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The octopus-like power of Pesantren dynasty in the dynamics of local politics

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Abstract: The Pesantren people's involvement in politics is a new phenomenon that is considered an impediment to the democratic process and progress. This paper aims to fill the gap in existing research on the dominance of the Pesantren people in local politics, which they seem to have strategically mastered. The methodology in this study involved qualitative data collected through observation techniques, interviews, and documentation. The results were analyzed, interpreted, and verified. The study aims to prove that the Pesantren family, including chief officials, utilized state facilities and are involved in dynastic politics. The study also explores the roles of social, economic, and political capital in election wins. Furthermore, the study explores how dynastic politics has weakened the democratic process and proposes a revision of current election processes to ensure fair elections by strengthening election supervision and encouraging voter education.

Subjects: Sociology & Social Policy; Sociology of Religion; Political Sociology

Keywords: Pesantren; local politics; cultural capital; dynasty politics; democracy; elections; elite power

1. Introduction

The domination of the Pesantren dynasty in local politics affects the democratic process in Indonesia. It has been shown that power based on kinship affects the availability of human resources, the development of society, and people's overall wellbeing. Nepotism in Indonesian politics has been commonly practiced in local elections; however, the Pesantren family's participation in politics is a new phenomenon. The oligarchic political system nominates election



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PUBLIC INTEREST STATEMENT

The existence of elite power in regional head elections and local political dynamics has resulted in oligarchic power and dynasty politics in Jombang, East Java, Indonesia. The participation of Islamic boarding school elites in local politics is a hindrance to the democratic process, and has exacerbated corruption, collusion, and nepotism. Actors in dynasty politics utilize their reputable names within Islamic boarding school communities as political tools to circle power. The relationship between familial power and patrons—Islamic boarding schools—is advantageous in that it increases one's chance of winning the regional head and legislative elections. This article aims to analyze the oligarchic power and Islamic boarding school dynasties in the context of local politics in Indonesia.

candidates who are local elites, thus perpetuating the construction of a dynastic network of power. Dynastic trends are dominant in the political dynamics in contemporary Indonesia, resulting in an unhealthy democracy unable to criticize and control government policy (Meitzner, 2009). The circle of power refers to political elitism based on nepotism and kinship (Susanti, 2018).

This study aims to fill a gap in existing research on the domination of the Pesantren people in local politics. However, some research has shown that the Pesantren family has overpowered the strategic sectors in local politics (Azizah, 2013). The study proposes three questions: (a) How does Pesantren dynastic power prevail in the local politics of East Java? (b) What are the factors of Pesantren dynastic power domination in the dynamics of local politics? (c) How does the domination of the Pesantren dynasty in local politics affect democracy at the local level?

This article argues that religious elite plays an essential role in bringing about power and authority. traditional capital also functions to support diversity, which manifests in several conditions: First, by following the rules stipulated in general. Second, depending on the belief system of the religious adherents. Finally, religious adherents always take part in religious activities (Barker & Beetham, 1993; Beetham, 1991; Beetham & Lord, 1998, 2014; Lord & Beetham, 2001). According to (Weber in Tyler, 2006), there are three kinds of legitimation. First is legitimation by traditional authority; second is charismatic authority based on religious elitism; and third is rational bureaucratic authority, mainly consisting of legitimation based on rules and interpretation (Tyler, 2006, 2011)

The study also explores the role of the *patron-client*, which some political experts consider the cause of financial influence in politics in developing countries. The patron-client relationship should not have harmful effects in a modern state with economic advances and a high education rate. Landé (1983) stated that the patron-client relationship exists in any society, modern and non-modern, authoritarian, democratic, and others (Baland & Robinson, 2012).

2. Theoretical framework

Political dynasty refers to a structure of authority stemming from kinship or connection to previous leaders. Political dynasties can exist in any country around the world, including democratic countries like the Kennedy families in the U.S., Menem in Argentina, Nehru-Gandhi family in India, Aquino and Ortega family in the Philippines, and the Bhuttos in Pakistan (Rossi, 2017). However, the phenomenon most commonly occurs in developing countries with younger democracies (Mendoza et al., 2016). There are three crucial points in the formation of political dynasties among local administrations. (1) The political dynasty is part of a larger network based on reciprocal relations in which family relation is the most common. (2) A united network of heirs. (3) Political dynasties are formed, and later abolished, under harsh political contestation in which the dynastic succession is not the only factor of success (Ruud & Nielsen, 2018).

The family connection provides a great advantage for the candidacy of a particular political position and accounts for a higher probability in winning elections by using the family name as a political vehicle, as for instance, in Italy, when a politician adds a famous family name to identify the family connection to get vote elections (Geys, 2017). Politicians from political dynasties enjoy brand name advantages that give significant benefits over non-dynasty politicians (Feinstein, 2010); thus, keeping a secure connection to the “clan” is crucial as a campaign strategy that targets the core supporters. This concept is commonly known as particularism politics (Muraoka, 2017). In Indonesia, political dynasties have a central position, and so regional and local politics are run by families who are critical to Indonesian “democracy,” which is decentralized and reflects personal interest (Purdey & Purdey, 2016).

Local politics implements its power by providing infrastructure and technical services such as constructing and maintaining roads, drainage, street lights, and clean water systems, all of which reflect the role of politics in the development of society and social service (Haug et al.,

2019). Local politics and policymaking are always extra-local and applied in many ways. Local politics functions as part of the mobility of policymaking (Temenos & Mccann, 2012). In Madura local politics, when applied, is based on a local spirit animating the ethical life of local politics, which provides the actualization of self-potencies without intimidation, intervention, or dictatorship. If the ideal condition cannot manifest in local politics, it may not become independent (Mbah et al., 2019) (Hidayat, 2012). In Rounta, Papua, local politics is created using identity polemics like native vs non-native people. In the Bupati (regent), election a candidate promoted himself as the only native Papuan candidate, expecting that to attract the majority of the votes of the Papuan indigenous people (Mcwilliam, 2011). In Korea, in the national political context, patronage influences politics, but it has no significant impact on the local context. Local civilians play essential roles in improving the quality of domestic politics (Sunhyuk, 2015). Local politics in Indonesia has been in a state of dynamic change for the last decade. In Indonesia, the central power (government) has always tried to control local politics because of its abundance of natural resources. Also, there has been an emergence of local *strongmen* as the result of political control of the center. Since Indonesian independence up to the New Order era, the central political elite's interests have intervened in local politics. However, at the start of the Reformation era, it was easy for local elites to prioritize their identity and importance by getting the space implemented, decentralized as part of local government, and empowered, although still mostly determined by the dynamics of national politics (Agustino & Yusof, 2010).

In general, power exists in many aspects of life, in its ability to instruct and be obeyed, and in decision making that directly and indirectly determines action. Power relations are a kind of social connection which exposes an asymmetric relationship through direction or imperative control. This relationship can be seen between governments and the governed (Liddle, 1992). In a traditional power system, conventional power consists of three components: stimulation, transmission, and distribution (Shahsiah, 2017).

Traditional power held by local elites is limited territorially, so that the more prominent power the local elites have, the more significant it is (Ledyae et al., 2014). The significant political power and spaces convergence with the local and global. Power and authority of a nation are redefined under the complex system of many layers of global government as a means of bargaining (Maguire, 2011). In Thailand, local politics and democracy gradually developed social justice and the power of majority rules. The process of development has come through conventional and modern political eras. Domestic politics in Thailand is in a transitional development process toward democracy; that said, it is important to note that Thai government policy supports and promotes democracy in Thailand. Public participation and changes in political culture could assist in overcoming conflict and problems and aid the development of politics and democracy in local Thailand (Boonlue, 2015).

In the Pesantren community, politics is not only about leadership but is also an effort to manage the profane and prophetic matters. Many Pesantren graduates build political parties out of legal obligation. Based on the legal foundation of "mala" (the completion of a duty is mandatory), building a political party and political participation is an obligation (Yahya, 2016). They also work on the premise of meeting people where they are at and encouraging them to look within and develop their own awareness (*kesadaran*) and convictions (*keyakinan*), which will lead them to true (Lukens-Bull, 2007). *Kiai* (Religious elite) and *santri* (Students), and other beliefs of the Pesantren people are influential in the process of national leadership. From the village Pesantren scope, *kiai* (religious Elite) and *santri* (students) utilize religious values of the local community at a national level to change people's mindsets regarding many aspects of life in Indonesia, including politics. Patron-client under Pesantren tradition, can be used to build kinship and civilizations to develop a social system that influences society at large. Thus, relations between elite pesantren and *students* affect leadership characteristics and become role models, the source of rules, and the driver of social and political development in Indonesia (Rohim, 2015). Pesantren education allows for community development, resulting in empowered economic capabilities, access to wellbeing, and cultural-political skills. Those

three aspects relate to four dimensions of power, mainly: power within, power to, power over and power with (Astuti, 2015). Local democracy is limited by territorial politics based on space and power acquired by people's participation, interactions, and discussions for consensus. However, people's reluctance to be involved in formulating policy becomes a fundamental challenge to parliament members and the sustainability of political control of local government (Henelt, 2012; Sweeting & Copus, 2012). Local democratic performance can be characterized thus: (1) Local democracy performs better if the people are invested in their community; (2) local democracy performs better (3) local democracy performs better when people realize their rights and obligations in local decision making; and (4) local democracy functions better with active citizen participation (Gendzwill & Swianiewicz, 2016). Observing these four characteristics will improve local government by increasing participation in local elections, strengthening leadership, reforming internal management of the local authority, most of them in accordance with the private sector, and allowing people to be involved in decision making of the local authority (Nyamori et al., 2012).

In Macedonia, empowerment of local democracy is done through decentralization that brings local government to closer to the people/citizens, and as a consequence, it allows local people to participate in the process of decision making. This decentralization initiative is driven by new acts, including civilian initiatives, popular meetings, and referendums aimed at increasing the transparency, accountability, and responsiveness of the city administration to local administration (Lyon, 2013). Local democracy insists that the process of reformation (Botchway, 2015) not only be initiated at the central level but at the local policymaking level as well. People's participation is substantially impactful in policymaking (Asslaand & Lyska, 2015). In India, public involvement in local village meetings is an essential basis for the discourse on democracy and decentralization policies. A decentralization policy should allow local leaders to channel people's participation into matters relating to people's welfare (Kulkarni, 2012).

In Arab countries that are developing into democracies, we can expect indigenous forms of democracy where religion (in this case Islam) plays a major role—and this reinterpreted, “authenticated” Islam must necessarily incorporate women as active and equal participants in political life (el-Husseini, 2016).

Cultural capital has been a significant concept used in sociology and educational researches in the last many decades. Pierre Bourdieu develops the idea of cultural capital at the end of 1960 when they learn French educational system and highlight that the students of a middle-class group tend to survive, while the students of working-class have a very high dropout rate (Dumais, 2015). Dumais (2015) stated that in *Social and Cultural Reproduction*, Bourdieu describes the cultural capital as linguistics and cultural competency, which can only be resulted from the family nurture when transmitting dominant culture. The theory of cultural reproduction by Pierre Bourdieu offers an explanation determining the mechanism resulted from the educational inter-generation asymmetry. Bourdieu conveys that parents send cultural capital to the children. The children change the cultural capital into academic achievement, as a consequence, a family that has cultural capital means having comparative advantages that help them to reproduce the special social-economic position (Andersen & Jaegar, 2015). defines cultural capital as familiarity with the code of dominant culture as written in a society. He stated that cultural resources are a kind of modal nonmaterial capital considered equal to economic capital and social network (social capital) (in Andersen & Jaegar, 2015). Bourdieu differs between three forms of cultural capital: manifested, as an object, and institutionalized (Tan & Liu, 2017). Erel (2010) stated that cultural capital is formed by the construction of policy of national economic interest and the professional system of protectionism. Cultural capital is equalized with three categories of capital, physical capital, human capital, and natural capital (Throsby, 1999). The cultural context in which Bourdieu thinks about culture is based on — related to the social origin and related to intellectual exercise (Robbins, 2005). The concept of cultural capital develops along with the concept of “habitus” influencing the result of the economy and social (Throsby, 1999).

3. Methodology

This study uses a qualitative approach including semi-structured interviews for data collection. Several political party representatives were interviewed, namely the Regent of Jombang city Hj. Munjidah Wahab, Partai Persatuan Pembangunan (PPP) Emma Umiyyatul Chusnah, Partai Kebangkitan Bangsa (PKB). Fatimatuzzahro, a legislator of the Regional People's Representative Council (DPRD) was also interviewed, and also some religious figures, namely, Gus Ali from Pesantren Darul Ulum Peterongan Jombang, in East Java, Indonesia. These interviewees were selected because they play active and dominant roles in the lives of the politicians they represent.

The materials submitted during the interviews semi-structured interviews on how to harness the power of culture and pesantren to obtain voter turnout. How winning strategy. The meeting was conducted by someone who met in person, such as an interview with Emma conducted via mobile phone and recorded directly. There is no difficulty at all when researchers want to meet religious elites, Regent, representatives of politicians simply contact aides determine the schedule for interviews.

Interviews was conducted either in person or via social media with four participants (two political representatives). Secondary data included articles, books, magazines, reports, and archived material used for triangulation with primary data. The data analysis method followed an earlier study (Miles et al., 2014). This method included collecting data and then describing, reducing, and verifying it. Data obtained from interviews were combined with the observational data, described, and reduced. A better way to word this might be, data were evaluated to discern what was relevant to our study and finally we verified the relevant data.

4. Results and discussion

4.1. The power of the Pesantren dynasty in local politics

The building of a political dynasty network started when Munjidah Wahab was elected as Jombang Regent from 2018 to 2023. Nyai Munjidah is the manager of Pesantren Tambak Beras Jombang and is also the daughter of KH Wahab Hasbullah (one of the founders of Nahdlatul Ulama). Munjidah has built octopus-like power by making her three sons and daughters legislative members of the Partai Perasatuan Pembangunan (PPP). The party supported her in the local election. Her oldest son Ahmad Silahuddin is becoming a member of Dewan Perwakilan Rakyat Daerah (DPRD) Jawa Timur, from the election zone 10 (Jombang and Kabupaten /Kota Mojokerto). Emma Umiyyatul Chusnah, her second daughter, has been elected as the member of DPR/MPR RI from the same election zone, and Muhammad Farid Al Farisi is Ibu Munjidah's son in law, who was elected as a member of DPRD Jombang, 2019–2024.

The table above shows that HJ. Munjidah Wahab has strong influence over the elections involving her son, daughter, and son-in-law, making them legislative members, from the level of DPRD of Regency level, DPRD Province of East Java, up to members of the DPR/MPR RI.

Munjidah Wahab's victory as the Regent has benefitted her family because of her influence as the head of Muslimat NU Cabang of the Nahdatul Ulama (NU). Muslimat NU, Fatayat NU, IPPNU, IPNU, and Banser Jombang are organizations under NU that contribute votes to legislative elections, allowing her sons and daughter to attend the DPR/MPR RI, Regional "Dewan Perwakilan Rakyat" of East Java Province and Dewan Perwakilan Rakyat Daerah (DPRD) of Jombang Regency. Organizations like Fatayat NU and KH Wahab Hasbullah's cultural capital result in scooping up NU members' votes in Jombang and Mojokerto Regency/City. Patronage between elite of Pesantren alumnae as sympathizers (ex Students in pesantren) is also a determinant of success. As stated by Emma, (daughter of the Jombang Regent and legislator of the PPP):

“ ... To keep the votes of santri, alumnae, and sympathizers of Pesantren more robust and more prominent, we appointed the head of the winning team from the family of Pesantren Bahrul Ulum Jombang. So that it is easier to coordinate inter-Pesantren-family relations because all of the big Pesantren in Jombang have family ties with us. It is one of the most critical factors that make my mother, sister, and brothers win the legislative election. Please pray for us so that this position brings ‘berkah’ (happiness in life).”

The interview shows that the Pesantren name was the determining factor in winning the legislative election in 2019. Political dynasties run on corruption, collusion, and nepotism. The Jombang Regent misuses authority and government facilities for personal interest. For instance, she uses the powerfull of the regent to gather the heads of villages and mobilize the masses vote in the legislative election. She also uses official transport to socialize with her sons and daughter while campaigning. The leaders of the Bureau (Kepala Dinas) who live in the election zone were tasked with collecting votes according to the target of number of voters.

Fatimatus Zahra legislator Partai Kebangkitan Bangsa explained,

“Bu Munjidah called all of the heads of the Bureau (kepala Dinas) at the regency administration of Jombang. They got the task of collecting votes in all of the election zones at Jombang. There is [even] a head of the Bureau who spends his own money, up to 25 million rupiahs, for the cost of the ‘dawn attack’ (give money), give rice, sugar, oil, to the voter.”

The interview above clearly describes how the Jombang regent maintains her power and position by instructing the heads of the Bureau to “collect votes” although they are supposed to be neutral civil servants.

5. Determining factors of domination of the Pesantren dynasty in local politics dynamics

Social capital as a basis for domination requires a social network of relations owned by Bu Munjidah Wahab. The Regent has been involved in the organization since she was young. She was the autonomic organ of Nahdatul Ulama, like Ikatan Pelajar Pemuda Perempuan NU (IPPNU) Jombang, then active in Fatayat as the Head of Muslimat NU- Branch in Jombang for two periods. In addition, she is also the manager (Pengasuh) of the Pesantren Putri Bahrul Ulum Tambak Beras Jombang, East Java. Genealogically she is the daughter of KH. Wahab Hasbullah, a national hero and one of the founding fathers of Nahdhatul Ulama (the most prominent Islamic organization in Indonesia).

After being active in various social organizations, the political party namely the Partai Persatuan Pembangunan (PPP) Munjidah Wahab to become a legislator, this is the way that led him to become the head of the region and managed to build an oligarchy family power in local politics. There are three factors to running a political dynasty. The first is the economic factor, for in order to take part in the Regional head election and Legislative Election one needs significant economic capital. Economic capital is the driving machine of political parties, as campaigns require money to pay for party recommendations, to register with political parties, to print posters and banners, to pay for advertisements, and to pay for consultants and success teams at various levels. The success team usually uses the economic capital in what is known as the dawn attack to persuade voters to participate.

Second is the political factor. When Bu Munjidah ran as the Jombang Regent Candidate, she bought a recommendation letter from Partai Persatuan Pembangunan (PPP) for political drive, as did her sons and daughters, thus succeeding in maintaining octopus-like political power in Jombang Regency. (Look at [Table 1](#))

Third is the social factor. Social capital, as a basis for domination, is the possession of a social network of familial relations like with Bu Munjidah Wahab.

Table 1. The influence pesantren on dynasty politics

Name	Relation	Position	Supporting party	Election Zone
Hj. Munjidah Wahab	Mother	Jombang Regent 2018–2023	PPP	Jombang
Ahmad Silahuddin	Son	Member of DPRD Jatim 2019–2024	PPP	Jombang and Kabupaten/kota Mojokerto
Emma Umiyyatul Chusnah	Daughter	Member of DPR/MPR RI 2019–2024	PPP	Jombang and Kabupaten/kota Mojokerto
Muhammad Farid Al Farisi	Son-in-Law	Member of DPRD Jombang 2019–2024	PPP	Jombang

5.1. The Pesantren dynasty’s domination in local politics and its effect on the process of democracy

Maintaining the position and power of the political and religious elite requires a religious hegemony, especially in religious polities like Jombang Regency. The Kyai and Nyai campaigners use daunting rhetoric in their campaign speeches and religious elites who function as “mouthpieces” for the people can dominate in all lines of life. As seen during the campaign for Nyai Mahfudhoh, who is the Regent of Jombang’s older sister.

Gus Ali of the religious elite explained,

“ ... if you want to be safe in the world and in the hereafter, gather with kyais, religious scholars and habaib, let’s vote Partai Persatuan Pembangunan. To make your life be a blessing, full of luck, long life, and who have debt will quickly repay the debt (sic.). From now on, you have to be sure to vote for the PPP party, vote Emma for the central legislatives, vote Gus Adik for the provincial legislatives, and vote for Farid in the regional legislatives, won’t you?”

The statement above is dogmatic and elite power. She pressures the public to vote for the PPP party and to vote for her nephews as legislators using the identity politics that has increasingly the biggest after the Reformation. Local religious elites use power-sharing and identity politics as a tool to manipulate and mobilize political power for their economic and political latent interests.

6. Pesantren dynasty building octopus-like power

The Pesantren descendents building octopus-like power can be understood in the terms of Ruud and Nielsen, who describe political dynasties as part of a larger network of gaining and perpetuating power. Jombang is made up of dynasty politics in which a powerful network of sons and daughters utilizes their family name and district where their mother serves as regional head as a political tool. This strategy can be likened to a “brand name.” For example, the name KH. Wahab Hasbullah (one of the founders of the NU) is synonymous with the largest religious organization in Indonesia, and one of KH. Wahab Hasbullah’s grandsons is a legislator. The octopus-like power of political dynasties in Jombang, in the authors’ view, aims to a) secure political positions at both local and central levels; b) establish a synergy in the utilization of central, provincial, and regional budgets; c) and accumulate economic capital by budgeting for political purposes.

6.1. Social, economic, and political capital as the veins of local politics

Social, economic, and political capital are used to gain power. In this instance, the social capital comprises a dynastic family name and Pesantren network; the political capital is the political power and benefits the name confers; and the economic capital is used to obtain votes from constituents. Although social capital is very valuable in Jombang, economic capital is still necessary. Economic capital in the dynasty provides logistical campaign elements like promotional material on television and social media. That said, the greater the social capital of a candidate,

the less economic capital that is needed. Conversely, if a candidate's social and political capital is low, then economic capital is a vital determinant in panning for votes.

7. Pesantren dynastic power and its influence on the democratic process in local politics

Local democracy, which implements power decentralization, brings political elites out of the regions. In general, democracy can be seen from two sides—positive and negative. Local democracy is positive when there are four techniques of implementation: improving community leadership, reforming management, increasing local voter participation, and infrastructure development provided by the government. Local democratic processes are negative with regard to internal management. Political dynasties are difficult to control, they check and balance policies and leaders, and people are afraid to criticize them. They rely on loyal people rather than smart people, which results in a government lacking innovation and management. Power distribution is limited to specific families, which ultimately weakens democracy.

8. Conclusion

This paper reveals several important findings related to octopus-like local power. First, the employment of familial relations in politics is a means of preserving power in legislative elections. Second, there are at least three types of capital used in local politics to gain power: social, economic, and political. The greater the social capital of a candidate, the less economic capital is needed. However, if the candidate's social and political capital are weak, then economic capital is vital in seeking votes. Another issue is the misuse of power for personal and organizational well-being. Inthrespect, this study found that the octopus-like power of political dynasties in local politics has weakened democracy.

This study's scope is limited to the Jombang Regency, which leaves room for further research on octopus-like power structures in other regions. However, as East Java Province's population is large, the results of the study may be representative of the situation in many regions of Indonesia.

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