

## The Transformation of the Political-Legal Status of the Kasunanan Surakarta in the Post-Constitutional Court Decision Era

<sup>1</sup>Tiara Tahta Anindhita, <sup>2</sup>Ali Ridho, <sup>3</sup>Safiyya Hisaan Irahma Pranowo, <sup>4</sup>Widhya Facitha Rezaliany, <sup>5</sup>Arofah Minasari

<sup>1,2,3,4,5</sup>Universitas Sebelas Maret, Indonesia

E-mail: tahta.anindhita@student.uns.ac.id

### ABSTRACT

The political and legal position of the Surakarta Kasunanan Palace has undergone a transformation shifting from the historical center of sovereignty to marginalized institutions within the modern state structure. Juridically, the 2014 Constitutional Court decision served as a turning point, extinguishing hopes for the restoration of the Special Region of Surakarta (DIS) status. Using a qualitative case study approach, this research analyzes the phenomenon through Max Weber's theory of Authority and Legitimacy, alongside concepts of Collective Memory and Social Representation. The findings indicate that the Court's rejection represents a victory for the state's rational-legal authority over the Palace's claims to traditional authority, which no longer possesses a foothold in post-1946 formal law. This condition is exacerbated by internal fragmentation and prolonged succession conflicts, which constitute a form of "political suicide" by damaging the Palace's internal legitimacy. Consequently, an asymmetrical relationship has emerged, placing the Palace in a dependent position as an administrative client reliant on government budgets for physical maintenance and cultural activities. This study concludes that the Palace has undergone a fundamental shift in its functional role, transitioning from a sovereign political entity to cultural heritage site and tourist attraction. In a modern democracy, the government must treat the palace as a national asset and object of policy managed under rational-legal management. State funding should be used as a lever for transparency and reconciliation, positioning the state as an active mediator to ensure the palace aligns with the creative economy and city identity, and brought under legal oversight to safeguard it against internal disputes.

**Keywords:** Surakarta Kasunanan Palace, Constitutional Court, Rational-Legal Authority, Memory Politics, Asymmetric Power, Culture Heritage Management.

### INTRODUCTION

The Chinatown Uproar marked a turning point in the Islamic Mataram Kingdom's ability to maintain its dominance by building the Kasunanan Surakarta Palace in 1745. Surakarta gained the status of Yogyakarta Sultanate and became the capital of the Javanese kingdom for two centuries (Urfan et al., 2022). In accordance with Javanese cosmology, the Solo (Surakarta) Palace's grandeur is derived from both its history and its opulent and spiritual spatial layout. The Javanese nobility regarded it as their main cultural stronghold due to its designation as "Pusering Tanah Jawi" and "Sumbering Budaya Jawi" (The Center of Java) (Achmad, 2025; Urfan et al., 2022). President Soekarno also gave the Charter of the Special Region of Surakarta (DIS) on August 19, 1945, making Paku Buwono XII the official Head of the Special Region (Fathoni, 2024; Lestari et al., 2025).

But even with all of this greatness, its current position is at odds with a heartbreaking reality. The status of the Special Region of Surakarta (DIS) was taken away exactly one year later, in 1946. The 10th law of 1950 made the area part of Central Java Province. Political instability, social unrest and the strength of the Anti-Swapraja Movement, which opposed the feudal system, caused this change (Lestari et al., 2025). Then, a very important moment caused the loss of political sovereignty even

clearer: the 2014 Constitutional Court decision that turned down the request for judicial review to restore Surakarta's Special Region status. The most ironic thing about this legal move is that the Kasunan Surakarta leadership, which had completely failed to settle the internal throne struggles within its own palace walls, filed the constitutional lawsuit to gain regional authority. This decision legally put an end to the palace's hopes of regaining its special status, making its claim to be a special administrative region less valid.

The palace currently reflects dependency in a different way from how it used to be. A significant number of the buildings have not been properly maintained and remain in poor condition. Due to continual internal conflict, government support for maintenance and cultural growth, which should come from the APBD (Regional Budget) or the APBN (National Budget), frequently becomes postponed or cancelled. In a 2024 interview with *TribunSolo* Official, Gusti Moeng claimed that the government has continued revitalization projects, such as renovating the town square, without receiving the support of palace relatives or the Traditional Council Institution (LDA). This exclusion indicates that the palace's cultural authority is decreasing. As a consequence, the King of Surakarta is now completely dependent on support from the national and local governments for repairs. The Deputy Mayor of Surakarta pointed out that in an effort to qualify for supplementary revitalization support, the palace is required to show professionalism in fund management.

Moving beyond traditional historical analyses of Surakarta's administrative shifts, this research examines the socio-structural fallout of the 2014 Constitutional Court decision on the palace's bargaining power within modern bureaucracy. Unlike previous research focused on the historical revocation of Surakarta's special status or the formal legalities of Constitutional Court petitions. It conceptualizes the palace as an emerging "administrative client" that has undergone a fundamental function transformation. The study contends that the Court's ruling solidified the dominance of rational-legal authority, effectively repositioning the palace from a sovereign entity to a dependent policy object governed by formal state mechanisms.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### Theory of Authority and Legitimacy

According to Max Weber, legitimacy represents a crucial element in evaluating the stability and empirical authority of a social order within the framework of Weberian sociological theory (Nikolakakis, 2024). Based on Weber, there are essentially two primary sorts of power: coercion power, which can be obtained illegally through threats or violence, and authority, which is characterized by legalization of power (Slyusar et al., 2025). Only when the subjects feel that the order has an appropriate reason to be implemented does a power structure become stable authority. This situation is consistent with Weber's idea of domination (*herrschaft*), which is more complex than just using force or offensive power. Conversely, dominance is a social relationship that results from the subjects' internal acceptance of the ruler's legitimacy and voluntary compliance (Nikolakakis, 2024; Slyusar et al., 2025).

Max Weber classified the types of relevant ideal authority within the conditions of modern society, including Traditional Authority and Rational-Legal Authority, each represented by different sources. Traditional Authority is based on the holiness of traditions that have been passed down hereditarily from previous generations; it is sourced from a leader who is obeyed through lineage and sustained by personal relationships based on loyalty. On the contrary, Rational-Legal Authority is based on the legitimacy that emerges from a trust in the legality of formal rules and legal procedures, where obedience is directed at a position within an impersonal and rational bureaucratic structure. Consequently, this is considered the most efficient way to arrange modern society (Sulhan & Lessy,

2022).

Max Weber's framework of authority can be used to see the clash between the traditional legitimacy of the palace and the rational-legal authority of the modern state (government). The Keraton is still oriented towards an understanding of Javanese power that views power as a supernatural and spiritual entity (Zainuddin & Nguindip, 2025). However, the post-independence state of Indonesia tends to put forward a system of formal law, while historical arguments about *vorstenlanden* (land of kings) no longer possess strength within the established national legal framework. The illusion of traditional power in maintaining legitimacy, even as "Pusering Tanah Jawi" (Javanese: Center of Javanese Land) could not avoid defeat by Rational-Legal Authority through the 2014 Constitutional Court decision.

### **Collective Memory and Social Representation**

Collective memory, as developed by Maurice Halbwachs, posits that memory is not rigid or static by nature but is continuously reconstructed within a social framework. From a theoretical standpoint, collective memory is understood as a social construction formed through an active process of interpreting the past, rather than as a neutral or objective memory (Haas et al., 2025). Because collective memory is fundamentally social, the determination of what is remembered or forgotten is dictated by a group's specific framework of meaning. In a Weberian perspective, collective memory is closely related to the process of legitimation in the effort to construct a belief in legitimate rights to power. Memory politics involves a strategic plan to create narratives of the past in order to build legitimacy in the present. These narrative memories function as symbolic self-assurance for a ruling group to perpetuate their power and authority, as well as to achieve ideological consensus or discipline among members of the public (Nikolakakis, 2024).

Meanwhile, the process by which individuals or groups collectively imagine and interpret an order is influenced by social representations. Serge Moscovici pioneered this concept, defining it as a system of values, ideas, and practices with a dual function: providing a cognitive order that allows individuals to orient themselves and master both the material and social worlds, and enabling communication by providing a shared code for exchanging meaning and classifying historical experiences (Haas et al., 2025). In Weber's theory, this is referred to as *Vorstellung* or mental representation. Individual actions and social relationships are conditioned by actors based on their representation of an objective order that is considered legitimate (Nikolakakis, 2024). Legitimacy is entirely a social construction under the observation of an audience, meaning a system is only considered legitimate as long as people trust its right to exist.

The politics of memory and social representation are two intertwined concepts used to explain how society understands the past to build reality and legitimacy in the present. These concepts are crucial for understanding how traditional institutional processes, such as those of the Kasunanan Surakarta Palace, attempt to maintain existence and legitimacy within a modern state structure. Currently, there is a gap between the elite's euphoria regarding past glory and a society that tends to be skeptical of the palace's political relevance in a democratic era. Consequently, it can be said that the Surakarta Palace is trapped in an illusion of power through internal memory politics that is incompatible with the logic of the modern state.

### **METHOD**

This study utilizes a qualitative approach with a case study design. The case study approach was chosen because it allows for a detailed examination of the transformation of the Surakarta Palace's special political and legal position following the Constitutional Court decision. Data acquisition was

conducted through the reading and interpretation of sources coherent with the phenomenon of the Palace's transformation. This study employed documentation techniques on December 2025 to gather up-to-date secondary data, including scholarly journals, books, and media reports. This period was chosen to accurately capture recent budgetary politics and internal palace dispute. The selection of secondary source specifically focused to those published between the 2014 Constitutional Court ruling and early 2025 to guarantee analytical relevance to the palace's current status as an "administrative client".

Data analysis was performed using Max Weber's Theory of Authority as the primary analytical tool to examine the transition from traditional authority to the domination of rational-legal authority. Additionally, the theories of Social Representation and Collective Memory were utilized to understand the political memory processes used as instruments of legitimacy in institutional communication. These data were analysed in depth to identify patterns in the shift of power, taking into account internal variables such as elite fragmentation (succession conflicts) and external variables such as the government's political budget. The data analysis follows a systematic through three primary stages. It begins with data reduction, filtering legal documents and media reports for insights into the palace's changing status. This is followed by data display, where categorization by Weberian Authority Theory is applied to analyze the clash between traditional and rational-legal structures, while accounting for factors like elite fragmentation and budget politics. Then conclusion drawing and verification, where the identified patterns are cross-checked using Social Representation and Collective Memory theories to validate the interpretation of the palace's transformation from a political subject into a national policy object. This framework ensures the article transcends mere chronological description, offering a deep theoretical explanation for the palace's shift from a sovereign political actor to a dependent policy object.

## **RESULT AND DISCUSSION**

### **Illusion Power and Failure of Memory Politics**

The 2014 decision of the Constitutional Court can be seen as a juridical closing of the claim to return to Special Region (DIS) status. The panel of judges rejected the judicial review of Law Number 10 of 1950 concerning the formation of Central Java Province, primarily because the applicants, GRAY. Koes Isbandiyah and KP Eddy S. Wirabhumi of the Traditional Council (LDA), did not possess the adequate legal standing to represent the Surakarta Palace as a whole. Furthermore, the Court argued that existing laws do not hinder the preservation of Javanese culture, as cultural advancement can continue under the jurisdiction of Central Java Province. This rejection reflects the state's consistency in upholding rational-legal authority within the post-1945 governmental system. Since Government Decree Number 16/SD/1946, the effective power of the Surakarta Palace has been integrated into the central government, weakening its traditional political legitimacy. Consequently, historical arguments regarding *vorstenlanden* (Dutch: Land of the Kings) are no longer capable of overcoming the established national legal framework.

The failure of the Surakarta Palace to obtain legal legitimacy is exacerbated by an internal legitimacy base that is incompatible with the logic of the modern state. As constitutional avenues have closed, internal ideological conflicts have further paralyzed political efforts. The Kasunanan elite remains dependent on memories of past glory and spiritual political narratives that view power as a supernatural entity. These demands for special status tend to be based on the politicization of history and collective memory. Such historical identity narratives are considered more symbolic than normative, functioning as negotiation tools for short-term local political interests in the absence of objective constitutional parameters (Zainuddin & Nguindip, 2025). This spiritual orientation results in

minimal political articulation that can be accepted by legal-rational logic. Meanwhile, views steeped in concepts of divine revelation and sectarianism lack relevance for the general public. This has caused skepticism among the people of Surakarta, who evaluate the palace as lacking a sufficient historical and cultural foundation to obtain special status. The gap between the elite's internal memory and external public perception continues to weaken the palace's political position in the democratic era.

This gap becomes increasingly clear when compared to Yogyakarta. While Surakarta remains trapped in an internal political memory incompatible with a modern state, Yogyakarta successfully transformed its historical memory into a source of national legitimacy. Yogyakarta established itself within the national narrative through the contributions of Hamengkubuwana IX during the Independence Revolution, positioning the monarchy as an integral part of the "founder of the nation" narrative. The Yogyakarta Sultanate built high public trust by integrating traditional institutions into a clear regional government structure, making the monarchy appear compatible with democratic political institutions (Fathoni, 2024). In contrast, the Surakarta Palace became trapped in protracted internal conflicts, from the emergence of "Twin Kings" to an inability to adapt to anti-feudal values. This has allowed the state to take over the palace's authority, leaving Surakarta without a strategic position in the national narrative in the eyes of the public and the state.

While many regions lost their autonomy through strategic external political blunders, Surakarta's failure was rooted in a more complex internal crisis. Whereas the Pontianak Sultanate's legitimacy vanished following Sultan Syarif Hamid II's collaboration with Dutch colonialism during the 1945 revolution (Rusnaini, 2016). Instead, the rulers of Surakarta, Pakubuwana XII and Mangkunegaran VII, formally declared their support for the Republic as early September 1945 (Fathoni, 2024). The divergence is clear; while Pontianak failed due to external factors regarding its colonial collaboration, Surakarta collapsed because its internal elites united against the mass movement. In Javanese perspective, this chronic instability indicates that the *wahyu kedhaton* has vanished, leaving the king's authority ignored by both subjects and relatives (Sunarmi, 2018). These recurring internal fracturings, seen today in the "Twin Kings" controversy and the friction with the Traditional Council (LDA) formed the core justification for the Constitutional Court's refusal to grant special status.

### **"Keraton Commotion" as Political Suicide**

The internal dynamics of the Kasunanan Surakarta Hadiningrat Palace, particularly in the post-2014 period, clearly demonstrate that the greatest threat crippling the institution is not the government, but rather the chronic conflict among the palace elite themselves. In the last decade, internal palace politics has shifted from mere family rivalry to a structural fragmentation that damages cultural legitimacy, breaks the continuity of *paugeran* (traditional rules and regulations), and ultimately provides the state with a justification to intervene and take over management gaps previously claimed as palace prerogatives. Concrete events occurring across two generations illustrate this decline. Following the death of Pakubuwono XII, who left no empress or official crown prince, a leadership dualism emerged, opening the way for legitimacy struggles among descendants and factions asserting their own traditional authority (Nabilla, 2022; Achmad, 2025; Mardianti & Rhiyantie, 2025). Although reconciliation efforts were made, relationships between elites fractured again, reaching a peak tension with the emergence of "Twin Kings" under Pakubuwono XIII due to fundamental differences in interpreting the *pagan* for royal succession.

This conflict has not only played out through symbolic disputes but has repeatedly manifested as open confrontations involving the locking of palace gates, struggles over ritual space, and incidents of physical violence that have dragged state apparatus into the arena of conflict. Actions such as the confinement of princesses within the *Keputren* (princess's quarters), mutual police reports, and clashes

between opposing camps (Wismabrata, 2021), as well as the taking over of the Kamandungan door based on a Decree of the Minister of Home Affairs (Bramantyo, 2025), show that internal conflict has exceeded the reasonable limits of a traditional dispute. The inability of traditional stakeholders to manage disputes internally has lowered the authority of the Surakarta Palace not only in the eyes of society but also in the eyes of government stakeholders tasked with guarding social stability, cultural preservation, and the local economy. Every incident reinforces the image of the palace as an institution incapable of enforcing its own governance and traditional discipline, serving as an administrative justification for state intervention to prevent further damage.

From the perspective of elite fragmentation, the situation at the Surakarta Palace illustrates how the fight for status, access to cultural assets, and symbols of power can break an institution's functionality to an irreparable point. The elites, who should serve as the center of cultural preservation, have instead positioned the palace as an arena for patronage competition rather than a center of cultural value production. The palace's dependency on the government budget, for building maintenance, traditional activities, and the allowances of the Abdi Dalem (royal servants), has become stronger because the palace lacks a single, responsible voice for administrative matters. Regional and central governments have affirmed through various policies that state aid can only be provided if the palace maintains neat internal governance and undisputed leadership (Bram, 2025). In other words, the state did not rob the palace of its cultural autonomy; rather, the palace surrendered it through unresolved, persistent conflict.

This condition has produced an entirely new relationship, vastly different from the palace's historical position as a symbol of local sovereignty. Fragmentation has shifted the palace from a political actor to an "administrative client" whose access to resources depends on compliance with state regulations. The resulting political logic is simple but firm: the state cannot grant autonomy to an institution that is incapable of governing itself, especially when that conflict repeatedly threatens public order and damages cultural heritage. At this point, sharp rhetorical questions, such as "How can the state grant autonomy if the King himself is being sued by his own younger siblings?" become a raw reflection of an internal legitimacy crisis that can no longer be hidden.

### **The State Enters, the King Submits**

The relationship between the Surakarta City Government and the Surakarta Kasunanan Palace over the final decade has undergone a drastic transformation, shifting from a balanced historical kinship to a completely asymmetrical pattern. Both the city and central governments have tangibly become patrons holding full control over resources, while the palace has fallen into a position of a client dependent on government budgets and administrative legitimacy. This dependency is not merely a consequence of external pressure, but rather the result of the palace's internal failure to maintain the stability, governance, and traditional authority that should serve as the foundation of its existence. The prolonged succession conflict since 2004, coupled with fragmentation among the nobles and abdi dalem (royal servants), has left the palace without a single authority capable of negotiating as an independent cultural institution. As a result, the state no longer views the palace as an entity eligible for autonomy, but rather as a fragile asset requiring strict supervision to prevent physical and symbolic damage.

This dependency is proven concretely in government-led revitalization projects. The APBN (National Budget) or APBD (Regional Budget), which should serve as instruments for preserving cultural heritage, have instead become devices for coercive discipline, forcing the palace to follow the logic of state administration. The local government has responded to this dependency by linking aid to the palace's internal conflicts, repeatedly emphasizing that a "family accord" and conflict resolution must be prioritized before funds are released (Fajarlie, 2022; Bram, 2025). This reflects a significant

shift in authority: the state regulates the tempo and determines the limits of movement, while the palace can only accept these terms to secure help for building maintenance and traditional ceremonies. Even the use of relatively small grant funds now requires professional management, including formal proposals and accountability reports (Bram, 2025). In this context, the budget is no longer a form of support, but a tool to subdue and integrate the palace into the modern state order. The government utilizes these steps to ensure the protection of cultural reserves, but politically, it demonstrates the increasing submission of the palace as it becomes a cog in the state administrative machine rather than an independent cultural partner.

Tensions between the palace and the city government were also evident during the revitalization of the town square area. Complaints from the Traditional Council Institution (LDA), led by Gusti Moeng, highlight that they were not involved in the initial planning (Tribun Solo Official, 2024, 01:39). This shows how the palace's symbolic authority is increasingly sidelined as the city government designs a cultural agenda centered on economic development interests. The palace is forced to accept state intervention because it lacks the internal power to reorganize itself. Ironically, groups of nobles have specifically asked the state to intervene to resolve internal conflicts, signifying that the legitimacy of conflict resolution has moved entirely outside the palace walls.

### **From Political Subject to Cultural Object**

The declining function of the Kasunan Surakarta Palace in contemporary times indicates that the institution's future is almost certainly limited to its role as a cultural museum or center for traditional preservation, rather than a political force with negotiating power in regional governance. This transformation did not happen suddenly; it is the result of a long accumulation of historical failures, prolonged internal rifts, and administrative pressures that have gradually placed the palace under state authority. In modern political construction, the palace's position is no longer determined by its ability to rule, but by its capacity to be protected and managed as a strategic cultural heritage asset, particularly in its contribution to regional development narratives.

This change is clearly visible in the legal status and manner in which the state bureaucracy treats the Surakarta Palace as an object, rather than a subject, of public policy. While the Sultanate was once the center of territorial power and a symbol of local sovereignty, its position is now part of a cultural heritage inventory that must be maintained for the public interest, equivalent to other archaeological sites in urban spatial planning. The Palace is still respected symbolically, but that respect no longer translates into administrative authority. The palace's area of authority has narrowed to a spiritual space and the circle of its own relatives. Although it has lost operational political sovereignty, the palace is still recognized *de facto* as a cultural symbol whose potential can be developed through state regulations (Lestari, et al., 2025). Fund management and the physical revitalization of buildings now rely on the decisions of relevant ministries to ensure the palace remains a national asset supporting cultural promotion and tourism.

The disconnection of the palace from public governance became more firm after the Special Region of Surakarta (DIS) status was abolished in 1946 and its territory was integrated into Central Java based on Law No. 10 of 1950. With the revocation of that juridical base, the Surakarta Palace lost its legal foothold to demand a political role at the provincial or city level. The 2014 Constitutional Court decision, which rejected the palace's lawsuit, further affirmed the disappearance of this legitimacy. Since that moment, the palace has had no role in regional policy formulation, no involvement in regional institutional formation, and no administrative authority whatsoever. All governmental functions have switched fully to the modern bureaucracy, and political relations between the Surakarta City Government and the palace are increasingly determined by budget mechanisms. The palace's dependency on revitalization budgets strengthens the City Government's position as the

key actor, with every form of aid accompanied by conditions for internal reconciliation and compliance with administrative procedures, standards the palace has historically failed to meet.

This condition in Surakarta contrasts sharply with Yogyakarta, which successfully maintained its political relevance through a framework of asymmetric decentralization or special autonomy guaranteed by the constitution. This includes the institutions of the DIY Regional Government, culture, land affairs, spatial planning, and the specific procedures for filling the positions and duties of the governor and deputy governor (Putri, et al., 2024). The historical legitimacy of Sultan Hamengkubuwono IX during the independence struggle created a positive intersection between national identity and the traditional monarchy, which was formally approved through Law No. 13 of 2012. With this legitimacy, the Sultan simultaneously serves as the Governor of DIY with the authority to issue Special Region Regulations and manage strategic affairs. Meanwhile, the Surakarta Palace lacks an equivalent legal mechanism, making it impossible to claim a similar political role in the modern state structure.

In this context, the reduction of the Surakarta Palace's role can be read as the final closure of the feudal political ideals that once dominated the city. Prolonged internal conflict caused the palace to lose its authoritative ability, demanding that the state step in as a mediator and manager. Elite splits weakened the traditional authority that should have served as their base of legitimacy, allowing the state bureaucracy to take over the void once filled by the monarchical structure. Within the framework of political modernization, the value of “Javanese power” is now reinterpreted as a source of morality and spirituality for leaders, rather than a basis for operational political power.

The transformation is very clear: what was once a center of power has shifted into a cultural institution whose relevance is determined by the extent to which it can support the creative economy, tourism, and city identity. With the disappearance of political space, the absence of administrative power, and increasing state penetration through budget mechanisms and regulations, the Surakarta Palace is in a position where its only functional future is to act as a guardian of traditions and cultural heritage. This role is more symbolic than political, and it is defined more by the needs of city development than by the internal will of the monarchy itself.

## CONCLUSION

This study concludes that the political and legal status of the Kasunanan Surakarta has undergone a fundamental transformation from a traditional sovereign entity into a cultural institution positioned under the rational-legal framework of the modern Indonesian state. The 2014 Constitutional Court decision marked a decisive juridical moment that closed the possibility of restoring the Special Region of Surakarta status. Through Weber's theory of authority, this transformation shows the dominance of rational-legal authority over traditional authority that no longer has a strong constitutional foundation in the post-1946 legal order.

The decline of the palace's political bargaining position was not caused solely by state intervention, but also by internal fragmentation within the palace elite. Prolonged succession conflicts, competing claims of authority, and the inability to maintain internal governance have weakened the palace's traditional legitimacy. This internal crisis has created an image of the palace as an institution that is unable to govern itself, thereby giving the state stronger justification to intervene through administrative, budgetary, and heritage management mechanisms.

As a result, the relationship between the Kasunanan Surakarta and the state has become increasingly asymmetrical. The palace is no longer positioned as an autonomous political actor, but as an administrative client that depends on government support for building maintenance, cultural preservation, and ceremonial activities. State funding has become not only a preservation instrument,

but also a mechanism of control that requires accountability, transparency, and internal reconciliation. The future relevance of the Kasunanan Surakarta therefore lies not in restoring political sovereignty, but in strengthening its function as a cultural heritage institution, tourism asset, and symbol of city identity. The government needs to treat the palace as a national cultural asset that must be protected through rational-legal management while still respecting its symbolic and historical value. State intervention should be directed toward mediation, institutional reform, and transparent cultural governance so that the palace can survive as a living heritage institution rather than remain trapped in unresolved elite conflict.

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