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Regional Head Election 2020

The Pause of Kinship Politics in the South Minahasa District

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Abstract: Kinship politics may be a way to preserve the power of the elites through elections. With the strong support of kinship politics from the local political elite, the candidate for the South Minahasa district head, Michaela Paruntu, had a very high chance of winning the 2020 regional election in the South Minahasa District. But the reality was different. The popularity gained from the influence of the previous district head, a close relative of the candidate, and the support of the ruling party in the South Minahasa District were ineffective in generating public support for the candidate. This study analyzed the factors that caused the ineffectiveness of the kinship politics in the South Minahasa District. This phenomenon was interesting to study since previous studies on kinship politics presented empirical evidence that candidates who have a kinship with the authorities or elites have a better opportunity to win an election. This study used a qualitative method with a case study approach. The result of the study showed that the community's perception of kinship politics in the South Minahasa District influenced people's political choices in the 2020 Regional Head Election (Pilkada).

Keywords: kinship politics; political dynasty; perception

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I. Introduction

South Minahasa Regency was designated as a new autonomous region through Law Number 10 of 2003, dated February 25, 2003, and inaugurated on August 4, 2003. Christiani Eugenia Paruntu won the 2010 Regional Head Election and became the first elected district head in South Minahasa District serving for two periods, which end in 2020. During her tenure, the district head and her relatives occupied strategic positions and became local elites, thus forming a political dynasty in the South Minahasa District. According to Nordholt (2003, p. 33), a political dynasty is a group of people or the ruling elite with close family ties or kinship based on blood ties or marriage who support each other and take turns to be in power. This phenomenon can be seen in Table 1.

Table 1.

Name/Kinship Relations	Title
Johana Tumbuan Paruntu/mother of the district head	Head of the South Minahasa Regional House of Representative for the period of 2014–2019 and 2019–2024
James A. Kojongian/brother-in-law of the district head	Deputy Head of North Sulawesi Province, 2019–2024
Adrian J. Paruntu/son of the district head	Member of the House of Representative, 2019–2024

Source: Data processed by the researcher

To maintain power, in the 2020 regional head election (Pilkada), Christiani Eugenia Paruntu as Chair of the North Sulawesi Golkar Party DPD supported Michaela Paruntu, her own sister, as a candidate for the district head, and inaugurated Michaela Paruntu, who was elected by acclamation at Musda IV Meeting, as the Chair of the DPD II of the South Minahasa Golkar Party (Liando, 2020). Previously, the leadership of the DPD II Golkar Party of South Minahasa was held by Johana Tumbuan Paruntu, the mother of Michaela Paruntu for approximately a decade. With such strong support of kinship politics, Michaela should have had a great chance of winning and was assumed to be able to win the 2020 regional election in the South Minahasa District. However, despite the strong kinship politics, Michaela Paruntu failed to win the 2020 regional election in South Minahasa District.

This study aimed to analyze the factors that caused the ineffectiveness of kinship politics in the South Minahasa District. It was an interesting phenomenon to study since previous studies on kinship politics presented empirical evidence that candidates who have a kinship with the authorities or elites have a better opportunity to win an election. A study by C. P. Pamungkas (2018, p.

223) on Kinship Politics in Pilkada: Case study of the election of Hj. Sri Hartini, SE-Hj. Sri Mulyani in Klaten District Pilkada in 2015 shown kinship politics as the way to maintain power in Klaten through the Regional Head Election (Pilkada). A similar study by Purwaningsih (2015, p. 121) on kinship politics in South Sulawesi showed that the family name and network favorably affected the public support to the candidate.

Kinship politics plays important roles in determining the ruling class in several countries, even with democratic elections and has the potential of establishing a political dynasty (Geys & Smith, 2017, p. F447). Studies by Querubin (2012, p. 28) and Mendoza et al. (2012, p. 145) in the Philippines showed the same result. Candidates from political families have a greater chance of winning the election. In India, kinship politics also plays an important role aside from caste groups and religious affiliation in shaping the actions of voters and politicians. It can be said that kinship makes it easy to be nominated for strategic positions or to get any kinds of jobs (Jensenius, 2018, p. 139).

Likewise, a study in Japan by Asako et al. (2015, p. 27) also showed similar results. Legislators with a kinship with the authorities have a higher probability of winning and obtain higher votes because their status greatly affects their electability. A study by Corstange (2018, p. 59) on kinship relations, partiality, and patronage voting during elections in Arabia also supported the above studies that candidates with kinship relations enjoy benefits, especially financially, and enhanced their electability.

From the results of the previous studies mentioned above, it can be concluded that the benefits enjoyed by the candidates (which greatly affect public support for them) include the running of the party machine in promoting the candidates and the popularity of the candidates due to the influence of the previous ruler's family and network. The ineffectiveness of kinship politics in the 2020 Pilkada in South Minahasa gave a different perspective to the study of kinship politics and political dynasties.

Before further research on kinship politics or political dynasties, it is important to understand them to get a comprehensive understanding of the issues being studied, namely the factors that influence the ineffectiveness of kinship politics in the 2020 Pilkada in the South Minahasa District. Kurtz (as cited in Purwaningsih, 2015), stated that kinship politics stems from the concept of a political family, which occurs when two or more

people who have kinship hold political positions. Hess (as cited in [Purwaningsih, 2015](#)), unlike Kurtz used a different term, namely political dynasty. However, they have a similar intention. They focus on more than two family members who are elected to political office.

From the concepts described above, kinship politics and dynastic politics can be said to be the same. However, in other studies such as by [Hidayati \(2014, p. 19\)](#), [David and San Pascual \(2016, p. 92\)](#), [Horiuchi et al. \(2020, p. 16\)](#), [Luluardi and Diniyanto \(2021, p. 121\)](#), kinship politics is seen as the root of dynastic politics. It could be said that kinship politics is a way or approach to maintain power. If kinship politics is successfully carried out by a public official, it will allow the development of a political dynasty. This paper referred to the concept of kinship politics with a focus on the activity of recruiting family members or relatives for political positions through regional head elections.

With the various inherent advantages or conveniences described in several studies above, it is not surprising that kinship politics continues to develop and become common, especially in the Indonesian political scene. From the Nagara Institute data, 124 regional head candidates in the 2020 regional head election had kinship relations. They consisted of wives, children, or close relatives of current or former regional heads. This figure was much higher when compared to the 2015–2018 regional elections, which were only 86 candidates ([Maharani, 2020](#)). This reality showed that the rulers were trying to maintain their power through kinship politics by involving close relatives in the election. As such, it cannot be denied that the probability of political dynasties was very high.

On the other hand, no rule prohibits political dynasties in Indonesia. The Constitutional Court granted the judicial review and abolished Article 7 letter r on the prohibition of incumbent families or dynastic politics in the Pilkada Law Number 8 of 2015, because it deemed to be contained discriminatory elements and was contrary to Article 28 i paragraph 2 of the 1945 Constitution ([Mahkamah Konstitusi Republik Indonesia, 2015](#)). The emergence of political dynasties is possible because in a democracy the only requirement is the popular vote. Whoever gets the most votes, wins. But the problem is, in the context of democracy, an equal competition arena between election participants is needed. With a political dynasty, there will be no equal competition. People who have greater access to political, economic, and social resources will have more

advantages than those without the same background.

The implication is that it can create dominating groups ([Hijang & Amelia, 2019, p. 125](#); [A. D. Pamungkas & Arifin, 2019, p. 27](#); [Ways, 2015](#)). It was undeniable that there was a strong desire from the incumbent, District Head Christiany Eugenia Paruntu, to maintain the power she held for two periods from 2010–2020 with kinship politics through the nomination of her younger sister, Michaela Paruntu. This kinship politics was a way to maintain the political power of the Paruntu family in South Minahasa. It is undeniable that kinship politics has been growing in the reform era, especially from the incumbent family.

Studies by [Purwaningsih \(2015\)](#) and [Zaetun and Mariyah \(2020, p. 127\)](#) showed that direct regional head elections and the proportional election system provide greater opportunities for political families to gain or enlarge their power so that more family members occupy political positions and increase the potential for the emergence of political dynasties. A study by [Geys and Smith \(2017\)](#) showed that in recent years, kinship politics has been growing rapidly and plays an important role in determining the ruling class in various countries, even with democratic elections. Thus, it attracts academics to conduct further studies.

This phenomenon was interesting to study because the kinship politics that favored Michaela Paruntu due to the Paruntu family's political dynasty in South Minahasa did not work effectively, and the kinship politics was halted in the South Minahasa District. Therefore, this study was conducted to identify the factors that caused the ineffective kinship politics in the 2020 regional head elections in South Minahasa District. This study was expected to produce different empirical evidence from the previous studies described earlier, and it can be a reference or open the opportunity for other researchers in the field of socio-political science to develop further studies on kinship politics, local elites, power, democracy, political preferences, society, and voter behavior.

To know the factors affecting the ineffectiveness of kinship politics in the South Minahasa district, the author sought to understand the South Minahasa community's perception of kinship politics. According to [Veithzal](#) (as cited in [Bataha & Fauziah, 2020, p. 445](#)), perception is important because people's behavior is based on their perception of what is reality and what is not. Perception is essentially a cognitive process experienced by everyone in

understanding information about their environment through sight, hearing, appreciation, feeling, and sense of smell. From this understanding, it can be concluded that perception is a person's view of another person or something that gives meaning to himself or his environment to gain awareness of the surrounding or environment. The author believed that the public's perception of kinship politics was very important to study because the public's perception of kinship politics would greatly influence their political choices or political preferences.

II. Methods

The study used a qualitative method with a case study approach. The qualitative method was chosen to explore and understand the phenomenon of kinship politics during the regional head election in the South Minahasa District. With a case study approach, this study was expected to answer the objective of the study, namely, to analyze the factors that cause ineffective kinship politics in the South Minahasa District and caused the power of kinship politics to be halted in its track. This was based on the author's interpretation of qualitative research with a case study approach according to [Creswell \(2014, p. 206\)](#).

This study was conducted on January 17 to February 15, 2021, in the South Minahasa District. The study location was selected by considering that during the 2020 regional head election in North Sulawesi, the kinship politics in the South Minahasa District seemed to be more complex than the five districts/cities in North Sulawesi that also had candidates with kinship relations to the current government. The selection of sources in this study was carried out purposively. They were selected with certain considerations and goals. The sources were selected from three groups or criteria, consisting of two political party administrators involved in the 2020 election, two Civil Servants in the South Minahasa regional government, and eight South Minahasa residents who voted in the 2020 election.

In-depth interviews with the 12 sources were used to collect data. The technique was chosen so that researchers could communicate directly with the sources. Communication takes place in the form of questions and answers in face-to-face sessions. In-depth interviews were used due to its ability to capture understanding or ideas, as well

as the feelings, experiences, emotions, and motives of the sources.

Data collection was also carried out by gathering literature that was closely related to the study. The stages of data analysis in this study followed [Creswell's theory \(2014\)](#). It started with managing and preparing data for analysis, reading the entire data, analyzing more detail by coding the data categories and themes, describing in narrative form, and interpreting the data.

III. Results and Discussion

During the interview, the researcher found that the sources were not familiar with the term political kinship and were more familiar with the term political dynasty. The sources believed that the South Minahasa political dynasty was powerful. Four sources made these statements during the interviews:

"... In North Sulawesi, only in the South Minahasa District you can find a district head that her mother serves as the head of the District's DPRD.."

"... it's not a surprise, with a political dynasty, the ruler will do all that they can legally do to ensure that the leadership remains in their family..."

"... Its legal, the important thing is that it follows the prevailing regulations.."

The interview highlighted several issues. First, the public is concerned over the ability of the executive and legislative bodies to perform the check and balances principle to maintain the balance of power. Check and balances are a crucial mechanism to ensure a democratic government. A synergy between states institutions (the executive, legislative, and judiciary bodies) is needed to ensure optimal performance of their roles and functions. The public noted that the District Head, as the executive body, and the head of DPRD, as the legislative body, in South Minahasa are from the same family.

The author did not find any issues or cases in the mass media related to District Head Christiany Eugenia Paruntu during her two terms in office. Christiany Eugenia Paruntu performed well and received four times Unqualified Opinions during her tenures. The Unqualified Opinions showed that the district government performed well in its

administration, accounting, and compliance with the prevailing regulations, as seen from the budget realization reports, changes in excess budget balances, operational reports, cash flow reports, and reports of changes in equity. It showed good cooperation between the executive and legislative bodies.

The highlighted issue in the interview was that the strategic political positions had been held by the family of the South Minahasa District Head. Several sources stated that the district head built a political dynasty during her tenure, both in the government and in Golkar party. For more than a decade, her mother, Johana Tumbuan Paruntu, headed the DPD II Golkar Party in South Minahasa, and her sister, Micheala Paruntu, held the same position for the 2020–2025 period (Rompas, 2020). District Head Christiany Eugenia Paruntu also served as the Head of the North Sulawesi Province DPD Golkar Party, while James A. Kojongian, the husband of Micheala Paruntu serve as the Executive Head (Ketua Harian). According to the sources, the public was weary of this situation. Although the district head's performance was good, but her tenure is full of nepotism practices.

Referring to the understanding of dynastic politics according to Kurtz (as cited in Purwaningsih, 2015) in terms of the involvement of two or more people in the government or circle of power, it can be said that a political dynasty had been established in the Minahasa District, and the 2020 election was a moment to maintain the political dynasty by using the kinship politics through the nomination of the incumbent's sister. Meanwhile, the candidate, Michaela Paruntu, cannot be separated from the kinship politics due to her relationship with the district head and the chairperson of the South Minahasa DPRD.

Data collected from the KPU's official website on February 27 showed that Michaela Paruntu has good track records to be nominated as a district head candidate, with good educational background and organizational experience. She was a State Civil Apparatus and a lecturer at the Faculty of Medicine of Sam Ratulangi University Manado before decided to be a politician and resigned from her position. She currently holds strategic positions in several organizations in North Sulawesi, including the Head of the Head of Youth Service of the Minahasa Masehi Injili Church (GMIM).

GMIM is a large Christian church organization in North Sulawesi that covers five districts/cities, namely North Minahasa, South Minahasa,

Minahasa, Southeast Minahasa, Manado City, Tomohon City, and Bitung City. Michaela Paruntu also headed many youth organizations, including the South Minahasa Angkatan Muda Pembaharuan Indonesia (AMPI), the South Minahasa Pramuka (Scouts) and PMI (Red Cross). In addition, on August 3, 2020, Michaela Paruntu was unanimously elected as chairman of the Regional Leadership Council (DPD) of the South Minahasa Golkar Party with the full support of 17 District Management (PK), Wing Organization, and DPD I of the North Sulawesi Golkar Party (Rompas, 2020).

With her organizational and leadership experience, Michaela Paruntu had the ability and popularity to be the candidate in the 2020 South Minahasa Pilkada. However, the big name and political influence of kinship politics attached to Michaela Paruntu created a negative perception to the community, as stated by the following sources:

"... no wonder, (she) takes advantage of the incumbent's influence as the chairman of the North Sulawesi Golkar Party..."

"... it is undeniable that (she) have access or opportunity in the party because of her kinship ..."

From the excerpt above, Michaela Paruntu seemed to benefit from her kinship. It is undeniable that candidates from political families have strong political capital, such as political connections with political cadres, experience in political parties, work experience, education, and skills in carrying out legislative functions. In other words, candidates from political families inherit a political legacy, such as education and political skills, well-known family names, and campaign funding.

However, the strong political capital was unable to assist Michaela Paruntu in winning the election in South Minahasa District. Thus, this phenomenon was interesting to be investigated further.

The interviews showed the community's antipathy to the political dynasty that gave birth to the local elites who controlled the South Minahasa government. This was in line with Harold Laswell's view that candidacy by families of the incumbent will concentrate the political power within the incumbent's circle of power and restrict the opportunity of other candidates to win (Haryanto, 2017, p. 88).

In the context of Indonesian politics, the elites are groups that can influence the political decision-making process, which makes it relatively easy for them to gain power or to run for a position. The question was, why people sought after and fought for power? According to [Haryanto \(2017\)](#) with their power, the rulers can influence others to submit and obey to their wishes and orders. The formulation and implementation of a policy can be directed to enable the rulers to achieve their goals through the policy. In essence, kinship politics is a political strategy made or built by the elites to maintain the power of their political dynasty. They hope that with kinship politics, power can be passed on to their descendants or families ([Nordholt, 2003, p. 35](#)).

Referring to the explanation above regarding the political dynasties, elites, and power, the people considered the nomination of Michaela Paruntu as an effort to maintain power by taking advantage of the incumbent's power given to its strategic nature ([Haryanto, 2017](#)). This can be seen from the following excerpt of the interview:

"...there is an attempt to maintain power by exploiting the power of the current leader or incumbent.."

"...take advantage of the incumbent position. It's unethical to pass power on to the (incumbent's) family..."

"... Strong dynastic politics. Supported by the incumbent's position that also the chairperson of the North Sulawesi DPD Golkar Party..."

The Local elites' attempts to maintain the power of political dynasties by using kinship politics is real. Aside from the Paruntu family in South Minahasa, there are local elites in several other areas. The Tegal Raya political dynasty is one example of a family that turns into an unconstitutional power of political dynasty. Many factors influenced the political development of the dynasty. The Dewi Sri family's political dynasty was developed over time. According to [Luluardi and Diniyanto \(2021\)](#), there were at least four factors that influence the establishment of the Dewi Sri political dynasty in the Tegal Raya region, namely: (1) the rule of law that allows the birth and establishment of political dynasties; (2) resources; (3) community support; (4) access to political parties. The kinship politics was supported by major parties in the legislative institutions, which means that they were also supported by the political elites.

Compared to South Minahasa and Tegal Raya, the political dynasty in Banten Province was the strongest. It started with the ex-Governor of Banten, Ratu Atut Chosiyah, and her brother Tubagus Chaeri Wardhana. At least four political dynasties rules Banten. Ratu Atut family rules over the Banten Province and several districts and cities, Natakusumah family rules over Pandeglang District, Jayabaya family in Lebak District, and Aat Syafaat family in Cilegon City. The four political dynasties sent their candidates in every Banten election and won in their respective areas. Banten is the best example to see that the real political power is in the hands of political dynasties, not in the formal political institutions such as political parties ([Anwar, 2020](#)). A study by [Luluardi and Diniyanto \(2021\)](#) stated public support was a crucial key on the rise of Tegal Raya political dynasty. Public support is highly influenced by what the public observed, paid attention to, and experienced in their area.

This is also what happened in South Minahasa District. The public perception on the local political dynamics was highly influenced by their observations and experiences. The rise of the Paruntu dynasty in South Minahasa was observed by the public and generated a negative response. Although Christiany Eugenia Paruntu was not implicated in any legal cases during her tenure, the public's perception of her leadership could not be separated from dynastic politics and her attempts to maintain power through kinship politics. This is shown from the following excerpt of interview:

"...I think it was because many people were disappointed with the previous leader, and it affected the election results..."

"...At first, it was good, but later it seemed like she was just looking for fame, building kinship politics, uneven development, and produce chaotic bureaucracy..."

"...The District Head's leadership is mediocre. For example, the Minahasa tourist destination should be developed more, but none of it was developed in her two tenures..."

From the results of interviews and supported by the theory of political dynasties above, it can be concluded that her attempts to maintain power through kinship politics give a negative image to Christiany Eugenia Paruntu leadership. People were unhappy with the political dynasty in the South Minahasa District and its attempts to

maintain power using kinship politics, regardless of the achievements of the incumbent. Therefore, it cannot be denied that this perception greatly affects the people's political preferences or political choices in the 2020 Pilkada in South Minahasa.

The trend of kinship politics in Indonesia is inseparable from the political parties since the political recruitment mechanism is carried out by the parties. In addition, the political family's interests are also influential. Summarizing the explanation above, candidate Michaela Paruntu has adequate political capital consisting of political networks, education, experience, and financial resources because of the Paruntu family's political power in the Golkar Party, not only in South Minahasa but also in North Sulawesi.

During the 2020 South Minahasa Pilkada, the candidacy of Michaela Paruntu as the district head candidate supported by the North Sulawesi Golkar Party headed by Christiany Eugenia Paruntu, who was also the South Minahasa District Head, was not successful. The Golkar Party was beaten by PDI-P party that supported Franky Donny Wongkar-Petra Yani Rembang candidacy. The victory of the PDI-P Party in the South Minahasa election provided a lesson for the Golkar Party, especially in setting political strategies. As stated in the following interview excerpt:

"... wrong political strategy and the underestimation of the opponent's strength (FDW-PYR) by MEP and her supporters backfired..."

"...mistake in preparation and planning stage caused the failure of the Political Party's internal system and the candidate support teams..."

In addition, socialization and political experience influenced one's political ability. In Indonesia, the candidates from kinship politics were seen as having low quality and relied solely on their family's popularity. This perception was also suffered by Michaela Paruntu, despite all her qualifications.

The quality of the candidates speaks of the inherent characteristics that allow them to be elected in political offices and shows their capabilities as politicians. Political quality or competence are influenced by their previous experiences, such as experience in political parties, organizations, and their previous work.

An important note: the political parties' recruitment mechanism is ruled by an oligarchy. The political parties' oligarchy prevented the candidacy mechanism from working properly. Candidates for district head or other legislative positions were mostly decided based on the wishes of the party's elites, without a democratic mechanism that paid attention to the candidates' ability and integrity. Many also supported candidates that were not the party's cadres. The candidates only have popularity and financial capabilities. Hence, it was not surprising that many artists or public figures were involved in politics without going through the internal party cadre process. In Law Number 2 of 2011 article 34 paragraph 3a, political parties receive financial assistance from the State Revenue and Expenditure Budget/Regional Revenue and Expenditure Budget with priority to carry out political education for members of Political Parties and the public.

Meanwhile, at the same time, political dynasties continue to build their networks through kinship politics with easy access to resources that enable them to maintain their power in political parties as well as the local and central governments (Mukti & Rodiyah, 2020, p. 537).

Dynastic politics can flourish in Indonesia because they are not prohibited by Law. Article 7 of Law Number 10 of 2016 states that every citizen has the right to have the same opportunity to nominate themselves and be nominated as regional head. There was nothing constitutionally wrong with the running of the political dynasty candidate. However, the dynastic political system accommodates personal relations more than their abilities, thus destroying the democratic system.

According to Purwaningsih (2015), the main problem of political dynasties is that they are not built based on competence and ability (the Merit system). The merit system is a system based on rewards for achievement or ability without nepotism or kinship politics. In the merit system, quality, capacity, and skills are prioritized. It can erode the dynastic system and can provide opportunities to others who have the ability to be leaders, not only to be controlled by the political elites.

According to Mariana and Husin (2017, p. 95), it is difficult to have democracy while the political dynasties maintain their power at the national and regional level by recruiting their family.

Through regional democracy, the people, not only the elites, were enabled to take a more active

part in the political process in Indonesia. However, in reality, several issues have a paradoxical impact in the political realm, including the rise of kinship politics, which is influenced by the power of the oligarchy in local politics.

Nicholas Taleb, in his book *The Black Swan* in 2007, reviewed the unimaginable black swan phenomenon. Everyone said that swans are white, based on facts for hundreds of years. When people found black swan in Australia, it opened a possibility of other unimaginable things. These black swans made us aware that there are random events that happen beyond normalcy and open a new perspective. The author drew an analogy that the ineffectiveness of kinship politics in the South Minahasa District was just like the black swan phenomenon, which occurrence was not predictable because empirical evidence of various studies has shown the power of kinship politics in the general elections. This is a breath of fresh air to people outside the circle of kinship politics who are willing and have the calling to run for office in the regional election to realize an egalitarian democracy in the regions.

IV. Conclusion

In this study, kinship politics was seen as different from dynastic politics. It was seen as a way for elites in political dynasties to preserve their power. This study on kinship politics focuses on the recruitment of family members or relatives to be placed in political positions through the regional head elections. Based on Kurtz theory, it was concluded that the political dynasty existed in Minahasa District, and the 2020 election was the moment to preserve the political dynasty by using kinship politics through the nomination of the District Head's sister Christiany Eugenia Paruntu.

To know the factors affecting the ineffectiveness of kinship politics in the South Minahasa district, the author sought to understand the South Minahasa community's perception on kinship politics. The result of the study showed that the people were weary of the kinship politics and political dynasties in South Minahasa. The community's view on kinship politics and political dynasties in South Minahasa affects people's political choices during the 2020 regional head election and the ineffectiveness of kinship politics in the South Minahasa district.

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