

POWER RELATIONS AMONG CULTURAL ELITES IN THE 2024 REGIONAL HEAD ELECTION IN BONE REGENCY

A. Burchanuddin, Arif Wicaksono, Ali Anas, Harifuddin

burchanuddin@universitasbosowa.ac.id, arifwicaksono@universitasbosowa.ac.id,
alianas@universitasbosowa.ac.id, harifuddin@universitasbosowa.ac.id

ABSTRACT

This study aims to analyze the power relations of cultural elites in the 2024 regional head elections in Bone Regency. The method used is a qualitative approach with a constructivist paradigm. Data collection techniques include in-depth interviews, participant observation, and documentation studies. The results show that cultural elites, including local aristocrats, traditional leaders, and charismatic clerics, play a significant role in gaining public support through the use of symbolic, cultural, and religious capital. Public support for cultural elites as regional head candidates is based not only on rational considerations related to work programs but also on cultural loyalty and the values of *siri' na pacce* (a sense of belonging) rooted in the social structure of Bone society. This power relationship operates through the mechanism of cultural patronage, in which elites mobilize the masses through the distribution of symbolic and economic resources, while candidates provide political rewards in the form of recognition, respect, and economic access to the elites. These findings confirm Michel Foucault's theory of productive and relational power, in which the power of cultural elites operates through customary and religious legitimacy, creating voluntarily submissive political subjects. This study concludes that the power relations of cultural elites in the 2024 Bone regional elections have reproduced traditional social structures and strengthened local oligarchies. Therefore, critical political education and strengthening the capacity of civil society are needed to promote a more inclusive and substantive local democracy.

Keywords: Power Relations, Cultural Elites, Political Identity, Regional Election

A. INTRODUCTION

Regions, as political stages, have become arenas for political power struggles for local communities, particularly their elites. Siti Zuhro et al. (2011), in their research on local democracy in four regions, demonstrated that the diversity of local political cultural values in relation to the behavior of actors in political life shows no positive correlation with the institutionalization of democracy because the interests of elites or actors are solely focused on gaining power. Meanwhile, discussing local politics is inseparable from local democracy. Quoting (Abd. Halim, 2014) in his book "Local

Politics, Actor Patterns and Dramatical Plots," he describes Local Democracy as an element of local autonomy involving freedom from central intervention and the freedom to reflect local values and norms. The dynamics of local politics in Indonesia are constantly changing. In the pre-independence era, local politics were characterized by a customary legal framework steeped in feudalism and political oligarchy, where only the royal nobility held power. As a result, most levels of society were only recognized as servants (not citizens) who carried out the dictates of their rulers without the right to correct existing policies. After the proclamation of independence, the power of society began to seep into formal institutions. This situation was more or less a positive legacy of the colonial plan to provide opportunities for ordinary people to participate in power within the context of modern political implementation. This situation placed the cultural elite (aristocracy) in competition with the general public, who were also striving to gain positions in state institutions. In addition to the competition between the cultural elite and ordinary people that emerged after the proclamation, issues of cultural identity and ethnicity also became prominent within the framework of democratization in Indonesia.

The social stratification of the Bugis-Makassar community has given a privileged position to the nobility as a strategic elite from other social groups in the social structure, and as the top leaders in the political structure or power structure. The stratification of the Bugis-Makassar community which is divided based on castes or groups is considered an important factor that controls or influences the socio-economic and religious life of the people of South Sulawesi. In general, the people of South Sulawesi are known as a society that is very strict in maintaining the rules of this social stratification. Even among the community there is an assumption that maintaining social stratification is a condition for the success of a country (Mattulada, 1985: 324). After the proclamation of independence of the Republic of Indonesia on August 17, 1945, the government system was no longer in the form of *swatantra* but switched to *swapraja*. Bone as a former kingdom is bound by the democratic system of the Unitary State of the Republic of Indonesia. This can be seen from the change from the oligarchy political era to the democratization era where in the contestation of local political power the existence of the nobility has the same political status as the people in general. During the Old Order and New Order eras, the top regional leadership at that time was dominated by military circles who took over strategic positions which were previously held by civilians (Taufiq Tanasaldy, 2007).

Regional head elections (PILKADA) are no less interesting to study than national elections. When direct elections are implemented in various regions, almost every democratic event is colored by various political dynamics that lead to conflict, dynasty, and feudalism in the local political realm. Along with the ongoing decentralization of power and contact with highly pluralistic local cultures, the drama of local politics in Indonesia is increasingly attracting the attention of socio-political

observers in the country. The local political dynamics in Bone Regency are interesting to study, as one of the regencies on the east coast of South Sulawesi Province, located 174 km from Makassar City. Historically, this regency is recorded as a former influential kingdom in South Sulawesi. Since its establishment as an autonomous regency in 1951, only the nobility (cultural elite) has dominated as regional heads during various periods of democratic transition until today. This situation is interesting to study, where democratic space appears to be reproduced only through the power relations of the cultural elite in regional head elections in Bone Regency. This condition gives a negative impression to the democratization process itself, because only the cultural elite group can contest on the regional head election stage. The objectives of this study are: a) identify the process of cultural elite power relations working in local political contestation in Bone Regency, b) understand the pattern of power relations in the utilization of resources to gain political party support, c) understand how cultural elites work in gaining public support through their power relations, d) identify the sociological implications of social and political interactions in society after the regional head election. The informants in this study were Cultural Observers, Party Elites, Social Activists, Voters, and State Civil Apparatus. The reason for choosing informants was because they were considered to understand the socio-political reality that occurred in Bone Regency. From the introductory description above, the assumption built by the researcher is to describe more specifically related to the power relations of cultural elites in regional head elections, both structure and culture, so that the space for election is very open to always exist on the local power stage. This reason is considered by the researcher something interesting to study in identifying the factors that influence the occurrence of this fact.

B. RESEARCH METHOD

The research method used in this study is descriptive qualitative, with a constructivist paradigm as its design. The constructivist paradigm is based on the ontological assumption that social reality is the result of social construction, bridged by a particular value system. Social reality cannot exist independently without the role of individuals, both external and internal. Explanations of the power relations of cultural elites can be examined in terms of the degree of their mutually influencing structuring relationships, including competition and cooperation.

Epistemologically, the constructivist paradigm bridges subjective transactional values through a hermeneutical and dialectical interaction between the researcher and the phenomenon of cultural elite power relations. This means that the methodology used prioritizes comprehensive and contextual analysis to discover the truth by uncovering the true truth behind the reality. Because this research methodology utilizes comprehensive and contextual analysis, a qualitative approach is used (Ratna, 2010).

Thus, the axiological consequences of the contribution of discourse and knowledge on the issue are used as a channel in determining and voicing choices by all stakeholders in the momentum of regional head elections in Bone Regency in particular.

C. THEORETICAL REVIEW

To explain the phenomenon of power relations among cultural elites, the central problem in this research, we will use the articulation of power in social life, specifically Michel Foucault's concept of power. This will be comprehensively elaborated on issues related to regional head election contests, according to the research's locus and focus.

1. Articulation of Power

Sociological studies relate to human behavior within the context of social life. If this assumption is accepted, it becomes important to apply political studies related to power to the same social context. Therefore, the intersection between sociological and political studies lies within the domain of political sociology, which draws on the same empirical foundation: social power.

Discussing power in the context of social life will be more meaningful by exploring the ideas of power from renowned medieval philosophers such as Thomas Aquinas, Thomas Hobbes, Karl Marx, and Max Weber. For Aquinas, power is merely a physical and social reality but does not constitute authority. According to him, no human being inherently possesses authority over another human being, because the only one with authority over that power is God (Suseno, 1986:6).

Based on this, Aquinas radically demands the ethical legitimacy of human use of power. The essence of Aquinas's thinking is that power is essentially right and good only as long as it operates within precise (precise/accurate) legal boundaries, while the law itself must support the state's goals, namely to promote the general welfare, not the personal interests of the ruler or a particular group. This meaning of power differs significantly from Hobbes's view, which positions power as a formal, institutional force exerted by the state through psychological manipulation in the form of threats and fear. For Hobbes, the state must be unrivaled in strength to ensure, and as necessary, enforce, compliance with the rules, and the state is obligated to establish its legal order. Similarly, the Marxist view, in which power is a property that can be controlled by one person or group to weaken another person or group, even the Weberian view, which only defines power as the subjective ability of an actor to dominate others.

Gordin and Klingemann (Ahmad, 2012:15) define politics as the limited use of social power. This is because power exists in social life and is also linked to the social legitimacy of that power itself. Social power, in this case, is not absolute; rather, it is subject to various limitations from other powers that are always present

simultaneously and inevitably. The definition that most closely aligns with the meaning of power is Foucault's, who articulates that power is diffuse, non-localizable, and a system connected by networks, characterized by a structure of productive, non-repressive activities, and inherent in the will to know (Haryatmoko, 2002:37).

Homans conceptualized power as the ability to control rewards or punishments in a social exchange. A person with power or power is able to make those they control do whatever they wish, as those they control lack the ability to provide rewards or punishments to those in power. The ability to provide rewards or sanctions that is owned by the ruler, has the same impact on the party being controlled, namely the position of the person being controlled depends on the ruler.

2. Power Relations

The contextualization of the power relations of cultural elites in regional head elections, as the main theme of this research, implies that power is spread as a complex strategic situation within ongoing social relations. Foucault (Adil, 2016:19) outlined five propositions about power, which he outlined as follows:

1. Power is not something that can be acquired, achieved, used, or shared, something that can be grasped or even lost; rather, power is exercised from various locations within constantly shifting relations.
2. Power relations are not structural hierarchical relations that assume there is a ruler and a ruled.
3. Power comes from below, which assumes there is no longer a binary distinction between oppositions because power encompasses both.
4. Power relations are intentional and non-subjective.
5. Where there is power, there is also anti-power (resistance), and resistance is not outside the power relationship, everyone is in power, there is no way out of it.

Foucault's five propositions above demonstrate how power is a complex form of strategic situation. To understand the complexity of power's interconnected networks, he proposed five approaches (Upe, 2016:19):

1. Decentralizing the analysis of power, namely rejecting centralistic forms of power. The goal is to examine the extremities of power and the various material techniques that intervene in life.
2. Observing power externally by approaching it with empirical studies of the locations where forms of power have an effect.
3. Not viewing power as a property right, but rather as a network involving individuals as subjects and objects of power.
4. Power does not operate from the top down, but from the bottom up.

5. Not starting with ideology and exploring the instruments used, but rather with mechanisms and practices, and exploring how actors shape ideology and knowledge.

By examining the five approaches above, it can be understood that power does not operate negatively as a tool used to oppress individuals. In this context, power operates positively and productively. Although the form of power is not visible and is not recognized as a practice that controls the individual, the effects of that practice of power are discernible.

D. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Humans, as *zoon politicon* (Aristotle) or *homo homini socius* (Adam Smith), are social beings. As social beings, humans interaction with one another to fulfill their needs. As social beings, humans possess a number of distinctive characteristics, differing from one another, such as physical characteristics, talents, emotions, needs, ideals, initiatives, behaviors, and so on, all of which trigger clashes of interests. These differences also continually place society in conflict-ridden situations.

The articulation of individual and collective needs fundamentally requires competition, both individual (private needs) and public (public needs). Individual needs are strongly influenced by the direction in which public needs are met, as it will be very difficult to meet individual needs if public needs are not met. To avoid conflicts of interest, conscious and collective efforts are needed to create order, and this order can only be achieved through politics.

Politics has been defined in various ways by experts. There is no single consensus. Politics can be articulated as the sharing of power, or as the effort to influence others to achieve certain goals, or as a matter of who gets what, when, and how. What is certain is that politics encompasses all aspects of social, cultural, economic, and religious life.

1. Power relations at work in local politics in Bone Regency

The power relations at work in local political contestation in Bone Regency are evident in the strong involvement of cultural elites in the local political process. Cultural elites, consisting of aristocrats, traditional leaders, and charismatic clerics, play a significant role in shaping candidate legitimacy and the direction of public support. The strategies used by candidates to gain symbolic legitimacy and their impact on local democracy are also discussed. The analysis shows that these power relations reinforce patronage and dynastic politics, while simultaneously maintaining social stability through traditional legitimacy mechanisms. Regional head elections (*Pilkada*) in Indonesia are not only an arena for political party contestation but are also fraught with local power dynamics. Bone Regency, as a

region with a strong socio-cultural structure, demonstrates the dominant role of cultural elites in the political process. Cultural elites, including aristocrats, traditional leaders, and charismatic clerics, possess symbolic legitimacy that candidates often exploit to gain public support.

Michel Foucault views power not merely as something possessed or concentrated in a single actor, but as a diffused relation that operates through various social practices, discourses, and knowledge. Foucault's concept of power is productive, shaping subjects and social truths through discursive and non-discursive mechanisms. In the context of the Bone Regency Pilkada, the power relations of the cultural elite clearly operate Foucaultian principles of power. Foucault emphasized that power is not merely repressive, but is present through everyday social relations. In the Bone Pilkada, the cultural elite (nobles, traditional figures, charismatic clerics) did not impose their power coercively, but rather their power operated through the cultural and religious legitimacy inherent in the social structure of the Bugis Bone community. This power is diffused, not centralized in a single institution, because it operates through the network of customs, religion, and kinship constructed in the social life of the community.

2. Patterns of power relations between cultural elites to gain political party support.

In the local political context of Bone Regency, the power relations between cultural elites as regional head candidates and political parties are inextricably linked to the dynamics of resource utilization. These resources include economic, social, cultural, and symbolic resources held by candidates and their support networks. This paper will discuss how power relations are formed in the process of gaining political party support by candidates in Bone, including resource utilization strategies and the implications for local democracy. According to Foucault's theory of power relations and resource mobilization theory, power stems from an actor's ability to: access and distribute resources; build patronage relationships with political parties through symbolic and material transactions; and integrate cultural, economic, and symbolic resources to gain political legitimacy.

Candidates with strong economic capital tend to dominate the political party lobbying process. Economic resources are used to: finance the party recruitment process, including formal and informal political dowries; finance the consolidation of party cadres and administrators at the district and village levels; and contribute to party programs as a form of political investment. In interviews with several party officials (based on various studies and the general reality of the Bone regional election), they acknowledged that the primary consideration in nominating a candidate is: "Who is best equipped with logistics and can operate

the party's machinery on the ground?" Candidates with noble status or close ties to traditional elites use cultural capital as bargaining power to convince political parties that they have a loyal base. Traditional titles or close ties to charismatic religious figures serve as symbolic capital to assert their electability in the eyes of the party.

The power relations of cultural elites are also evident in the negotiation process with the party, where candidates with access to the party's central elite (DPP) have an advantage, even though other candidates with high electability exist in the regions. Generally, this power relationship pattern is constructed through negotiations conducted by political brokers close to DPP elites, and through the use of personal networks (extended family, organizations, communities, and business networks). From this study, it is concluded that the pattern of power relations in the use of resources to obtain political party support in Bone Regency shows that: a) Political power is not only determined by the vision and mission and competence of candidates, but also by their ability to manage economic, social and cultural resources, b) Political parties act as transactional arenas and actors that select candidates based on resource capacity, more than ideology or substantive programs, c) Understanding these power relations is important to encourage reform of local political recruitment to be more democratic and oriented towards public interests.

3. Cultural Elites in Gaining Public Support

Research results indicate that cultural elites in Bone Regency, including local aristocrats, traditional leaders, and charismatic clerics, play a dominant role in gaining public support at every political moment, including regional head elections. Field findings demonstrate that the legitimacy of cultural elites is constructed through their genealogically inherited noble status, community-recognized customary authority, and religious authority. Furthermore, public support for cultural elites is not solely based on rational assessments of programs and policies, but rather on cultural respect and loyalty internalized in the value structure of Bone society, particularly the value of *siri' na pacce*, which emphasizes self-respect, solidarity, and obedience to traditional and religious leaders.

Further findings reveal that cultural elites utilize their symbolic capital in various socio-religious and customary activities, such as attending *mappacci* (traditional ceremonies), *mappadandang* (traditional ceremonies), Islamic holiday celebrations, and Bone royal rituals, to strengthen emotional closeness and affirm their social status as moral and cultural representatives of the community.

These findings confirm Michel Foucault's theory of power relations, stating that power is not only materially coercive but also operates productively through symbolic legitimacy and cultural discourse that create voluntarily submissive

subjects. In the Bone context, cultural elites do not enforce their power through repressive means, but rather use customary and religious narratives to internalize the value of obedience to society. This pattern also correlates with Pierre Bourdieu's concept of symbolic capital, where noble status, customary titles, and religious authority function as symbolic capital that can be converted into political capital, so that public support emerges not only as a form of rational political choice but also as an act of reproduction of traditional social structures.

Furthermore, the practices of cultural elites in gaining public support in Bone demonstrate a pattern of cultural patronage, in which elites provide protection, social assistance, or access to resources to the community as a means of fulfilling their patronage function, while the community provides loyalty and political support in return for this relationship. This practice also demonstrates that in societies with traditional social structures, the political process is inextricably linked to the influence of custom and symbolic legitimacy. However, the discussion also emphasizes that while the power relations of cultural elites can maintain social stability and the reproduction of customary values, they also have the potential to hinder substantive democracy, as people tend to vote based on genealogical and symbolic loyalties rather than rational evaluation of candidates' visions and programs. This situation creates an oligarchic local political space and precludes the possibility for new political actors lacking cultural and symbolic capital to compete on equal terms.

From this focus, it can be concluded that the role of cultural elites in gaining public support in Bone not only reflects the strength of traditional social structures that persist in the modern era but also demonstrates how power relations and symbolic capital operate simultaneously in local political reproduction, where customary and religious-based legitimacy serve as strategic instruments to assert power and ensure the continued dominance of cultural elites in local electoral contests.

4. Sociological Implications of Political Power Relations Post-Regional Head Elections

The political power relations formed during the regional head election process, particularly those involving cultural elites and political patronage, have resulted in the re-enforcement of traditional social structures post-election. The dominance of aristocrats, traditional leaders, and charismatic clerics in local politics further solidifies the social hierarchy within society. Society continues to place cultural elites in central positions as patrons and policymakers, resulting in the reproduction of symbolic and cultural power that reinforces society's structural dependence on traditional elites. Post-regional head elections, patron-client relationships are further strengthened due to the political favors demanded by

elites from the community, and vice versa. Voters who support the elected candidate gain access to resources, development projects, social assistance, or strategic positions in government, while groups who do not support them tend to experience political marginalization. The sociological implications of this include the emergence of unequal social and economic access based on community political orientation, as well as social fragmentation between supporters and non-supporters.

On the other hand, post-election political power relations also create social stability, as leadership that enjoys the approval of cultural elites is generally more readily accepted by the public. Their legitimacy stems not only from formal vote acquisition but also from recognition of customary and religious structures. This implies broader social acceptance and minimizes the potential for open conflict resulting from disputed election results. However, this stability is illusory if the government is unable to fulfill its political promises. Post-election periods also give rise to social and political polarization within society. Regional head elections, fraught with contestation based on cultural identity and patronage networks, create new social divisions, such as supporter versus opposition groups, which can lead to latent conflicts in daily life, affecting kinship relationships, social interactions, and even community solidarity.

The practice of political power relations based on patronage and cultural symbols has sociological implications in the form of a transformation of societal political values, from rational values based on public programs and policies to instrumentalistic, transactional values and symbolic loyalty. Society interprets politics as an arena for the exchange of resources and symbolic honor, rather than as a means of pursuing collective interests based on substantive aspirations.

Thus, it can be concluded that political power relations following the regional head elections have implications for the reproduction of traditional social structures and the legitimacy of cultural elites, the strengthening of patronage and clientelism practices that create unequal access, the institutionalization of local oligarchies that block substantive democratic space, social polarization that has the potential to weaken community social cohesion, and the transformation of community political values into pragmatic and transactional ones. Understanding these implications is crucial in efforts to promote critical political education and strengthen the capacity of civil society so that local democracy in Bone Regency and other regions can develop more substantive and inclusively.

REFERENCE

- Ahmad, Nyarwi. 2012. Political Communication Management and Political Marketing. History, Perspectives, and Research Developments. Yogyakarta: Pustaka Zaman.
- Auerbach, F. Carl and Silverstein, B. Louis. 2003. Qualitative Data. New York: New York University Press.
- Abdul Halim, 2014. Local Politics: Patterns, Actors & Dramatic Plots: Perspectives of Powercube, Capital, and Stage Theories, LP2B, Bandung, Indonesia.
- A. Burchanuddin, Andi Agustang, Arlin Adam, Andi Alim. Cultural Reproduction in the Socio-Political Context of Bone District. JSSA Sociology Journal, 12(1-2): 12-22 (2021).
- Aspinall, Edward and Sukmajati, Mada. 2015. Money Politics in Indonesia: Patronage and Clientelism in the 2014 Legislative Elections. Yogyakarta: Department of Politics and Government, Gadjah Mada University.
- Firmanzah. 2008. Political Marketing. Between Understanding and Reality. Jakarta: Yayasan Obor Indonesia.
- Gaffar, Afan. 1989. Several Aspects of Political Development - An Anthology. Jakarta: Rajawali Pers.
- Mattulada, 1985. The Bugis-Wajo Community (In a Phenomenological Perspective), CV. Tohar Media, Indonesia.
- O'Donoghue, Tom and Punch, Keith. 2003. Qualitative Educational Research in Action. London and New York: Routledge Falmer.
- Ratna, Nyoman Kutha. 2010. Research Methodology (Cultural Studies and Social and Humanitarian Sciences in General). Yogyakarta: Pustaka Pelajar.
- Ritzer, George and Goodman, Douglas J. 2007. Modern Sociological Theory. Jakarta: Kencana.
- Satori, Djam'an and Komariah, Aan. 2010. Qualitative Research Methodology. Bandung: Alfabeta.
- Suseno, Frans Magnis. 1986. Power and Morality. Jakarta PT. Gramedia.
- Tabroni, Roni. 2014. Political Marketing. Media and Image Building in the Multiparty Era. Yogyakarta: Graha Ilmu.
- Warsito Rahardjo, 2013. Revivalism of the Power of Familiism in Democracy: Political Dynasties at the Local Level, Journal of Community Sociology, Vol. 18, No. 2, July 2013: 203-231, University of Indonesia.
- Zuhro, Siti et al. Local Democracy. Yogyakarta: Ombak Publisher, 2010.