

# The Practice of Political Dynasty and Kinship in Local Government of Hulu Sungai Utara District

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**Abstract:** The practice of political dynasty has been detected in many local elections in Indonesia. This political condition may have a connection with the failure of democratization implemented in Indonesia during the Reformation era. To delve into this issue, the researchers conducted descriptive qualitative research regarding political dynasty and kinship in one of the districts in Indonesia, Hulu Sungai Utara. The researchers used Gramsci's framework of hegemony to investigate the way political dynasty and kinship is constructed and perpetuated in Hulu Sungai Utara district. The researchers also utilized several media including print and digital media as the secondary data of this study. In the analysis of the data, the researchers discovered two ways of incumbent to perpetuate and monopolize local electoral system. Here, Abdul Wahid HK and Almien Ashar Safari (The regent and the Chief of the Provincial Legislatures Council of Hulu Sungai Utara) appear to have operated two types of power, that is soft and hard power to perpetuate their political dynasty in Hulu Sungai Utara.

**Keywords:** Local Politic; Political Orientation; Political Dynasty.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

In political dynasty, kinship connection has a significant role to exercise power of a certain group. This phenomenon has spread in numbers of practices including in Indonesian's local politics. Mostly, political dynasty can determine the construction of public policies. This practice, to some extent, can also limit the participation of some civil societies in the political process as it has monopolised the electoral system by transferring power to the incumbent's family.

Principally speaking, dynasty politics does not violate any constitution or democratic process. If the family of incumbent gains their position through a fair election system, the dynasty politics is surely not noxious in democratisation system. The problem of dynasty

politics, however, lies on the fact that some of incumbants choose their family to replace their position in government. Some of incumbants even consciously or unconsciously select their relative to maintain their control and domination. One of the examples occurs in Hulu Sungai Utara district when Abdul Wahid, who occupied the position as the regent from 2012 to 2021, continues his domination through his son, Almien Ashar Safari, who has occupied the position as the Chief of the Provincial Legislatives Council of Hulu Sungai Utara from 2019 to 2024.

The general election which initially has a purpose to corroborate local democracation (Sulistiyanto & Erb, 2009, pp. 3; Hanif & Pratikno, 2012, pp. .89) seems to be fail in its implementation due to the political kinship and political dynasty. Leo Agustino has mentioned this political kinship issue. According to him, political kinship is conducted to build a political empire in the level of region or nation and has a purpose to protect and maintain the governing class' position which can construct public policies based on their interest (Agustinus, 2010).

The practice of political kinship or political dynasty has been embedded in many aspects such as political organisation and government. Wasisto (2013) reveals two factors that can cause this practice. The first factor is the inability of political parties to revitalize the election of local leaders. Another factor may be caused by the cultural and political situation in society that tends to maintain the status quo of the incumbent family's domination. This cultural and political situation can be seen from the characteristic of voters in the general election. In most of cases, the voters tend to choose a candidate who they have already been familiar (Cesar, 2013).

The issue of political dynasty in Indonesia is interesting to be examined as it does not only perpetuate the value of neo-feodalism. The political dynasty, to some extent, can also open up the possibilities of corruption, collution, and nepotism in Indonesia which adopts democracation system (Wasisto, 2013). Thus this study is conducted to focus on one of the districts in Indonesia, namely Hulu Sungai Utara.

### **1.1. Family and its relation to politics**

Politics, to some extent, is interrelated to the family institution. This issue has been mentioned by Mohtar Mas'oeed and Collin MacAndrews (1995) in their book titled *Perbandingan Sistem Politik*. According to them, a family has a significant part in constructing someone's political ideology. Besides, a family can also constitute the political belief, knowledge, and involvement of someone in the political mechanisms. This may denote the importance of political socialization in the family to predispose the members of the family's attitudes, beliefs, and participation in the political system. In a broader context, the interrelatedness of family and politics even can also structure a political identity of a certain group in society. Thus, this study is interested to highlight this topic, especially in the context of political dynasty.

The phenomenon of the political dynasty is not something new in the political mechanism. It seems to have also been practiced in many regions in Indonesia during local elections. Some of the parties may consciously select their relatives to displace their

position in government. Meanwhile, the other parties seem to unconsciously promote their relative as the new face to maintain their domination in a political system.

One of the examples of political dynasty can be seen in a case of Hulu Sungai Utara district. This political dynasty has been started from 2012 to 2021 when Abdul Wahid was selected as the regent of Hulu Sungai Utara. Currently, the dynasty politics is still continued as Abdul Wahid's son was also selected as the Chief of the Provincial Legislatures Council of Hulu Sungai Utara period 2019-2024. To examine this issue in more detail, the following theory of hegemony proposed by Gramsci is also used as the analysis foundation of this study:

### 1.2. Theoretical framework

In the current political climate, dynasty politics also refers to a group named 'political elite'. This elite group is portrayed as a group of people who have control to constitute numerous public policies. They have authority over the government's policies by operating hegemony, which according to Gramsci, has imposed society to deal with the ruler class's norms and values.

Pareto as cited in Varma (2007, p. 204) has also mentioned this political elite concept. He explains that those who are classified as political elites are the ones who have the qualities to control social and political power in society. This group tends to come from a similar social class in terms of wealth and intelligence context. There are two groups of society according to Pareto, that is high echelon and low echelon (non-elite). In the case of the high echelon, the group is also divided into two types, namely the governing and non-governing elite.

The distinction between the governed and the governing class seems to always exist in society as stated by Gaetano Mosca. The governing class mostly has a small number, but a powerful position as they have a capital to control and monopolize public policies. Mosca as cited in Varma also mentions the influence of social aspect on the structure of the political elite. He uses the term 'sub-elite' to describe the middle class which consisted by various professions such as bureaucrat, manager, scientist, and student.

In political dynasty context, the elite group also utilizes political party as a medium to occupy their position in government. In maintaining their political dynasty, political elite is assisted by some factors such as the existence of neo-feudalism, ethnocentrism, and the gap of people's participation in political process.

## 2. METHODS

This research was conducted to investigate how political dynasty is constructed and perpetuated in Hulu Sungai Utara district. The researchers used descriptive qualitative research as the design of this study to answer the question about political dynasty construction. In collecting the data, the researchers specifically used secondary data that are not directly provided by the data source (Sugiyono, 2016). This type of data includes print media (newspaper, magazine, books, literary review) and digital media (online

newspaper and website) as the data source of the analysis. In the analysis of data, the researchers also employed Gramsci's explanation regarding hegemony. This theory is fruitful to examine the type of power exercised by Hulu Sungai Utara's regent, Abdul Wahid, to maintain his political dynasty.

### **3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

#### **3.1. The Political Dynamics in Hulu Sungai Utara District**

Hulu Sungai Utara is a district in South Kalimantan, and the researchers attempt to elaborate the close ties that have existed between these families to show the real family-based political structure in the province. The election in South Kalimantan is more often interpreted as an arena for political and power farming, that a high quality and respectable democracy can be determined by the democratic process, the political climate, the actions of the players, and the policies of the political parties is a basic principle of theoretical consistency.

The redistribution of popular programs originating from the 'pig barrel politics' plan and the politicization of the budget cycle are the foundations of local political dynasties in Indonesia (political budget cycle). It is what enables wealthy leaders to bribe voters in far-flung areas by cultivating personal ties with their people.

Compared to the background of political dynasties at the national level, local political dynasties look very different. The glorification of the family's name in city politics guaranteed the longevity of a political dynasty. The effectiveness of local administration in Indonesia can be largely attributed to three processes: personalism, clientelism, and tribalism. In political dynasties, relatives who wish to join the government or the political arena are predestined to play a certain role because the kinship networks within self-government are already strong. In order to maintain "informal" authority over his successor after the General Election, assuming that happens, a successful government may suddenly elect a relative to replace him.

#### **3.2. The Form of Political dynasty in Local Government**

##### **3.2.1. Abdul Wahid**

Abdul Wahid is the Regent of Hulu Sungai Utara. He served as the Regent for a seven-year term, from 2012 to 2017 and got reelected from 2017 to 2021. Good Corporate Governance is consistent with a leadership style that prioritizes the welfare of the organization's constituents and promotes long-term strategic planning. To improve the way governments serve their citizens, a more fashionable approach is needed. There has been a flood of articles, people are seeing big changes with strong performances, especially in development and tourism, and academic achievements. As a result of people's satisfaction and prosperity of the population throughout his reign, his people trusted him and he won the 2012-2017 Regent Election.

Leadership style is the means they use to convince followers to carry out the leader's directions for the sake of the group as a whole, even if they disagree with them. Managers' leadership styles can be categorized into three; task-oriented, relationship-oriented, and participatory (Ratnamiasih & Warenihi, 2014).

This is like a puzzle because our political system which adheres to a direct election political system has many consequences, and it has happened in every regime so far, because naturally he is the son of the incumbent regent, and if the Regent was in his place, one could assume that Almien was campaigning, even though he was only accompanying the chairman. Since public officials are expected to remain neutral and APBD is intended for the benefit of the community, its use is prohibited. But incumbents have an advantage over challengers when their actions are well received by society. As long as scrutiny is lacking and the public is not aware of the risks associated with money in politics, this problem will persist. In today's democratic environment, it is almost impossible to avoid engaging in money politics as a means to an end. For what reason? Most people's first assumption, given the existence of terms like "money politics" and "cosh politics", is that if teams are being reimbursed for travel expenses, this constitutes "money politics". However, this assumption is not unique to those who are new to the direct election political system.

### 3.2.2. Almien Ashar Safari

Running for Chair of the DPRD for the 2019-2024 period, Almien Ashar Safari, the eldest son of Abdul Wahid and Anisah Rasyidah, is a hot topic of public discussion. From the beginning, all that was known to the people of Upper North River was that Almien was the son of the regent. Almien is the Chairperson of the DPD Youth Nationality Committee (KNPI) in his hometown, Amuntai, where he has been an activist for a long time. Almien is heavily involved in the welfare of Hulu Sungai Utara, especially in the field of sports.

Given the period of introspection and growth before the people of Hulu Sungai Utara were entrusted with the future of their nation, there are so few young people in positions of power in the government now that young people have little choice, today's youth only serve as political pawns. If politicians are looking for candidates from the younger generation and want to reach out to them, they will be wasting their time if they don't involve the younger generation actively. Because, in the end, the younger generation can be trusted, and it's best not to judge them based on their age when they participate in political activities; after all, they probably have the methods and talents to help the area develop, etc.

Looking at the political history of the two of them, the discussion about Abdul Wahid's political approach which was passed on to his son Almien does make sense, to understand the strategy is very important in this situation. The youthful spirit and the inclination to development that characterizes Mr. Almien also becomes a political strategy when he approaches the Kunin community with his youthful enthusiasm, not limited to the realm of athletics, he often encourages the next generation to continue to grow.

Apart from Almien's prowess which was shown by his youth and extraordinary ambition to become a leader, there are other considerations that made him a candidate for Leader, including his success in the DPRD election at that time. From his investigation into the origins of the rise to power of the regent family in the area, we learn that there are many interrelated causes. Hulu Sungai Utara is just one example of an area where the ruling regent is widely considered to be successful.

Neighbors, however, claim that this has not had a negative impact on the community service under Abdul Wahid's political dynasty to his descendants. But when viewed from their position of authority, they raised those who opposed them to high positions, from the DPRD to the DPRD. Investigations revealed that this influential family had an established network of political relatives. We believe that a political dynasty has less consequences if its intentions and goals are honorable. We believe the destination is good for society and have no intention of stopping political reform. What matters in politics is motive, and acting solely for one's own gain is a grave mistake.

However, taking into account the above, it is clear that this has undermined existing democracy in Indonesia, partly because the necessary controls over government, such as checks and balances, are inadequate. Some political analysts refer to current political dynasties as "political oligarchies" because of their status as hereditary political elites. The elite group, in the Indonesian context, is a group that can provide significant influence in making government policies. To make it easier for them to rise to positions of authority or to maintain control once there. As political dynasties, built on the basis of kinship political ties, grew stronger, the opportunities for outsiders to enter politics dried up. According to Turner, this is because networks have a significant impact on the dynamics of shifts in political power, which in turn can affect the efficiency of political recruitment (Susanti, 2017).

All democracies place political parties at the center of government and give them significant powers. Political parties serve as important intermediaries between society and the governmental process. As Schattscheider said, "political parties establish democracy," and this is something many people believe. Simply put, political parties are essential for the functioning of a democratic government because they serve as a medium through which the will of the people can be realized in the form of a sovereign government. However, all political parties should be allowed to play a significant behind-the-scenes role in leadership. Political parties play an important role in society by identifying and nurturing future political leaders at all levels, from mayors to governors to presidents. Our country's leadership urgently needs honest individuals who are committed to the country's growth, as opposed to those who only wish to further their own personal power.

Leadership is an eternal problem for humanity because a country's trajectory to its greatness or downfall depends on its head of state. Far more broadly than is often believed, a nation's economy and well-being are ultimately determined by its leadership. In order to increase the chances of choosing the candidate pairs they carry, political parties are forced to form alliances because they cannot nominate candidates for regional heads from their own party cadres. When candidates for legislative and executive positions share the same vision, goals, platform and plan of action, they have a better



chance of electoral success. In order to produce leaders who can be accounted for with competence and integrity, political parties must prioritize a fit and proper test process based on vision, programs, ethics, and data. This means reforming political parties from the inside out so that there are no gaps for pragmatic behavior to enter regarding the function of cadres as candidates for regional heads, for the sake of having an honest and competent leader

After the election in Indonesia, many local governments have remained under the rule of a few political elites, making progress towards the goal of an ideal government even more challenging. Why? This is because, first, the political elite has managed to suppress the involvement of the citizens. This is indicated by the fact that the person is the candidate of choice for a political party, similar to the election in Hulu Sungai Utara District 2019, political parties pushed for the Regent's son to be appointed as a chairman of the district DPRD while his parents held that position.

While it is true that Pak Almien was elected or put forward in DPRD nomination based on a party decision, the addition of the sentence "because he is the son of the district head" creates the impression that Pak Abdul Wahid has a power in Hulu Sungai Utara. Apart from that, the party should be more proficient in recruiting, considering that Pak Almien is a newcomer who is unfamiliar with the politics of Hulu Sungai Utara; After all, having a leader who wasn't familiar with his territory would lead to a lot of trouble, including simple disagreements.

This has the potential to threaten the maintenance of local governance. Various flaws in the political system filled by kinship and several political dynasties were the factors. First of all, it's hard for feedback, management, and other forms of accountability to do their job. Empirical evidence shows that political dynasties are only concerned with the family and support policies that benefit the ruling family. Second, as kinship politics grows, it will unequal the playing field, as those who are able to amass power, wealth, territorial domination, and economic control will have an advantage over those with more limited resources and who can only rely on the hope of winning. political contest. Third, the growth of familial politics reflects the decline in party institutionalization and the decline in the ability of political parties to attract new members and revitalize themselves. Fourth, in the current more individualistic contestation system, the role of political parties is decreasing, and the power of individual candidates becomes one of the determining factors in the struggle for political office. There are clear electoral advantages for political parties that rely on kinship politics to win regional positions, including the popularity of kinship political figures, the strength of financial resources, and the ability to mobilize masses under the influence of kinship political figures who are already in power. To make regional elections successful, political parties often use ridiculous and absurd political support. This is because political parties seem more concerned with victory than the use of power in the medium to long term.

In addition, political parties in Indonesia are more likely to recruit candidates with financial capabilities because of kinship politics. The financial stability of a political party is more important than the charm of its leader. Because of this, a political candidate will be required to make a financial contribution to the party before being selected to play a

role in each election. It is possible that this tendency has given rise to the phenomenon of political dowry, in which potential candidates for public office are judged not by their track record, but by the amount of money they bring as dowries. However, party cadres who have a proven track record of revitalizing parties through concept politics are not considered party owners. Even more ironic, cadre parties that consistently put political ideas first are treated as complementary cadres who do not have the right to vote as to who will be nominated. More precisely, members of these parties are neither empowered nor obligated to act as co-owners of the political parties they serve. Consequently, organic cadres are sometimes indirectly removed due to the practice of political dowry (Sudaryana, 2017).

#### 4. CONCLUSIONS

Since Indonesia's independence, political dynasties have ruled the country and have become a hot topic of conversation among the people. These families are criticized for deviating from democratic principles which should be the basis of politics in Indonesia. Regional autonomy and democracy provide new challenges for local leadership if political dynasties are present. Political dynasties, on the other hand, are universally reviled as monstrous political systems because they always produce only a small group of related elites who hold the highest offices of government. Because of this, the probability of a community nominating its own members for leadership positions is low, and it can be said that there is no possibility of a new generation taking over a particular country or region. Also, political dynasties can be used to harm the region, the state and the nation in general. Along with authoritarianism in government, the issue of corruption, collusion and nepotism has become commonplace because of the opportunities it provides to leaders who are obsessed with amassing power and wealth. The issue that is developing is that local people are reduced to mere spectators while regional autonomy and democracy are taking place. As we have seen, Abdul Wahid's family in Hulu Sungai Utara carried out a kind of kinship or family politics.

Without concerted efforts from all sectors of Indonesian society to counteract the influence of debilitating political dynasties, the country's democratic future would not be any brighter than it is today. An important first step was reforming political parties, as many dynastic political practices are rooted in political dynasties within the party. Equally important is the strengthening of election regulations that can guarantee a fair and participatory level of playing field. Last but not least, the process of voters' political education is a strategic complement to mitigate the negative effects of political dynasties.

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