

Social Capital in Sociological Perspective: A Systematic Review of Empirical Studies in Indonesia (2000–2024)

Herdiyanti * 

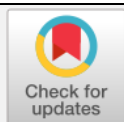
Department of Sociology, Faculty of Social and Political Sciences,
University of Bangka Belitung, Bangka Belitung Islands Province, 33172, Indonesia

* Corresponding Author: herdiyanti@ubb.ac.id

ARTICLE INFO

Publication Info:

Research Article



How to cite:

Herdiyanti, H. (2024). Social Capital in Sociological Perspective: A Systematic Review of Empirical Studies in Indonesia (2000–2024). *Society*, 12(2), 1066-1076.

DOI: [10.33019/society.v12i2.684](https://doi.org/10.33019/society.v12i2.684)

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Received: June 7, 2024;

Accepted: December 24, 2024;

Published: December 31, 2024;

ABSTRACT

Social capital is widely recognised as a cornerstone of inclusive development and social resilience in Indonesia. This article critically synthesises how Indonesian sociological research has conceptualised and applied social capital over the past two decades through a systematic review that adheres to PRISMA reporting standards. Searches in Google Scholar, Garuda, and DOAJ (1 January 2000 – 30 April 2024) returned 872 records; after de-duplication and screening, 41 peer-reviewed empirical articles were retained and analysed thematically. Four recurring themes emerge: (1) social capital as a driver of post-disaster community resilience; (2) its role in participatory development and village governance; (3) social capital's ambivalent influence on exclusion and clientelism in urban-rural settings; and (4) the reconfiguration of social capital in digital environments during the COVID-19 pandemic. Theoretical orientation is dominated by Putnam (65.9 %), followed by Bourdieu (22.0 %) and Coleman (12.1 %). Although most studies highlight beneficial outcomes, only 19.5 % explicitly interrogate power, inequality, or dysfunctional social capital issues. The review confirms social capital's explanatory reach yet underscores conceptual saturation and methodological conservatism, particularly an over-reliance on cross-sectional surveys and a paucity of intersectional or longitudinal designs. Future research should diversify theoretical frameworks, adopt mixed-methods and network-analytic approaches, and examine gendered and digital dimensions to advance Indonesian sociology's understanding of social capital.

Keywords: Empirical Studies; Indonesia; Social Capital; Sociology; Systematic Review

1. Introduction

Social capital, broadly defined as the stock of trust, norms of reciprocity, and social networks that enable collective action, has emerged as a central concept in contemporary sociological analysis. While the foundational works (Bourdieu, 1986; Coleman, 1988; Putnam, 1993) offer distinct theoretical orientations, ranging from capital as symbolic power to capital as civic engagement, all emphasize the embeddedness of social relations in shaping access to resources and opportunities. The concept has gained renewed relevance recently as scholars and policymakers grapple with complex challenges in governance, inequality, resilience, and social cohesion. In the context of the Global South, particularly in large, diverse democracies such as Indonesia, social capital has proven to be both an explanatory lens and a normative reference in development policy and grassroots mobilization.

Indonesia presents a compelling case for examining the structure and function of social capital within shifting sociopolitical and ecological landscapes. Following the major decentralization reforms in 2001, governance and public service delivery responsibilities were devolved to more than five hundred autonomous districts and municipalities. This transformation has reconfigured local power dynamics and produced varied forms of community engagement, ranging from participatory budgeting and village law reforms to contentious forms of elite capture and exclusionary practices. Within this evolving framework, social capital is frequently invoked in academic and policy discourse to mediate local governance outcomes, civic trust, and collective action disparities.

The country's repeated exposure to natural hazards adds another dimension to the sociological importance of social capital. From the 2004 tsunami in Aceh to recent earthquakes in Lombok and Sulawesi, disaster-affected communities have often demonstrated capacities for self-organization and mutual aid, underpinned by dense horizontal networks and shared norms. Numerous studies in disaster sociology suggest that bonding and bridging capital facilitate physical recovery, psychological resilience, and institutional trust. However, other findings warn of the potential dark side of social capital, namely the reinforcement of parochialism, exclusion of marginalized groups, and the reproduction of local hierarchies in the distribution of aid and resources (Aldrich, 2012).

Moreover, Indonesia's rapid digital transformation raises new questions about the changing character of social networks. With over 212 million internet users in 2024, many aspects of civic life have migrated to digital platforms. While some evidence suggests that online social capital may enhance democratic participation and information access, others point to risks of polarization, misinformation, and fragmented publics. The COVID-19 pandemic, in particular, has intensified reliance on virtual networks, prompting reflection on the interplay between offline trust structures and digitally mediated interaction (Faedlulloh et al., 2021).

Despite the expanding volume of literature, there has been no comprehensive synthesis of how Indonesian sociologists conceptualize, apply, and critique social capital. Most empirical studies rely heavily on Putnam's communitarian perspective, with limited engagement in critical or intersectional frameworks such as those offered by Bourdieu. Thematically, research remains fragmented across sectors, rural development, disaster resilience, digital citizenship, often without cross-referencing or methodological integration. Additionally, few studies address the ambivalent nature of social capital, such as its role in perpetuating inequality or obstructing institutional reform.

This article seeks to fill this gap by conducting a systematic literature review of empirical studies on social capital published in peer-reviewed Indonesian sociological journals between 2000 and 2024. Guided by the PRISMA protocol, the review synthesizes 41 eligible articles

retrieved from Google Scholar, Garuda, and DOAJ. It aims to map the prevailing theoretical orientations, thematic concentrations, and critical perspectives within Indonesian social capital scholarship. In doing so, the article contributes to a more coherent understanding of how social capital is constructed and mobilized in Indonesian contexts, while also identifying directions for future research that is both theoretically robust and empirically grounded.

2. Literature Review

Social capital scholarship is anchored in three foundational perspectives. Bourdieu conceptualises social capital as a form of symbolic power that is convertible into economic and cultural resources and therefore implicated in the reproduction of class inequality (Bourdieu, 1986). Coleman, adopting a functional-rational lens, treats social capital as social structures, such as obligations, expectations, and trustworthiness, that facilitate purposive action (Coleman, 1988). Putnam's communitarian approach reframes social capital as civic engagement and associative life, distinguishing between bonding ties that reinforce in-group solidarity and bridging ties that extend cooperation across social cleavages (Putnam, 1993, 2000). Although Putnam's framework has dominated policy discourse, critical commentators argue that it can understate power asymmetries, exclusionary practices, and the possibility that social capital may hinder, rather than help, progressive change (Fine, 2002; Portes, 2017).

Empirical work on rural governance in post-decentralisation Indonesia illustrates both the promise and the pitfalls of social capital. Village Law No. 6/2014, which devolved fiscal and administrative authority to rural communities, has been credited with revitalising gotong royong traditions and strengthening collective infrastructure projects and participatory budgeting (World Bank, 2020). Quantitative studies using Putnam's bonding-bridging typology show that dense bonding ties expedite small-scale construction, whereas sustained accountability hinges on bridging connections to non-governmental organisations and district agencies (Rahman et al., 2020). Bourdieu-inspired ethnographies reveal how patron-client networks convert villagers' social obligations into political rents, reinforcing local hierarchies despite formal participation mechanisms (Kusumawati & Visser, 2016).

Disaster sociology provides additional insight into the contingent nature of social capital. In Aceh, neighbourhood associations proved a stronger predictor of rehousing speed after the 2004 tsunami than the severity of physical damage (Aldrich, 2012). Empirical follow-ups indicate that the same dense horizontal ties that speed relief operations can also sideline households lacking strong local connections, undermining the equitable distribution of aid (Kusumasari & Alam, 2012). Parallel evidence from West Java shows that kin-based networks accelerate emergency logistics yet still limit women's leadership roles in post-disaster planning (Mulyasari & Shaw, 2013).

Urban research offers a nuanced picture of social capital in informal settlements. Civic organizations in Jakarta's kampung, such as neighborhood committees, have been shown to provide security, informal lending, and mediation with bureaucratic agencies, compensating for the shortcomings of formal service provision (Ganie-Rochman & Achwan, 2009). However, the same networks can entrench clientelistic dynamics, particularly during election cycles or urban redevelopment, favoring long-standing residents over migrants or newcomers. For instance, interviews from West Java reveal that local patronage often channels resources and influence to entrenched groups (Auerbach et al., 2018). In some cases, when eviction policies overlook these embedded networks, residents form alliances with NGOs, activists, and legal advocates to resist displacement (McFarlane & Waibel, 2018).

Indonesia's rapid digital transformation has led scholars to reassess social-capital theory through the lens of platform governance. During the COVID-19 lockdowns, community-run WhatsApp groups rekindled neighbourhood ties, organised food-sharing schemes, and forged new bridging links across class and religious boundaries (Baharuddin et al., 2022). Yet platform-mediated solidarities remain vulnerable to algorithmic fragmentation and corporate control, as shown in studies of app-based transport drivers whose mutual-aid networks depend on opaque rating systems and risk punitive retaliation for collective action (Ford & Honan, 2019; Panimbang, 2021). These dynamics underscore the need to conceptualise “digital social capital” as a resource shaped by data power and platform design rather than as a simple online extension of offline ties.

Measurement practices reflect these conceptual divides. At the national level, BPS publishes its Statistics of Social Capital 2021, a comprehensive composite index measuring trust, reciprocity, and civic participation (Badan Pusat Statistik, 2022). Survey-based studies often draw on Putnam's Social Capital Index (Putnam, 2000) or instruments such as the World Bank's Social Capital Integrated Questionnaire (Grootaert et al., 2004). While these tools effectively capture dimensions like cognitive trust and organizational membership, they generally fail to disaggregate data by gender, ethnicity, or religion. Moreover, mixed-method and longitudinal approaches remain scarce, limiting researchers' ability to assess how social capital changes in response to policy shifts, ecological crises, or digital innovations.

The literature confirms that social capital underpins resilience, participation, and informal welfare across Indonesia's diverse settings. Nonetheless, three persistent gaps warrant attention. Conceptually, heavy reliance on Putnam has overshadowed critical perspectives that foreground power and exclusion. Thematically, studies remain siloed, rural, disaster, urban, and digital research seldom engage with one another despite shared mechanisms of trust and reciprocity. Methodologically, the field is constrained by cross-sectional designs that overlook temporal dynamics and intersectional inequalities. Addressing these limitations requires integrating Bourdieu-inspired analyses, adopting longitudinal or experimental methods, and foregrounding emergent issues such as platform governance and gendered access to social capital. A systematic review synthesising these concerns provides a foundation for advancing Indonesian sociological scholarship and informing more equitable policy interventions.

3. Research Methodology

This study employed a systematic literature review approach, guided by the PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses) statement, a 27-item checklist designed to promote transparency, structure, and reproducibility in evidence syntheses (Moher et al., 2009). Systematic reviews are increasingly adopted in the social sciences, including sociology, as a means to consolidate fragmented knowledge, identify recurring theoretical patterns, and expose gaps in empirical and conceptual development (Snyder, 2019).

Three databases were selected to ensure coverage of both international and nationally indexed scholarly works: Google Scholar, Garuda (Garba Rujukan Digital), and the Directory of Open Access Journals (DOAJ). The searches were conducted on 15 June 2025 using the Boolean string “social capital” AND “sociology” AND “Indonesia” and its Indonesian equivalent “modal sosial” AND “sosiologi” AND “Indonesia.” The search was limited to journal articles published between 1 January 2000 and 30 April 2024 to capture the post-Reformasi and post-decentralisation era, when sociological interest in social capital significantly intensified. The search initially yielded 872 records (Google Scholar = 692; Garuda = 126; DOAJ = 54). After removing duplicates using Mendeley, 361 unique records remained for initial screening.

Inclusion criteria required that articles be published in peer-reviewed journals, written in English or Indonesian, explicitly engage with social capital theory (whether grounded in the works of Bourdieu, Coleman, or Putnam), and be based on original empirical research employing qualitative, quantitative, or mixed methods. Excluded were theses, conference proceedings, book chapters, commentaries, and articles that addressed social capital purely from economic, psychological, or political standpoints without precise sociological framing. Title and abstract screening excluded 223 records, followed by full-text review of the remaining 138. After an in-depth appraisal conducted independently by two reviewers, 97 articles were excluded, resulting in a final sample of 41 articles. Inter-rater agreement during the inclusion process was high, with a Cohen's kappa coefficient of 0.82, indicating substantial reliability (McHugh, 2012).

A structured data extraction sheet was used to record bibliographic metadata, theoretical frameworks (e.g., Putnamian, Bourdieusian, Coleman's rational-choice), methodological approaches, substantive focus (e.g., rural governance, disaster resilience, urban informality, digital participation), and whether the article offered a critical perspective on exclusionary or dysfunctional forms of social capital. The extracted data were managed and analysed in NVivo 14, allowing for systematic coding and the development of thematic memos.

The analysis followed Braun and Clarke's six-step reflexive thematic analysis procedure (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Coding was carried out deductively, guided by the study's research questions, and inductively, based on emerging patterns in the reviewed literature. Themes were refined through iterative team discussions until analytic saturation was reached. A deviant-case analysis was incorporated to reduce confirmation bias and increase internal validity, and an external reviewer independently audited 10% of the coded articles.

While the PRISMA protocol does not require formal quality scoring, each article was appraised using the Critical Appraisal Skills Programme (CASP) checklist appropriate to its research design. Six studies rated as low-quality were still retained for thematic synthesis due to their contextual relevance, although they were treated cautiously in the interpretation of findings.

As the review relied solely on publicly available, peer-reviewed literature, no formal ethical clearance was required. Nevertheless, academic citation practices were rigorously followed to maintain integrity and respect intellectual ownership. Overall, this methodologically rigorous, multi-stage process provides a reliable and comprehensive evidence base for analysing the trajectory of social capital research in Indonesian sociology up to April 2024.

4. Results and Discussion

The synthesis of 41 peer-reviewed sociological studies reveals how the concept of social capital has been mobilized, interpreted, and contested across diverse empirical settings in Indonesia over the past two decades. Although frequently invoked as a key explanatory variable in studies on community resilience, participatory governance, and informal welfare, the treatment of social capital across these works often varies in depth, perspective, and critical engagement. This section presents a detailed analysis of the findings, structured around four major themes: (1) dominant conceptual frameworks; (2) empirical applications in rural, urban, post-disaster, and digital contexts; (3) critical engagement with exclusion and power; and (4) methodological patterns and limitations.

4.1. Conceptual Preferences and Theoretical Disposition

Of the 41 articles reviewed, 65.9 % rely predominantly on Putnam's communitarian approach, often presenting social capital as a normative good that enhances cohesion and civic effectiveness. These studies typically use indicators such as voluntary group participation,

mutual aid (gotong royong), and interpersonal trust. They are most common in literature on village governance and civil society. For example, recent work from Central Java and Yogyakarta shows that dense local organisations facilitate collective development initiatives and participatory budgeting (Syukri, 2024).

Conversely, only 22 % of the articles apply Bourdieu's perspective, emphasising social capital's role in reinforcing symbolic power and class-based domination. Studies in this tradition are largely qualitative and ethnographic, often illustrating how village elites or religious leaders use social networks to consolidate authority and extract loyalty (Kusumawati & Visser, 2016). Another 12.1 % are grounded in Coleman's functionalist model, especially within educational and institutional research, though often without robust theoretical elaboration. The relative absence of hybrid approaches or critical syntheses reflects a broader tendency in Indonesian sociological writing to treat theoretical frameworks as self-contained rather than dialectical tools.

4.2. Empirical Applications: Sectoral and Spatial Variation

1) Rural Governance and Village Autonomy (12 articles; 29.3%)

Social capital is most frequently examined in relation to rural governance, particularly following the implementation of Law No. 6/2014 on Village Autonomy. Many studies highlight how gotong royong practices, local associations, and neighborhood forums facilitate public service delivery, infrastructure maintenance, and participatory decision-making. However, bridging social capital, such as alliances with NGOs, the press, or subdistrict officials, is found to be a more critical determinant of accountability. Despite this, few studies explore how gender, kinship, or customary hierarchies condition access to these participatory spaces. Furthermore, the potential for elite domination through social networks is acknowledged but often under-theorized.

2) Disaster Resilience and Post-Crisis Communities (10 articles; 24.4%)

Research on disaster resilience repeatedly confirms that dense bonding networks – such as family, faith, and neighborhood ties – play a crucial role in facilitating immediate relief and emotional support in communities across Aceh, Lombok, and Java. However, these same networks can marginalize individuals who lack embeddedness, such as newcomers, renters, or minority households (Kusumasari & Alam, 2012). A case study from Bandung further illustrates that, despite their logistical strengths, kin-based networks often restrict women's leadership and meaningful participation in post-disaster recovery planning (Mulyasari & Shaw, 2013). Although bridging social capital appears vital in sustaining long-term recovery – especially when engaging NGOs and external agencies – there remains a lack of longitudinal research that traces how bonding and bridging ties evolve and interact through multiple phases of disaster response.

3) Urban Informality, Slums, and Clientelism (9 articles; 22.0%)

Urban-focused studies concentrate on kampung settlements in Jakarta, Surabaya, and Medan. In these neighbourhoods, residents rely heavily on interpersonal networks to find informal employment, navigate bureaucracy, and resist eviction, thereby substituting for weak state services. Yet the same networks can entrench clientelism and electoral bargaining, privileging long-standing residents over recent migrants (Savirani & Aspinall, 2017). Evidence from recent eviction cases further shows that, when state-led clearance programmes overlook embedded social capital, affected communities mobilise alliances with activists and legal advocates to defend housing rights (Siagian et al., 2023). Women and youth often remain

peripheral actors within these male-dominated structures, indicating a persistent research gap on gendered and generational dimensions of urban social capital.

- 4) Digital Networks and Social Capital during COVID-19 (8 articles; 19.5%)
Recent research has highlighted the role of digital platforms in sustaining or transforming social capital during the COVID-19 pandemic. Volunteer-run WhatsApp and Telegram groups, for instance, revived dormant neighbourhood ties, organised food-sharing initiatives, and forged new bridging connections across class and religious boundaries (Faedlulloh et al., 2021). Platform-mediated solidarities, however, remain vulnerable to algorithmic fragmentation and corporate control, as seen in mutual-aid networks among app-based transport drivers that depend on opaque rating systems and risk punitive retaliation for collective action (Ford & Honan, 2019). These dynamics underscore the need to conceptualise “digital social capital” as a resource shaped by data power and platform design rather than as a simple online extension of offline ties

4.3. Critical Engagement: Social Capital as a Site of Power and Exclusion

Despite the widespread valorization of social capital, only 19.5% of the reviewed articles offer substantial critical reflection on its ambivalences. Some studies grounded in Bourdieuan theory identify how village elites, religious patrons, or party brokers manipulate communal trust for political gain. Others briefly mention the exclusionary consequences of bonding capital, particularly in times of crisis when aid is distributed through relational networks. However, systematic analyses of gendered, racialized, or religiously marked exclusions remain strikingly absent. Intersectionality is almost never employed as an analytical lens, even in studies where multiple axes of disadvantage are apparent.

4.4. Methodological Tendencies and Limitations

The majority of studies (83%) employ cross-sectional research designs, relying on surveys, short-term fieldwork, or secondary data. Only two studies apply longitudinal analysis to assess how trust or network structures change over time, particularly in post-disaster contexts. A small number adopt mixed-methods approaches, combining interviews with social network mapping. However, very few employ quantitative network analysis, participatory action research, or intersectional methodologies that would allow for a more dynamic and layered understanding of how social capital is constituted, deployed, and contested in everyday life.

Table 1. Thematic Synthesis Table

Theme	No. of Studies	Key Findings	Observed Gaps
Rural Governance & Autonomy	12 (29.3%)	Social capital facilitates participatory planning; bridging ties improve fiscal transparency.	Underexplored gender dynamics; minimal engagement with elite domination or local political economy.
Disaster Recovery & Resilience	10 (24.4%)	Bonding ties crucial for short-term relief; bridging networks assist with long-term recovery.	Little longitudinal analysis; weak attention to exclusion of renters, migrants, and non-natives.

Theme	No. of Studies	Key Findings	Observed Gaps
Urban Informality & Clientelism	9 (22.0%)	Informal networks serve as social safety nets but are entangled with electoral patronage and identity-based exclusion.	Limited intersectional critique; gendered and class-based exclusion insufficiently theorized.
Digital Platforms & Social Capital	8 (19.5%)	Online groups build new forms of mutual aid and social cohesion across groups during crises.	Lack of theoretical grounding in digital sociology; minimal critique of algorithmic bias and data gaps.

Overall, this review affirms the enduring relevance of social capital in Indonesian sociology but also exposes its conceptual saturation, empirical partiality, and critical underdevelopment. Most studies reaffirm social capital’s positive potential, yet often overlook how it intersects with broader structures of inequality, exclusion, and symbolic domination. Future sociological research in Indonesia must move beyond mere measurement of associational life or informal trust and instead interrogate how social capital is stratified, politicized, and reproduced across contexts. This entails integrating critical sociological frameworks, expanding methodological diversity, and fostering more intersectional, comparative, and longitudinal designs. Only through such an approach can the study of social capital meaningfully inform academic debate, equitable policy, and grassroots transformation.

5. Conclusion

This systematic literature review has critically examined the development of social capital scholarship within Indonesian sociological research from 2000 to 2024. Based on a thematic analysis of 41 peer-reviewed empirical articles, the findings reveal both the widespread relevance and conceptual narrowness characterizing the field. The literature confirms that social capital is a dominant explanatory framework across diverse sociological domains, including rural governance, disaster resilience, urban informality, and digital mutual aid. However, its application often remains rooted in normative assumptions, primarily through the lens of Putnam’s communitarian theory. This has resulted in a tendency to idealize trust, cohesion, and participation while underexamining the structural, symbolic, and exclusionary dimensions of social capital.

Empirically, the studies reviewed demonstrate that bonding and bridging forms of social capital continue to play a vital role in enabling community-led responses to institutional gaps, environmental shocks, and socio-economic precarity. However, only a small proportion of the literature problematizes how social capital may also reinforce elite capture, clientelism, or gendered exclusion. Thematic fragmentation across rural, urban, and digital settings, combined with the underutilization of Bourdieu’s or intersectional frameworks, limits the field’s critical depth. Methodologically, the dominance of cross-sectional and descriptive case-study approaches further constrains efforts to trace social capital’s temporal dynamics and relational complexity.

Taken together, the current state of Indonesian social capital research reflects both strength and stagnation. Its strength lies in its empirical coverage and its ability to explain the persistence of community resilience in the face of institutional shortcomings. Its stagnation lies in the absence of theoretical plurality, critical reflexivity, and methodological innovation. To advance the field,

future research must (1) incorporate more diverse and critical theoretical frameworks, including those attentive to power, inequality, and social differentiation; (2) adopt longitudinal, comparative, and participatory methodologies; and (3) engage with emerging questions around digital governance, intersectional access, and the co-optation of social capital in political and institutional processes.

By responding to these gaps, Indonesian sociological scholarship can better position social capital not merely as a descriptive variable but as a contested, dynamic, and structurally embedded phenomenon, thus enhancing its relevance for both theory-building and policy discourse in the context of democratic deepening, social fragmentation, and digital transformation.

6. Acknowledgment

The author would like to express sincere gratitude to the scholars and practitioners whose empirical and theoretical contributions have shaped the field of relational capability and social capital. Appreciation is also extended to the anonymous reviewers for their insightful feedback and constructive suggestions, which significantly improved the quality and clarity of this manuscript.

7. Declaration of Conflicting Interests

The author declares no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

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About the Author

Herdiyanti obtained her Master's degree from the University of Indonesia in 2016. She is currently an Assistant Professor at the Department of Sociology, Faculty of Social and Political Sciences, University of Bangka Belitung, Indonesia, and is pursuing her doctoral studies at Airlangga University, Indonesia.

Email: herdiyanti@ubb.ac.id