

## TRANSFORMATION OF *JODANG* FROM TRADITION INTO POLITICS

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### ABSTRACT

This study examines the *Jodang* tradition in Kenjo Village, Banyuwangi District, focusing on its cultural, social, and political dimensions. The tradition is held throughout the month commemorating the birth of Prophet Muhammad, during which villagers engage in nightly prayer rituals and distribute *Jodang* to their neighbors. The ritual serves to honor the Prophet through prayer, praise, and mosque decoration, with *Jodang* later consumed by the participants. This research employs a qualitative approach with an embedded single-case study design, using interviews, observation, and documentation as primary data collection methods. The analysis is framed by Max Weber's theory of social action, which provides a lens to interpret how religious and cultural practices can intersect with political behavior. Weber's typology of action, particularly traditional and value-rational actions helps explain the villagers' motivations, while also revealing how instrumental rationality emerges in political appropriation of the ritual. Data were analyzed thematically to connect empirical findings with theoretical insights. However, the tradition has also taken on political significance. Politicians increasingly participate by sponsoring or distributing *Jodang*, using the event as a platform to strengthen their public image and maintain constituent support. As such, *Jodang* has evolved from a purely religious and cultural practice into a political instrument embedded within local community life.

**Keywords:** Food, *Jodang*, Politics, Tradition

### INTRODUCTION

Traditional foods represent more than just sustenance. They are embodiments of cultural identity, collective memory, and historical continuity. In the context of post-Soeharto Indonesia, where decentralization has revived local traditions and fostered regional autonomy, food has become one of the most accessible and symbolic means of expressing communal and political identity. As cultural artifacts, traditional dishes reflect not only lifestyle and spirituality but also the socio-political histories of the communities that produce and consume them (Mardhiyyah, 2023; Weking, 2020; Santoso, 2025). For instance, *wajik*, a traditional Javanese sweet made from glutinous rice, symbolizes the courageous pursuit of righteousness and features prominently in ceremonies that reinforce Javanese cultural and moral values (Wardana, 2024). The persistence of such traditions contributes to the broader project of asserting Javanese identity within the national cultural mosaic.

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Similarly, the celebration of *Lebaran ketupat*, marking the end of the fasting month, not only signifies religious observance but also functions as a shared communal ritual that transcends urban-rural divides and strengthens Islamic and regional identities in the public sphere. Local culinary heritage also becomes a medium through which regional communities differentiate themselves within the national framework, asserting uniqueness and resisting cultural homogenization. Harsana et al. (2019), for example, highlight the *kolombeng* cake from Yogyakarta as a culinary expression of local distinctiveness, carrying symbolic meanings tied to authenticity and regional pride.

In some communities, such as the Pasemah of South Sumatra, traditional foods play explicitly social and political roles. Juniarti (2021) observes that food-related practices in this region help to consolidate group identity, maintain harmony, and preserve spiritual values that are particularly significant in the context of political decentralization and the revival of adat (customary law). However, heritage food is not immune to change. As Almansouri et al. (2022) argue, “heritage food is subject to cultural and societal influences,” which suggests that culinary authenticity is dynamic and often shaped by evolving power relations, globalization, and contestations over cultural representation.

Food illustrates a culinary heritage that is embedded in the ways of life of the people in Palermo (Italy). It can also bring the customer back to ancient times (Sgroi, Modica, and Fusté-Forné 2022). In Poland, culinary heritages represent a factor of tourism attraction. For example, Pierogi and cheese convey Polish gastronomy identities to visitors. Pierogi is a traditional Polish dumpling; it offers versatility in its fillings (Fuste-Forne, 2019).

Just like street food in Palermo (Miele & Murdoch, 2002) and traditional Polish cuisine (Richards, 2012) that represent cultural identity and serve as tourist attractions, local culinary traditions in various regions also play a crucial role in shaping community character and strengthening social bonds. These traditions not only showcase rich flavors (Long, 2004), but also reflect values and beliefs passed down through generations (Bessière, 1998). A similar phenomenon can be found in Kenjo Village, where traditional culinary practices like the making of *Jodang* are still carried out with a strong sense of togetherness and religiosity.

In Kenjo Village, the villagers have a tradition of making *Jodang*, a decorated egg that will be used as offerings during the whole month of Maulud to celebrate Prophet Mohammad's birth. They do the ritual every night for a month. The villagers take turns to provide *Jodang* as part of the ritual. They are happy to do it as part of tradition in the village. Nowadays, the good faith of the people is ridden by the political interests of the politicians.

Strong and favorable political images are essential assets for politicians and political parties, especially in democratic contexts such as Indonesia where public perception heavily influences electoral success. A credible and trustworthy public image not only shapes how politicians are perceived but also functions as a key strategy for

gaining and maintaining political legitimacy (Norris, 2000). According to Lubis and Rabbani (2023), political identity and image in Indonesia are shaped by various sociocultural factors, including religion, ethnicity, media representation, and public narratives. Therefore, image-building is not merely cosmetic. It is deeply intertwined with identity politics and public sentiment. In an era dominated by media visibility and information saturation, politicians must continuously manage their public persona to align with the values and expectations of the electorate (McNair, 2011). To be electable, they must cultivate positive and authentic impressions that resonate with voters' aspirations, often through strategic communication, symbolic gestures, and alignment with popular causes. Without such efforts, political figures risk being seen as disconnected, inauthentic, or untrustworthy that are electorally damaging in Indonesia's competitive and personality-driven political landscape.

The public image of politicians is important as political branding. In Tasikmalaya, the United Development Party (PPP) is also doing political branding as the Charismatic Ulama Party, Nahdiyyin Party, the Mass Organization Party, and the Dakwah Party. PPP are supported by charismatic ulama, where in Tasikmalaya, the context of charismatic ulama has political power as political actors who are followed by the public (Subhan and Ramdhani 2024). This research shows that an image positive regarding religion has political value in Indonesia.

Religious identity politics in Indonesia functions as a strategic tool for political actors to gain advantage and mobilize mass support, often by appealing to shared beliefs and communal values. Islamic law, as noted by Jamilah (2024), provides a moral framework that legitimizes political expression rooted in religious identity, making it appear as a form of piety rather than mere political interest. Politicians frequently utilize religious rhetoric, symbols, and clerical endorsements to secure legitimacy and influence public sentiment (Naja & Riyanto, 2024). While effective in rallying support, this practice risks fostering social fragmentation and undermining democratic pluralism. As Mietzner (2019) and Hasan (2021) highlight, the rise of religious populism has intensified political polarization, often framing political contestation as a moral struggle and marginalizing minority groups in the process. Thus, while religion can empower political participation, its instrumentalization poses serious challenges to inclusive and democratic governance.

This research will employ Max Weber's theory of social action as elaborated by Ritzer and Smart (2018) to analyze the motivations behind individuals' behaviors in a sociopolitical context. Weber identifies four ideal types of social action, each grounded in a different mode of reasoning and meaning-making. The first is instrumentally rational action, where individuals act based on calculated goals and the most efficient means to achieve them. This type of action is often found in political decision-making or campaign strategies where actors seek tangible outcomes, such as winning elections or gaining public support, through deliberate planning and resource allocation. Second is value-rational action, which is guided by a belief in the inherent value of an action, regardless of its success or consequences. Politicians or citizens may engage in activism or symbolic

gestures not because they are effective, but because they align with deeply held moral or ideological values, such as justice or religious duty.

Third, affective action is driven by emotions or feelings rather than rational calculation. In this case, behaviors such as spontaneous public protests or charismatic leadership performances may be expressions of love, anger, pride, or loyalty, rather than strategic choices. Finally, traditional action is rooted in ingrained habits, customs, or longstanding social norms. People often participate in rituals, vote along family lines, or maintain political loyalties out of tradition, without critically assessing alternatives. Understanding these four categories of social action allows researchers to interpret human behavior in a more nuanced way, beyond purely rational or utilitarian frameworks. It also helps to uncover the interplay of emotion, value, custom, and calculation in shaping political identities and actions within Indonesian society.

## **RESEARCH METHOD**

This research investigates *Jodang*, a traditional ritual in Kenjo Village that has undergone transformation into a political instrument, using a qualitative approach with a single embedded case study design. The qualitative method was deemed appropriate as it allows for an in-depth exploration of how cultural traditions intersect with political interests, particularly by capturing the subjective experiences and perceptions of local actors involved in the *Jodang* tradition (Creswell & Poth, 2018). By formulating research questions grounded in the lived experiences of the respondents, the study seeks to produce rich, descriptive insights that explain how and why *Jodang* is practiced, and how its symbolic and communal meanings are appropriated for political purposes. This approach aligns with the interpretive paradigm, which prioritizes meaning-making and context over generalizability (Yin, 2018).

Data collection was conducted through multiple techniques: in-depth interviews, participant observation, and a literature review. In-depth interviews enabled researchers to gather narratives from key informants, such as head village, citizen, and local political actors who possess deep knowledge of the tradition and its evolving functions. Observations were carried out during the *Maulud* month to capture the ritual's actual implementation, offering insights beyond what could be articulated in interviews. This method helped identify behavioral patterns, social interactions, and symbolic elements that were not explicitly mentioned by informants (Angrosino, 2007). The literature review served to contextualize the empirical findings within existing theoretical and historical frameworks, as well as to cross-validate information obtained from the field. Once data collection was complete, the analysis was conducted thematically to identify recurring patterns and tensions, allowing researchers to synthesize the findings into a coherent narrative that reflects both cultural continuity and political appropriation.

## **RESULT AND DISCUSSION**

This research aims to explore the culture of Kenjo Village, focusing on its traditions, particularly *Jodang*, which holds an important place in ceremonial practices.

The discussion is structured as follows: first, the author will provide an overview of the people of Kenjo Village; second, an explanation of the Jodang tradition itself; and finally, an analysis of the connection between Jodang and politics.

### **The Origin and Character of Kenjo**

Kenjo Village is located in Glagah district, Banyuwangi Regency, East Java. It has cool weather because it is located near Ijen Mountains. The village road is not wide, only about 3 meters. The agricultural activities of the villagers are planting rice in rice fields and fruits plantation. In terms of ethnic groups the people in Kenjo Village area belong to Osing ethnic group. They speak Osing language but are also capable of speaking Bahasa Indonesia fluently in their daily life.

Kenjo Village is well known for its mystics, who are usually identified by the villagers' ability in Black Magic. People come to the village to practice black magic. There are a lot of accusations regarding the people in this village that haven't been proven. This is concerning for the village chief. The Village Chief stated that he wants to try to change this because it is not fair if there are accusations without any proof that his villagers are practicing black magic, such as santet (black magic that make people sick or even die).

“Yes, I heard rumors related to black magic in this village. But, personally, I don't believe it. I know where the people “alleged” as practitioners, but to me they are just ordinary citizens. I believe in the principle of innocence, because if there is an issue related to black magic it will disturb the peace of the people.” (Interview with the Village Chief, Ahmad Sofiyanto, on September 25, 2024)

The villagers are religious citizens. Most of them are Muslim and they practice their ritual seriously. Every month of Maulud (The month when Prophet Mohammad was born) the villagers hold rituals in the mosque every night in the whole month. After sending praises to Prophet Mohammad and praying, they give offerings to the pilgrims who come to the mosque. The offerings that have been given are Jodang.

The youth movement and political participation are also rising in Kenjo Village. They are the reason why the current Village Head wants to be elected. They think their village needs a new leader with a young age and with great vision for the Village. The current Village Head is not only young, but also has strong leadership skills. He was elected as Village Head when he was 27 years old. It is relatively young compared to other Village Heads in Indonesia.

“They say we need to provide a lot of money to be elected as village head. The number could be hundreds of millions of rupiah. But I only spent about 20 million. The money is not to do money politics but to make flyers, to buy food and drinks during the campaign.” (Interview with the Village Chief, Ahmad Sofiyanto, on September 25, 2024)

In Ethiopia, there is a lot of youth unemployment because they don't own land to do agriculture-related business. The young people have to struggle to get employment (Moreda 2023). But in Indonesia, young people have an important role in changing rural dynamics. They have the potential to develop the rural area. The paradigm that stated we need to move out from the village to the city to be successful is no longer relevant nowadays (Reynaldi, Ibrahim Khan, and Krisnawati 2021).

### **Jodang as tradition in Kenjo Village**

Jodang is decorated egg that always been there as part of the ritual. During the month of Prophet Mohammad birth (Maulud months), the people in Kenjo Village prepare decorations that contain eggs. Every neighborhood takes turns offering Jodang because the ceremony happens every night in Maulud Month.

“Every night in Maulud months we celebrate the Prophet Mohammad's birth by holding a ritual at the mosque. We take turns offering Jodang. Each resident gives a different number of eggs, some are 40, others 60, and it can also reach 100. It depends on their financial conditions.” (Interview with Nur, on September 24, 2024)

The history of Jodang itself mentions Jodang as egg flower. The people will decorate wooden twigs with paper and then they will stick them in banana stems. At the end of the twigs, they decorated an egg surrounded by paper flowers. The more eggs that are placed in one trunk, the more beautiful it looks because it has more twigs. Villagers who provide Jodang with more eggs also get social recognition from other villagers and will be known for their welfare and generosity.

Figure 1 Jodang



Jodang is a tradition that hold a lot of values. This tradition happens because of the creative acculturation of the villagers to respect the born of Prophet Mohammad. The egg flowers symbolize faith and monotheism. The hard eggshells are a symbol of faith; it symbolize that faith must be hard and firm. Then the thin skin inside the hard outer shell is a symbol of purity, the white part of the egg symbolizes goodness/morals, and the egg yolk in the core is a symbol of monotheism (Jumhardiyanto 2023).

The villagers also used Jodang as an attraction in a parade. After the pandemic hit in 2021, the villagers were happy because they could hold celebrations again. They use Jodang as the main attraction. They put Jodang in the vehicles (pedicab or pickup truck) and parade it around the village. The villagers hope that after pandemics, they can always celebrate Prophet Mohammad born day every year (Fanani 2021). Jodang also suitable with Sustainable Development Goal No. 2 is zero hunger. It means that there is a common target for countries in the world to eradicate hunger with several indicators such as achieving food security, improved nutrition, and promoting sustainable agriculture. When we want to eradicate hunger, we can also use local knowledge or local tradition to achieve the goals.

Eggs are a source of nutrition rich in protein. When the people in Kenjo Village give Jodang as an offering, they also give protein for free to all the pilgrims attending the ritual. It also happens every night for a month; hence, during that month, there is a guarantee that Kenjo villagers will have food for their dinner. The challenge will be to keep this tradition in other months.

The generosity of Kenjo people in the Maulud months is well known because of their selfishness. We can identify their reaction using the value rationality theory from Max Weber. Weber explains that people's actions can be explained not only by instrumental rationality but also by their traditional values or beliefs (Ritzer and Smart 2018). When they give Jodang as offerings, they are not expecting feedback but merely doing the traditions that already take place in the villages from generation to generation. Galang-Danganan also explains about traditional Libad and Panatad that happened in the Philippines. It is not only a religious ritual but also tourism that shows the importance of cultural sustainability (Galang-Danganan 2025).

Kenjo people maintain jodang as their tradition because it is deeply embedded in the structure of the society. Since they were a child, their parents have already been doing it. Hence, when they grow up, they will do the tradition voluntarily. This tradition strengthens the solidarity of the people in Kenjo village. They are happily doing the tradition that uphold local wisdom in their village.

### **Jodang as a Political Tool**

The Jodang tradition has long been an integral part of life in Kenjo Village. It serves as a deeply rooted cultural practice passed down through generations and draws residents together to perform collective rituals each years. It foster a strong sense of unity and belonging within the community. Such gatherings, marked by high participation and shared cultural values, also create a unique social moment that extends beyond religious or cultural purposes. In the political sphere, this communal atmosphere presents an opportune moment for politicians to engage with the villagers, introduce their platforms, and strengthen ties with their constituents. Thus, while Jodang remains a symbol of cultural heritage and social cohesion for the community, it simultaneously becomes a strategic stage for political actors seeking to maintain visibility and support.

“Jodang has been a tradition in Kenjo Village since a long time ago. Even before I was born. When it passed the Maulud Month, some mosques still held the ritual. It can be held in the mosque or a villager’s home.” (Interview with citizen, Subandi on 4 December, 2024)

Based on Max Weber’s concept of traditional action, which refers to social actions rooted in long-standing habits, customs, or social norms, the tradition practiced by the community in the given data can be categorized as a traditional action. This is evident from the statement that the tradition is “already rooted deep in society” and is carried out routinely every year during the Maulud months through a series of communal rituals. This pattern shows that community participation is not merely driven by rational considerations or pragmatic objectives, but by inherited customs that have become part of the community’s identity and social cohesion. The timing, which is tied to the religious calendar, and the communal nature of the practice further affirm that the meaning of this action is derived from cultural heritage and shared values rather than from individual calculation. However, within the same context, there is another dimension when politicians use this traditional moment to introduce themselves or maintain constituent support. For politicians, such involvement constitutes a form of rational–instrumental action, a deliberate strategy to achieve political goals. Thus, the tradition carries a dual layer of meaning: for the villagers, it represents a socially and culturally binding traditional action; for politicians, it becomes a strategic arena that can be optimized for political purposes without altering its traditional meaning in the eyes of the community.

“Politician donors can send up to five Jodang to me. I have been helping them gain voters from the villagers here. Two legislative members always send Jodang to us, Mr. Zamroni and Mrs. Astuti from the Nasdem Party.” (Interview with citizen, Nur, 4 December 2024). This statement reflects how politicians perceive Jodang not merely as a cultural tradition, but as a strategic opportunity to secure electoral support. By contributing to the event, they aim to strengthen their presence in the community, win the villagers’ trust, and ultimately increase their chances of being elected in the next election.

The activity of donating Jodang is not only shown for the act of tradition but also gives a good image to society. This is a good opportunity for politicians to give a good impression. They will get the image that they are generous and care about traditions that happen in the village. This is explained by the instrumental rationality theory by Max Weber, that politicians donate to get benefits such as religious image from the citizens. It can no longer be identified as a traditional action because they expect benefits from their action, not purely doing the tradition.

Democracy means people have the highest power. It shows in the form of a general election when people choose their representation as their leader. Democracy requires participation from all people in the society in making and implementing decisions (Aisyahwara and Fahadayna 2024). Actors have the power to construct the statements according to the position and power they hold. This situation then led the

actors to influence the policies by making discourse in the public sphere with the primary focus on targeting the voices of the wider audiences (Maulana and Kurniawan 2024).

Kenjo Village has a population of 1,853 residents. For politicians, introducing themselves to thousands of people in their electoral district requires considerable effort. Local traditions that attract large gatherings present a valuable opportunity for engagement. The Jodang tradition, in particular, brings many villagers together in one place, allowing politicians to build a positive public image and strengthen their connection with the community. By participating in Jodang, they can demonstrate respect for local customs and values, reinforcing their alignment with the cultural identity of the village.

The majority of voters in Kenjo Village are Muslim. They have been practicing the religion-related tradition since their ancestor. They also have political power because they also practice religious rituals and tradition, such as Jodang to welcome the birth month of Prophet Mohammad. This showed as an opportunity for the politician to get benefit from it and build their political image. They will hope people remember and vote for them when the election time comes.

## CONCLUSION

This research reveals that Jodang is an offering presented during rituals in Kenjo Village, held every day throughout the Maulud months. The Jodang offerings reflect the wisdom of the villagers' ancestors in honoring the Prophet Muhammad and expressing gratitude to God. According to the people of Kenjo Village, they enjoy performing this ritual and take turns providing Jodang offerings each night during the Maulud months.

This tradition conveys several important lessons. First, it teaches respect for the Prophet and God. Second, acts of kindness and the giving of offerings strengthen social bonds within the community. Lastly, it demonstrates that the wisdom of traditional communities can be just as important as modern approaches; in the case of Jodang, it highlights the enduring value of generosity. However, politicians often view this tradition as an opportunity to promote themselves and gain the trust of prospective voters.

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