The research participants included religious leaders (Tuan Guru), community leaders, youth, and mosque management actors who were directly involved in the development process and in daily mosque activities. Participants were selected purposively based on their roles and relevance to the dynamics of mosque development in the research area. The criteria for involvement included experience, social position, and access to local decision-making processes.

The research process was conducted through several interrelated stages. The initial stage involved mapping the locations and actors involved in mosque development and management in Central Lombok and Mataram City. These two areas were selected because they represent different dynamics of the Sasak society: one with a strong local community base and the other as an urban area more open to broader socio-political networks. After the mapping stage, the researcher observed mosque activities, communication patterns

among administrators, forms of community participation, and relations among actors in development and management activities. In-depth interviews were then conducted with purposively selected participants to obtain explanations regarding their experiences, perceptions, strategies, and interests behind the mosque development process. Documentation data, including photographs, pamphlets, activity notes, and development archives, were used as comparative material to examine the consistency of field information. All data were systematically recorded, compared across sources, and verified through triangulation so that the findings did not rely on a single perspective. In this way, the study does not treat the community as a passive object, but as a source of knowledge that helps explain the social complexity behind mosque development (Bergold & Thomas, 2012).

The data analysis technique in this study follows the interactive model of Miles and Huberman, which includes data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing (Miles, 1994). Operationally, data reduction was carried out by rereading interview transcripts, observation notes, and field documents to identify sections on elite actors, funding sources, support networks, forms of legitimacy, and potential conflicts. The next stage was open coding to classify the data into initial categories, such as symbolic capital, network capital, economic capital, religious authority, negotiation of interests, and social fragmentation. These categories were then developed into broader analytical themes, including the configuration of elite actors, strategies for mobilizing social capital, symbolic-political contestation, and social implications for cohesion and Islamic identity. Data display was presented in thematic descriptions that brought together interviews, observations, and documentation. At the interpretive stage, Bourdieu's theory of the field and social capital was used to read actors' positions, the types of capital they possess, and how such capital is converted into legitimacy and authority. Triangulation was conducted by comparing statements among participants, matching them with field documents, and testing their consistency with observational findings. Through these steps, the analysis does not stop at event description, but is directed toward explaining the social mechanisms that make mosque development an arena of elite contestation in Lombok.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Configuration of Elite Actors and Patterns of Relations in Mosque Development in Lombok

Mosque development in Lombok is not merely a religious activity, but a complex social practice loaded with symbolic, political, and economic interests. The mosque has developed into a multifunctional public space that serves not only as a place of worship but also as a center for social, economic, and political development within the community. In Islamic history, the development of mosques has strategic significance, as exemplified by the Prophet Muhammad, who made the mosque a center for organizing social life, education, and the advancement of Islamic knowledge. For the Sasak community, building a mosque is understood as part of the Prophet's tradition, carrying great spiritual merit and significant social benefits, strengthening social bonds, and serving as a center for preserving religious values and communal life. Interview data with several community elites and mosque administrators in Lombok indicate that mosque development is a strategic arena for mobilizing social capital. One community leader stated, "This mosque development is not only about the physical building, but also about strengthening our social position through the networks and recognition we build" (Interview, Community Leader, 2024). This statement indicates that social capital, particularly symbolic capital and networks, becomes a key instrument in the mosque development process. Field observations support this finding by showing intensive fundraising activities and elite coordination, reflecting competition for social influence.

In the context of the Sasak society, the mosque is not a neutral institution. It represents the values, power, and ideological orientation of the actors involved. The process of mosque development always involves complex negotiations, from the planning and architectural design stages to the implementation of religious activities. Each stage often reflects the preferences and interests of particular groups, including religious, customary, and political elites competing for social legitimacy (Nasution et al., 2025). The study shows that mosque development in Lombok is frequently used to assert community social identity, maintain a positive image, and affirm moral authority within society. This phenomenon can be explained through Pierre Bourdieu's theory of social capital, which

conceptualizes social capital as the accumulation of resources derived from networks of social relations that can be mobilized to secure symbolic and material advantages (Bourdieu, 1986). In the context of mosque development, symbolic capital in the form of legitimacy and social prestige is obtained through active involvement in development projects. In contrast, network capital enables access to external resources such as donations and government support (Haerussaleh & Huda, 2021). Therefore, mosque development is not merely a religious activity, but a socio-political arena that shows how social capital is used as an instrument of domination and power negotiation.

Mosque development in Lombok is also inseparable from external influences, particularly through funding from transnational religious institutions or individuals with certain ideological affiliations. This influence affects architectural forms, management systems, and styles of da'wa that sometimes do not fully align with the inclusive and moderate traditions of local Sasak Islam. Such transformation creates tension between local values and global influences, while also provoking debates over the authenticity and sustainability of Sasak religious traditions. The relationship between social capital and power dynamics is also evident in mosque administrative documents, which record a significant increase in community and donor participation throughout the development process. This indicates that public trust in mosque administrators, as holders of social capital, is crucial to the smooth progress of development (Irwan et al., 2021). Trust serves as social capital that strengthens social cohesion and facilitates cooperation, while also becoming a tool of elite legitimacy in maintaining their position.

Mosques in Lombok have also become objects of symbolic contestation. Their names, locations, and the actors involved in the development process become markers of social and political status for particular groups. Local elites seek to make mosques evidence of social existence and instruments for legitimizing moral authority. This phenomenon aligns with the concept of religious commodification, in which mosques serve not only as places of worship but also as objects of religious tourism and symbols of community pride, as seen at the Hubbul Wathan Grand Mosque, which functions as an Islamic Center and tourist destination.

Pierre Bourdieu views mosque development as a form of capital struggle within a social field. Various actors use economic, symbolic, social, and cultural capital to dominate the mosque arena. Religious leaders leverage their reputation and networks of students, while politicians rely on bureaucratic power and public budgets for legitimacy. In this arena, dominant positions are determined not only by religious capacity but also by the ability to access resources and shape public opinion. Media support, billboards, and the involvement of national figures further reinforce the mosque as a symbol of power and an instrument of elite image-making (Haspiani, 2025). Interviews also reveal conflicts of interest among elites competing within the mosque development arena. A mosque administrator stated, "Sometimes there is a tug-of-war of interests, but that also pushes us to find new strategies so that development can continue" (Interview, Mosque Administrator, 2024). Observation supports this statement by documenting intensive negotiations over the distribution of roles and fund management. This conflict shows that social capital is not always harmonious, but is also a field of complex struggle and negotiation.

Amid these dynamics, the contestation surrounding mosque development also generates social fragmentation at the grassroots level. Differences in views on the mosque's direction and function may trigger conflict among groups, whether openly or covertly. This indicates that while mosques can build solidarity, they may also deepen social segregation if they are not managed inclusively and participatively. According to Swartz (2012), social capital, from Bourdieu's perspective, encompasses dimensions of conflict and domination as well as social cohesion. Social capital can become a source of inequality and exclusion when its distribution is uneven. In the case of mosque development in Lombok, elites with greater social capital can control the development process and decision-making, while groups with weaker social capital may be marginalized.

This study shows that mosque development in Lombok is not simply a religious activity, but a complex social process full of competing interests. Actors from various backgrounds, including religious leaders, customary elites, politicians, and external donors, significantly influence the direction, form, and function of mosque development. Contestation appears in the form of ideological competition, symbolic claims, and

strategies of social legitimation. The mosque is built not only as a place of worship but also as a means of asserting identity, power, and social influence within the community. Interview and observational data also show that elite network capital plays an important role in accessing external resources. One community leader explained, "Our networks with the government and donors from outside the region have greatly helped accelerate mosque development" (Interview, Community Leader, 2024). This illustrates how social capital functions as a bridge connecting internal and external resources, strengthening the social position of elites while expanding the capacity for development.

Mosque Development as an Arena for the Contestation of Symbolic Capital and Social Legitimacy

Mosque development in Lombok has become a site of contestation because mosques hold great symbolic value in the life of the Sasak community. The mosque is understood not only as a place of worship but also as a sign of communal honor, a center of social activity, and a source of moral recognition for the actors involved. In an interview, a mosque administrator stated, "For us, the mosque is a symbol of collective strength and a manifestation of the spirit of competing in goodness; it has become our symbol of pride, not only as a place of worship, but also as a marker of our social status" (Interview, Mosque Administrator, 2024). This statement shows that involvement in mosque development can generate social recognition that is not always material in form, but appears as prestige, trust, and moral authority. In Bourdieu's perspective, such recognition can be understood as symbolic capital, a form of capital that operates when society accepts, respects, and recognizes the position of a person or group as worthy of leading and determining the community's socio-religious direction.

This symbolic contestation is evident in how actors display their contributions, expand their networks, and shape the meaning of mosque development in ways that reflect their social positions. Religious leaders gain legitimacy through scholarly authority and closeness to the congregation; customary leaders through their cultural and historical influence; and political actors or donors through their access to economic and bureaucratic resources. When these various forms of capital enter the arena of the mosque,

development no longer remains a technical matter. However, it becomes a social process that determines who is considered most meritorious, most authoritative, and most worthy of being heard within the community. Therefore, conflicts that emerge are not always expressed as open opposition, but may appear as struggles for influence, differences in management orientation, architectural choices, patterns of da'wa, and the regulation of mosque activities.

This finding shows that the mosque's integrative function operates alongside the potential for social stratification. On the one hand, mosque development encourages cooperation, strengthens a sense of ownership, and revitalizes community solidarity. On the other hand, the unequal distribution of social capital allows certain actors to have greater access to decision-making than others. Thus, social capital not only produces cooperation but can also reinforce hierarchy when networks, reputation, and resources are concentrated in particular groups. This reading is consistent with Bourdieu's view of the social field as a competitive space in which actors seek to maintain or improve their positions by accumulating and converting capital. In the Lombok context, the mosque becomes an arena in which religious, cultural, economic, and political capital meet and are negotiated.

Based on these findings, mosque development needs to be managed in line with the principles of participation, accountability, and openness. The involvement of religious elites, customary elites, political actors, and donors need not be understood negatively, as long as the process gives the broader society space to participate in determining the direction of mosque development and management. A transparent management model can prevent the mosque from becoming a symbol of domination by a particular group, while preserving its function as a place of worship and a center of social cohesion. Therefore, mosque development in Lombok should ideally not only pursue physical grandeur, but also attend to participatory justice, the sustainability of social functions, and respect for the identity of local Sasak Islam.

Social Implications for Religiosity, Social Cohesion, and Islamic Identity

Mosque development in Lombok cannot be separated from external influences, particularly funding from transnational religious institutions or individuals with specific ideological affiliations (Safi'i et al., 2025). This influence shapes architectural forms, management systems, and styles of da'wa that sometimes do not align with the inclusive and moderate traditions of local Sasak Islam. Such a transformation creates tension between local values and global influences, while also provoking debates about the authenticity and sustainability of the Sasak community's religious traditions.

The relationship between social capital and power dynamics is also evident in mosque administrative documentation, which records a significant increase in community and donor participation throughout the development process. This indicates that public trust in mosque administrators, as holders of social capital, is essential to the smooth progress of development (Nurahman et al., 2025). Trust functions as social capital that strengthens social cohesion and facilitates cooperation, while also becoming a tool of elite legitimacy in maintaining their position. Amid these dynamics, contestation in mosque development may also produce social fragmentation at the grassroots level. Differences in views on the mosque's direction and function can trigger conflict between groups, both openly and covertly. This shows that while mosques can build solidarity, they also have the potential to deepen social segregation if they are not managed inclusively and participatively. According to Swartz (2012), social capital, from Bourdieu's perspective, encompasses dimensions of conflict and domination, not merely social cohesion. Social capital can become a source of inequality and exclusion if its distribution is uneven. In the case of mosque development in Lombok, elites with greater social capital can control the development and decision-making processes, while groups with weaker social capital may be marginalized.

The active participation of ordinary community members in development, even under elite influence, shows that social capital also functions as a medium of trust and social solidarity. Cooperation and organized collective work provide concrete evidence of how social capital facilitates collective action in the local context (Alfiansyah, 2023). However, the unequal distribution of social capital creates a risk of social exclusion for

groups with limited access to networks and symbolic resources. Based on this finding, local government, religious leaders, and civil society organizations are encouraged to develop a participatory, locally grounded mosque development policy framework. Collaboration between local and external actors should be directed toward strengthening the social function of mosques without negating deeply rooted local identity. Future research is encouraged to conduct comparative studies across regions with distinct social characteristics to identify similar or distinctive patterns of contestation beyond the Lombok context. This is important for developing evidence-based, context-specific policy recommendations to manage religious institutions in Indonesia more justly and sustainably.

Overall, the empirical data obtained through interviews, observations, and documentation show that mosque development in Lombok constitutes a complex arena for the contestation of elite social capital. Symbolic capital and social networks are mobilized to strengthen elite social positions and legitimacy, while also reinforcing community cohesion and identity (Herdiyanti, 2024). This study confirms the relevance of Bourdieu's theory of social capital for understanding the socio-political dynamics of the development of religious institutions in local communities. It makes an important contribution to the study of social capital in the context of socio-religious development in Indonesia.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that mosque development in Lombok cannot be understood merely as a religious activity, but rather as a social process involving power relations, capital exchange, and the struggle for legitimacy. The mosque serves as an arena where religious, customary, and political elites, as well as donors, interact and negotiate their social positions through symbolic, network, economic, and cultural capital. The involvement of these elites shapes the direction of development, management patterns, and the mosque's social meaning within the community. The findings reveal two main tendencies: mosque development can strengthen social cohesion through collective

participation and a sense of ownership, but it can also generate fragmentation when actors with stronger social capital dominate access to decision-making.

Theoretically, this article affirms the relevance of Bourdieu's perspective in reading the mosque as an active social arena, rather than as a neutral religious institution free from interests. The concepts of field, social capital, and symbolic capital help explain how religious recognition, moral reputation, social networks, and economic resources can be converted into local authority. Empirically, this study shows that local Sasak Islam does not exist in a static space, but continuously interacts with elite interests, social change, and external influences. Thus, this study contributes to the sociology of religion, particularly by clarifying the relationship among the development of religious institutions, elite contestation, and the formation of Islamic identity at the local level.

The limitation of this study lies in its dominant focus on community elites and mosque administrators, so the voices of groups with more limited access to decision-making arenas have not been explored in depth. In addition, the qualitative approach used in this study provides contextual understanding, but is not intended to produce broad generalizations for all areas of Lombok or other regions. Future research may expand the range of participants by involving ordinary congregants, women, youth, economically vulnerable groups, and external actors involved in funding or da'wa networks. Further studies may also employ comparative or longitudinal approaches to examine changes in social capital relations as mosques develop over time.

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