Family rivalry and its impact on local democracy: An analysis of political dynasties in Samosir Regency, Indonesia

Ruruh Aris Setyawibawa[*], R. Hamdani Harahap, Muryanto Amin, Nurman Achmad
Universitas Sumatera Utara, Indonesia
*Corresponding author: ruruhusus@gmail.com
https://orcid.org/0009-0003-2070-7417

Abstract
Political dynasties in Indonesia often serve as a tool to maintain concentrated power, resulting in a centralized power structure and potential negative impacts on democratization. This research analyzes the dynamics of dynastic politics and family rivalry in the Regional Head Election in Samosir Regency, North Sumatra, Indonesia. Using a qualitative approach, the research method involved document analysis, in-depth interviews with local political figures, and field observations to identify the impact of political dynasties on local democratic processes. The findings show that competition within clans creates political tensions and contributes to shifts in people's assessment of the quality and legitimacy of leaders. While political dynasties can offer stability, they often reduce transparency and accountability and inhibit public participation. This research highlights the importance of understanding how political dynasties adapt to electoral system changes and their impact on local political dynamics. Recommendations include evaluating public policies to reduce the negative impact of political dynasties, improve accountability, and strengthen public participation in democratic processes. Further research is needed to explore how internal rivalries within political dynasties affect elections and community responses to political change.

Keywords: accountability, family rivalry, local elections, political dynasty, public participation, transparency

Public Interest Statement

This research explores the phenomenon of political dynasties and family rivalries in regional elections, explicitly focusing on the Samosir Regency in North Sumatra, Indonesia. Political dynasties, often characterized by family members holding successive or influential political positions, can significantly impact democratic processes and governance at the local level. In Samosir Regency, the prevalence of such dynasties and their internal rivalries have profound implications for political competition, governance quality, and community engagement. This study sheds light on how these dynastic structures and family rivalries affect local political dynamics, electoral outcomes, and the overall health of democracy in the region. By examining these issues, the research highlights the need for reforms to ensure a more equitable and transparent democratic process. It encourages policymakers, political parties, and community leaders to address the challenges posed by political dynasties to enhance democratic consolidation and governance.

Introduction

Transitioning to democracy is often considered a relatively easy step in this modern era. However, the challenges faced by countries undergoing democratic transition, including Indonesia, are not only limited to the establishment of democratic institutions but also to the consolidation of democracy itself (Gunther, 2005). Indonesia has come a long way in the democratization process since the collapse of the New Order regime in 1998, with three critical elements of democracy marking its success: political competition, public participation, and the guarantee of civil and political rights (Marijan, 2010).

Regional head elections (Pilkada) are an essential instrument in realizing the principles of democracy at the local level (Fauzan et al., 2024). Pilkada allows the people to determine their leaders directly, strengthening political legitimacy and popular sovereignty in the government system. However, although Pilkada is an essential symbol of local democracy, its implementation in Indonesia still faces several problems, especially related to the influence of political dynasties and the hegemony of local elite groups that often limit broader political participation (Nasution et al., 2023).

One increasingly prominent phenomenon in Indonesia's regional election process is the emergence of political dynasties, where certain families or groups with solid power networks control political power. This phenomenon does not only occur at the national level but also the regional level, especially in regional elections (Smith, 2012). Romli & Efriza (2021) shows that in the 2020 simultaneous regional elections, the influence of family identity remains vital in supporting candidates participating in the elections, which shows the strength of political dynasties in various regions.

Djati (2013) categorizes political dynasties in Indonesia into several forms, such as the Populism Dynasty, Octopus Dynasty, Tribalism Dynasty, and Feudalism Dynasty. Although these various forms of dynasties have different characteristics, one of the exciting dynamics is the emergence of internal competition among family members of political dynasties in Pilkada contestation. This phenomenon contradicts the pattern of political dynasty succession, usually characterized by a more orderly power transfer. Particularly in North Sumatra Province, the phenomenon of inter-family competition in Pilkada is increasingly striking, especially in Samosir Regency, where in the 2020 Pilkada, there were 28 candidates from the same clan competing in the same electoral district.

This competition phenomenon indicates a change in dynamics in the pattern of political dynasties in Indonesia, where internal competition between families has become a new form of maintaining and expanding political power. This study will explore the forms of internal competition in political dynasties in the Samosir Regency and its impact on the stability and development of local political institutions in the region. By examining this phenomenon, this research is expected to contribute to understanding the dynamics of local political power and its implications for democratic consolidation in Indonesia.

To strengthen this analysis, previous research by Hadiz (2004) shows that oligarchic transformation in Indonesia, especially at the local level, strengthens the existence of local elites who

continue to maintain their power through various means, including political dynasties. Winters (2011) also underlines that the oligarchic phenomenon in Indonesia is closely related to the concentrated distribution of economic power, which then creates political dynasties to maintain the status quo. In addition, Hutchcroft (2000) argues that political dynasties often emerge as a product of a weak political system, where less stringent regulations allow family dominance in politics.

The phenomenon studied in this research focuses on inter-family rivalry in political dynasties in regional head elections (Pilkada) in Samosir Regency, North Sumatra, which has experienced a significant increase in recent years. This competition involves family members from the same clan competing against each other in the local political arena. This research aims to analyze the forms of family rivalry in political dynasties in Samosir and to understand the factors that drive the rivalry. This research is necessary because it can provide a deeper understanding of how local political dynamics develop amidst democratization pressures and how competition in political dynasties can affect the quality of local governance and democracy in Indonesia. The findings of this research are also expected to contribute to academic discussions on the power of oligarchy and political dynasties in the context of emerging democracies.

Literature Review

In recent years, there has been increasing attention to political dynasties in countries undergoing democratic transition. Political dynasties in these countries, including Indonesia, often emerge due to entrenched oligarchies and low institutionalization of political parties (Winters, 2011). A study by Das et al. (2023) found that in countries with less established democratic systems, family power plays a vital role in maintaining political power. In Indonesia, political dynasty is a phenomenon that applies at the national level and extends to the regional level through regional head elections (Pilkada). Recent research highlights the role of political dynasties in creating a monopoly of power at the sub-national level. For example, found that in Southeast Asian countries, political dynasties are more common in areas with low access to resources, where family networks are used to secure positions of power. This is reflected in regions where local elections are often characterized by family involvement in running for essential positions in Indonesia (Wardani & Subekti, 2021).

Family rivalry in political dynasties has become a subject of increasing attention. Research by Rajekshah et al. (2023) shows that internal rivalries within ruling families are common in local politics, especially in countries with competitive electoral systems. These rivalries often allow family members to expand their influence or maintain control over political resources. In the Indonesian context, recent studies have shown an increase in families competing in local elections. A study by Zulkarnain (2020) noted that in the 2020 regional elections in Indonesia, at least 28 pairs of candidates from the same clan competed in the elections in North Sumatra. This phenomenon shows that rivalry within dynastic families is not only about power struggles but also about maintaining the family's political influence and legitimacy in the eyes of the public.

Political dynasties often hurt the quality of local governance. A study by Mendoza et al., (2022) reveals that political dynasties can exacerbate corruption and undermine democracy at the local level. In the Philippines, for example, political dynasties are associated with increased levels of corruption and decreased local government performance. In Indonesia, similar impacts are also found, where political dynasties in some regions tend to weaken accountability mechanisms, reduce public participation, and increase social inequality (Hadiz, 2004). However, not all political dynasties bring negative impacts. Research by Aspinall & As'ad, (2016) emphasizes that, in some cases, political dynasties can also generate political stability and provide continuity in public policy. In some regions in Indonesia, families with political dynasties have sometimes succeeded in creating more stable and sustainable governments. In general, criticism is more directed at the risk of concentrating power in the hands of a few political elites. In the context of democratic consolidation, political dynasties pose severe challenges to the inclusive

democratization process. Winters (2020) states that the existence of political dynasties in democratic transition countries such as Indonesia often slows down progress towards a more participatory and transparent democracy. This is because political dynasties tend to reinforce a centralized power structure, which hinders the process of a more equitable distribution of power.

In Indonesia, political dynastic rivalries also hinder the formation of solid and responsive political parties. This is discussed by Kenawas (2023), who found that political parties in Indonesia often function as tools to secure power for the ruling family rather than as institutions that promote healthy democracy. As such, democratic consolidation in Indonesia faces significant challenges from powerful political dynasties. Regional elections in Indonesia, especially since the introduction of direct elections, have become a competitive arena for political dynasties to expand their influence in the regions. Direct elections at the regional level provide an opportunity for powerful families to further consolidate their power through the social and political networks they have built. However, it also poses new challenges in the form of internal rivalries within dynastic families, which often result in serious political frictions (Dwianto et al., 2023).

A study by Rajekshah et al., (2020) found that family rivalries in regional elections tend to be more intense in areas with a long history of kinship politics in North Sumatra. These rivalries not only change the dynamics of local politics but also shift public perceptions of prospective leaders who come from political dynasties. Sometimes, these rivalries weaken the dynasty's support base, mainly when competition occurs between close family members with solid claims to power. Research on political dynasties and family rivalries in Indonesian elections continues to grow. Recent studies suggest that this phenomenon will continue to be an essential part of local political dynamics in Indonesia. Further research is needed to understand how political dynasties adapt to electoral system changes and how local communities respond to internal rivalries within dynastic families. In addition, it is essential to explore how public policies can be designed to mitigate the negative impacts of political dynasties and ensure that local democracy continues to function optimally.

Methods

This research uses a qualitative approach with a case study method to explore the phenomenon of political dynasties and family rivalry in regional head elections (Pilkada) in Samosir Regency. The qualitative approach was chosen because it allows researchers to explore the meaning and social dynamics that occur in depth in the context of local politics. This research focuses on the influence of political dynasties on the results of Pilkada and the relationship between family members involved in political competition. The research was conducted in Samosir Regency, North Sumatra, for six months, from January to June 2024. The research location was chosen based on geographical and political relevance to the phenomenon under study, namely family political competition in Pilkada. The data collected in this study consisted of primary and secondary data. Primary data was obtained through in-depth interviews with 15 purposively selected key informants, including Pilkada candidates, family members, local political figures, and academics who understand the dynamics of political dynasties in Samosir Regency. Meanwhile, secondary data was obtained from official documents related to the Pilkada, mass media reports, campaign archives, and relevant previous research.

Data was collected through three main techniques: in-depth interviews, documentation, and observation. In-depth interviews were used to explore informants' experiences and views related to political dynasties and family rivalries in the Pilkada. The questions asked were semi-structured, thus providing space for informants to provide comprehensive explanations. In addition, documentation was conducted to obtain supporting data from official documents and media reports. At the same time, observations were made during the campaign and election to see first-hand the political dynamics in the field.

The data that has been collected is analyzed using thematic analysis techniques. This analysis

involves data organization, coding, and thematic interpretation to identify patterns, themes, and main categories. Data organization was done by grouping information based on relevant themes and systematically coding the data to identify key themes. These themes were then analyzed to understand the relationships between themes and broader implications. Data validation was conducted through triangulation by comparing data from various sources and data collection techniques and member checking with critical informants to ensure the accuracy of interpretations.

In maintaining the validity and reliability of the data, this research applies a triangulation strategy, which aims to verify findings from various data sources. Member checking with informants was also conducted to ensure that the findings reflect the actual reality and do not contain researcher bias. In addition, this study also paid attention to the principles of research ethics, where informed consent from each informant was obtained before the interview was conducted. The confidentiality of informants' identities was maintained, except with the consent of the informants concerned, and the information provided was used appropriately to maintain the safety and comfort of research participants.

Results

The democratization process in a country is often identified by three fundamental prerequisites: competition, participation, and guarantees of political rights for all citizens. These three prerequisites are an essential foundation for running an effective democratic system. Competition creates more diverse choices for people, while participation allows citizens to participate in politics. In order to realize these prerequisites, the electoral system plays a central role. The electoral system is used in democratic countries to facilitate healthy political competition, increase citizen participation, and protect individual political rights. In this way, electoral systems help create the foundation for a solid and inclusive democracy.

The Regional Head Election (Pilkada) is an essential example of implementing the general election process in a democratic system. In democratic ideals, Pilkada participants should be able to represent their function well in channeling the people's aspirations. Developing field conditions in several regions show that regional election contestants often need to function better as channelers of people's aspirations. On the other hand, regional election results are often determined by candidate figures who are well-known in the local context. This phenomenon indicates that regional head elections, in some cases, do not fully reflect the will of the people but are more related to local wisdom factors or the popularity of candidates (Lubis et al., 2024). In some contexts, this can foster the emergence of political dynasties at the local level. A political dynasty refers to a family or group that successively holds the highest political office in a region. This shows that local democracy can be manipulated by placing relatives in strategic regional positions (Thananithichot & Satidporn, 2016).

The strong phenomenon of political dynasties in the context of the Indonesian democratic system has been highlighted by Mietzner (2009). Political dynasty is a phenomenon that occurs in democratic political systems, which is contrary to the principle of equal political rights. Political dynasties reflect inequality in the distribution of political power, which can challenge democratic systems. This research focuses on political dynasties in the context of regional elections in Samosir Regency, North Sumatra Province. In the 2020 regional elections in North Sumatra, of the 69 pairs of candidates for regent and mayor, 28 candidates from the same clan competed in one electoral district. Rivalry between the same clans also occurred successively in the 2015 and 2020 regional elections, especially in Samosir Regency. In the 2015 Samosir Regency Pilkada, of the 4 pairs of candidates who competed, there were 2 candidates from the Simbolon clan, namely Oloan Simbolon (Regent Candidate Serial Number 1) and Rapidin Simbolon (Regent Candidate Serial Number 4), as well as 2 candidates from the Sinaga clan, namely Alusdin Sinaga (Vice Regent Candidate Number 2) and Juang Sinaga (Vice Regent Candidate Number 4). The 2015 Samosir Regency Pilkada was won by Rapidin Simbolon and Juang Sinaga, contestants Number 4 from the PDIP Party.

In the 2020 Samosir Regency Pilkada, of the three pairs of candidates competing, there were

two people from the Simbolon clan, namely Marhuale Simbolon (Regent Candidate Serial Number 1) and Rapidin Simbolon (Regent Candidate Serial Number 3), as well as two people from the Sinaga clan, namely Guntur Sinaga (Regent Candidate Serial Number 1) and Juang Sinaga (Regent Candidate Serial Number 3). The 2020 Samosir Regency Regional Election was won by Candidate Number 2, namely Vandiko Timotius Gultom and Martua Sitanggang.

In the view of dynastic political theory, the ability of political dynasties to thrive in a democratic system is not always in line with the principle of equal political rights, which should give every individual the same opportunity to participate in political contestation. It is revealed that political dynasties play a significant role in local politics. Although the community still upholds the concept of "dalihan natolu," which describes three levels of relationships in Batak society (Lubis, 2019), kinship in politics has declined. The clan system, such as Simbolon, Sinaga, Gultom, and others, is essential in the Samosir Regency Pilkada, where regional head candidate pairs often have close ties to these clans. Competition even occurs between couples from the same clan, and clan names and familial relationships can influence the choice of potential leaders. The context of political dynasties can also be seen through efforts to influence the election of potential leaders through meetings and solidarity at traditional events. The existence of political money can also have a significant influence on political dynamics in Samosir Regency, where the practice of distributing money to voters is common. Although there is competition between clans, after elections, communities tend to reunite without significant post-Pilkada conflict.

The rivalry between family members from various clans, especially between Simbolon and Sinaga, in Samosir Regency politics has complex dynamics. Although this rivalry can divide society in some aspects, it also creates healthy competition that encourages citizens' political development and awareness. This shows that although political dynasties still play a role, there are efforts and signs of change towards elections based on better quality and vision of leaders and more mature political development efforts in Samosir Regency. Thus, political dynasties are not the only factor shaping the local political landscape, and there is a shift towards elections based on people's competence and aspirations.

The Samosir regional elections witnessed intense political competition between two pairs of candidates from the Simbolon and Sinaga clans, reflecting the polarization in Samosir society with equal support for the two clans. Despite this, relations within the Simbolon clan in Samosir Regency remain good because the Simbolon clan prioritizes customary law over political law. The Simbolon clan has succeeded in distinguishing between politics and their traditional solid relations, and there has never been any conflict or dispute within the Simbolon clan. Rivalry within the Simbolon clan during the regional elections is interpreted positively as an effort to determine the best candidate for developing Samosir.

Anomalous Forms of Tribalism Dynasties

Tribalism Dynasties in the context of political dynasties reflect tribal or ethnic-based political domination in a particular region. In research discussing dynastic politics in various regions in Indonesia, such as Banten, Bantul, Kendal, Probolinggo, Indramayu, North Sulawesi, South Sulawesi, Papua, the Special Region of Yogyakarta, and Bali, it can be seen that dynastic politics is often related to a solid local political culture (Mukti & Rodiyah, 2020). One form of dynastic politics identified is Tribalism Dynasties, which shows the tremendous political influence of certain tribes or ethnicities in the region. In the cases mentioned in the dissertation, dynastic politics was often used to secure power by placing family or relatives in essential posts in government or business projects.

In this context, Tribalism Dynasties reflect how certain tribes or ethnicities can dominate politics in their region by utilizing tribal or ethnic identity to maintain power. The familial, political culture that characterizes dynastic politics in Indonesia influences the character of dynastic politics despite its different forms in various regions. This familial, political culture seems to have penetrated various levels

of politics in Indonesia, where dynastic politics is more synonymous with heredity than the quality of political actors or the cadre of political parties. Thus, Tribalism Dynasties manifest dynastic politics in Indonesia, reflecting a solid local political culture and the dominant influence of tribe or ethnicity in politics in a particular region (Aspinall et al., 2011).

In the Pilkada in Samosir Regency, local culture tends to be firm with local wisdom or the concept of "dalihan natolu" in Batak culture. "Dalihan Natolu" is the social structure of the Toba Batak community's kinship system. Dalihan Natolu creates a structure in society so that we can live with mutual respect, help each other, and keep people away from internal tribal and religious conflicts. The concept of local wisdom is also often used in maintaining political power, which tends to cadre successors based on the similarity of certain clans by dynastic tribalism. However, in the last two periods of the Samosir regional elections, anomalies have been seen in the political dynasties in the area, where there has been rivalry between clan members within the dynasty's family. This becomes very interesting, where rivalry between members of political dynasty families can be seen as part of the dynamics of political competition. The concept of political competition shows highly competitive relationships between political actors, including rivalry between members of political dynasty families. This creates an atmosphere of intense competition in the Pilkada, where various parties compete to get voter support and votes. Thus, political dynasties, political culture, local wisdom, political dynasty typology, and political competition are interrelated elements in the context of regional elections in Samosir Regency, North Sumatra Province.

Members of Political Dynasties from Different Generations
In the Samosir regional head election (Pilkada) in 2020, the form of competition between family members in political dynasties is obvious through inter-generational competition. This competition often involves a political dynasty family's older and younger generation. This tension arises from the desire of different generations to fight for their influence and acquire political positions once held by previous family members. A prominent example of this phenomenon is the Samosir regional election in 2020. Historically, political dynasties in Samosir, such as the Simbolon and Sinaga clans, have dominated the political landscape in the area. These families have established themselves as influential players, often occupying key positions in local government. However, the 2020 election introduced a new dynamic as younger candidates from different political dynasties entered the political arena.

Candidates number 2, Vandiko Timotius Gultom and Martua Sitanggang, represent the younger generation compared to their older competitors. Their candidacy marked a change from the traditional dominance of the Simbolon and Sinaga clans. The young duo of Gultom and Sitanggang symbolized a new wave of political ambition and energy, challenging the established political order. The presence of these young candidates signals a change in voter preferences and the local political landscape in Samosir. Although the Simbolon and Sinaga clans have historically dominated the region's politics, candidates from the Gultom and Sitanggang clans managed to secure the majority of votes. These results reflect a change in voter tastes that may seek new leadership and fresh perspectives.

This inter-generational rivalry within a political dynasty indicates a power struggle and reflects the evolving political dynamics at the local level. The success of candidates Gultom and Sitanggang over established political families suggests that voters are increasingly open to new leadership. This shift could have long-term implications for the future of political competition in Samosir and similar regions, where established political families must navigate a landscape increasingly influenced by new and emerging actors. Furthermore, inter-generational competition within political dynasties illustrates how political processes can undergo significant transformations in line with demographic and social changes. Younger generations involved in politics bring fresh ideas and new challenges to long-established power structures. As such, this phenomenon changes the way politics is conducted in Samosir and provides insight into the broader political dynamics in Indonesia, where the involvement of younger generations

can change the traditional power map and influence the future direction of politics in different regions.

Differences in viewpoints, ideologies, vision and mission

Differences in viewpoints, ideologies, visions, and missions are often the main drivers of competition in political elections, especially in the context of political dynasties in regions such as Samosir. These differences were prominent in the 2020 Samosir regional elections and became an essential factor influencing the election dynamics. Ideology and vision play an important role in politics as they form the basis for candidates' platforms and policies. Vision refers to the end goal a candidate or political group wants to achieve, while ideology is the framework used to plan how to achieve it. In this case, each pair of candidates in the 2020 Samosir Regional Election has a different ideology and vision despite competing for the same goal: the development of the Samosir Regency.

These differences in ideology and vision often lead to sharp competition between candidates from the same political clans. For example, in the 2020 Samosir regional election, two pairs of candidates used the same last name, Simbolon and Sinaga. This reflects internal divisions within the same political dynasty. However, the last names used are the same; differences in ideology and vision cause the two pairs to compete. This dynamic highlights that divisions within political dynasties can occur due to personal ambition and fundamental differences in political views and development strategies. In this context, political families like Simbolon and Sinaga show how members of the same dynasty can have different views and goals, forming two separate political platforms.

On the other hand, two pairs of candidates with the same last name show that despite coming from the same background, differences in ideology and vision can be significant enough to trigger competition. These two pairs of candidates have different views on how best to achieve Samosir's development goals. For example, one pair may focus on infrastructure development and the local economy, while the other may emphasize social empowerment and education more. This illustrates that ideological and visionary differences in local politics can result in intense competition, even among members of the same political family. It also shows that while political dynasties can provide stability, they are not immune to internal conflicts caused by differing views on development directions and strategies.

Thus, differences in ideology and vision affect how candidates compete in elections and impact the broader political structure in the area. These divisions reflect how dynastic politics can be a complex and layered arena of competition, with each individual or group seeking to distinguish themselves through their respective views and programs.

Internal family conflict occurs

In political dynasties, internal family conflicts often influence power structures and dynamics. This phenomenon appears in various forms, including competition to inherit power, struggles over family assets, and strategic conflicts among family members. The 2020 Samosir regional elections case provides a clear example of how internal conflict can influence local politics and election outcomes. In the 2020 Samosir regional elections, there were three pairs of candidates vying for the position of the regional head, with two of the three pairs coming from the same clan, Simbolon and Sinaga. These clans are known to have dominant political power in Samosir Regency and have often won previous local elections. Usually, these clans collaborate in elections to consolidate support and maximize their chances of victory. However, the Simbolon and Sinaga clans split into two competing camps in this election.

This split was made clear by the emergence of two pairs of candidates, each from the same clan: candidate number 1, Marhuale Simbolon and Guntur Sinaga, and candidate number 3, Rapidin Simbolon and Juang Sinaga. The decision to nominate two candidates from the same clan indicates significant internal conflict. This conflict can be caused by various factors, including differences in political views, competition for power or positions within the family structure, and different strategies to win elections. In political dynasties, competition for inherited power often involves a battle between

older and younger generations. In these cases, there may be tensions between family members from the older generation who previously held power and family members from the younger generation who now also want to be involved in politics. These tensions can exacerbate internal conflicts, cause electoral support and strategy divisions, and ultimately affect election outcomes.

The Simbolon and Sinaga clans' split also shows how internal conflict can affect electoral dynamics. With two competing candidates from the same clan, sympathizers' votes were split. This weakens the position of each candidate from the clan and opens up opportunities for other candidates not involved in the internal conflict to gain additional support from voters who feel neglected or disillusioned by the split within the political family. These splits can lead to a decline in support for candidates from the split clan and give an advantage to other candidates who can capitalize on voter uncertainty and discontent.

Moreover, although the Simbolon and Sinaga clans remain culturally connected, this political split illustrates the significant impact of internal conflict on local political structures. Internal conflict reflects tensions and rivalries within political families and affects public perceptions and electoral dynamics. Political support and family power become fragmented, affecting election outcomes and changing the local political landscape. Candidates' success in this context often depends on their ability to overcome internal conflicts and gain solid support from voters. Therefore, understanding internal conflict in political dynasties provides valuable insights into how power structures and political strategies can be influenced by internal family dynamics and how these can affect election outcomes and political developments at the local level.

Discussion

This study's results align with several findings in the existing literature. This research shows how political dynasties in Indonesia, particularly in regional elections, reflect the phenomenon identified by Winters (2011) and Das et al. (2023), namely the critical role of family power in maintaining political power in countries with less established democratic systems. This research also reflects the findings of Wardani & Subekti (2021) regarding the tendency of political dynasties in regions with limited access to resources, where family networks are used to secure positions of power.

This research adds new perspectives that still need to be fully captured in the existing literature. For example, this study focuses on internal rivalries within political dynasties, which may have been underemphasized in previous studies such as by Zulkarnain (2020) and Rajekshah et al., (2020). The results show that rivalries within political clans can trigger more complex political dynamics and influence how voters perceive potential leaders. While previous literature, such as Hadiz (2004) and Aspinall & As'ad, (2016), has emphasized political dynasties' negative and positive impacts, this research highlights how internal rivalries can affect election outcomes and public perceptions more specifically.

The results of this study provide significant implications for the understanding of political dynasties in Indonesia and the challenges they face in the process of democratic consolidation. The findings suggest that political dynasties, while often instrumental in reinforcing centralized power structures, can also create internal dynamics that alter patterns of political competition at the local level. This implies that internal rivalries within political dynasties strengthen family power and create shifts in how local politics is conducted and assessed. This research also highlights the challenges local political parties face in building a strong and responsive support base, which aligns with the findings of Kenawas (2023).

Future research should explore how internal rivalries within political dynasties affect election outcomes and overall local political dynamics. Further studies need to be conducted to understand how political dynasties adjust to changes in the electoral system and how local communities respond to rivalries within dynastic families. In addition, it is essential to examine further how public policies can be designed to mitigate the negative impacts of political dynasties and ensure that local democracy

remains viable. More in-depth research is also needed to evaluate the effectiveness of accountability and public participation mechanisms in the context of dynasty-dominated regions and to formulate strategies to improve the quality of local governance in Indonesia.

Conclusion

This research reveals the complexity and impact of political dynasties in the regional head elections (Pilkada) in Samosir Regency, North Sumatra, by highlighting internal rivalries within political clans. The main findings of the research show that political dynasties in Indonesia, particularly in Samosir, serve not only as a tool to maintain power but also create complicated political dynamics through rivalries among members of the same family. Internal rivalries, such as those between the Simbolon and Sinaga clans, often create tensions that affect public perceptions of potential leaders and the election outcome.

Political dynasties in Samosir reinforce a centralized power structure, which can hinder a more inclusive democratization process. While political dynasties can provide stability, they often reduce transparency, accountability, and public participation. Local concepts such as "dalihan natolu" are essential in influencing political dynamics and managing political dynasties in local contexts. Rivalries within clans not only reflect political change but also indicate shifts in local communities' assessment and selection of leaders.

Furthermore, while political dynasties can provide continuity in public policy, they can also exacerbate corruption and reduce the performance of local governance. Internal competition within political dynasties can result in more responsive and better-quality governance if managed well. Therefore, this study recommends that further evaluation of the impact of political dynasties and internal rivalries on electoral dynamics and public perceptions be undertaken. Public policy evaluation should focus on reducing the negative impact of political dynasties and increasing accountability and public participation. Studies on how political dynasties adapt to changes in the electoral system and how local communities respond to rivalries within dynastic families are also crucial to understanding the evolution of local politics.

Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare no conflict of interest.

Biographies
Ruruh Aris Setyawibawa is a Doctoral Student in Development Studies, Faculty of Political and Social Sciences, University of North Sumatra, Indonesia.

R. Hamdani Harahap is a Professor in the Doctoral Program in Development Studies, Faculty of Political Science and Social Sciences, University of North Sumatra, Indonesia.

Muryanto Amin is Professor at the Department of Political Science, Faculty of Political and Social Sciences, University of North Sumatra, Indonesia.

Nurman Achmad is a Lecturer in Development Studies Program, Faculty of Political and Social Sciences, University of North Sumatra, Indonesia.

Authorship and Contribution Level
Ruruh Aris Setyawibawa contributed to the conceptualization and design of the study, including formulating research questions and hypotheses. He also played a significant role in data collection through interviews and surveys.

R. Hamdani Harahap was responsible for conducting focus group discussions and analyzing qualitative data, contributing to the interpretation of results and their implications for development studies.

Muryanto Amin assisted in the development of the research framework and provided insights into the theoretical underpinnings of political dynasties and family rivalries. He also contributed to the analysis of data related to regional electoral dynamics.

Nurman Achmad played a key role in reviewing existing literature and drafting the methodology section of the research. He ensured that the research methods were robust and aligned with the study's objectives.

References

Aspinall, E., Dettman, S., & Warburton, E. (2011). When religion trumps ethnicity: a regional election case study from Indonesia. *South East Asia Research*, 19(1), 27-58. https://doi.org/10.5367/sear.2011.0034

Aspinall, E., & As'ad, M. U. (2016). Understanding family politics. *South East Asia Research*, 24(3), 420–435. https://doi.org/10.1177/0967828x16659571

Das, R., Nielsen, K. B., & Ruud, A. E. (2023). Dynastic dilemma in South Asia: influence, networks and shamefacedness. *Contemporary South Asia*, 31(3), 355–370. https://doi.org/10.1080/09584935.2023.2227591

Djati, W. R. (2013). Revivalisme Kekuatan Familisme dalam Demokrasi: Dinasti Politik di Aras Lokal. *Masyarakat*, 18(2), 1–29. https://doi.org/10.7454/mjs.v18i2.1234

Dwianto, R. A., Darmawan, A. B., & Salahudin, S. (2023). Meta-Analysis As A Research Tool: A Systematic Review Of Bibliometric Studies In Political Dynasty. *Journal of Indonesian Social Sciences and Humanities*, 13(1), 57–69. https://doi.org/10.14203/jissh.v13i1.265

Fauzan, I., Nasution, F. A., & Regif, S. Y. (2024). Examining the models of religious harmony in anticipating hate polarization in regional head elections in Medan City. *Research Journal in Advanced Humanities*, 5(3). https://doi.org/10.58256/sr02ca56

Gunther, R. (2005). *The Politics of Democratic Consolidation: Southern Europe in Comparative Perspective*. The Johns Hopkins University Press.

Hadiz, V. R. (2004). Decentralization and Democracy in Indonesia: A Critique of Neo-Institutionalist Perspectives. *Development and Change*, 35(4), 697–718. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.0012-155x.2004.00376.x

Hutchcroft, P. D. (2000). *Colonial Bureaucracy and Political Dynasties in Southeast Asia: Towards a Political Economy of Authoritarianism*. Stanford University Press.

Kenawas, Y. C. (2023). The irony of Indonesia's democracy: The rise of dynastic politics in the post-Suharto era. *Asian Journal of Comparative Politics*, 8(3), 748–764. https://doi.org/10.1177/20578911231195970

Lubis, F. H., Nasution, F. A., & Harahap, R. H. (2024). The Commodification of Religious Rituals: Representations of Political Actors in Indonesian Elections. *Pharos Journal of Theology*, 105(2), 1–11. https://doi.org/10.46222/pharosjot.105.214

Marijan, K. (2010). *Sistem Pemilihan Umum dan Konsolidasi Demokrasi di Indonesia*. Airlangga University Press.

Mendoza, R. U., Yap, J. K., Mendoza, G. A. S., Jaminola, L., & Yu, E. C. (2022). Political Dynasties, Business, and Poverty in the Philippines. *Journal of Government and Economics*, 7(7), 100051. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jge.2022.100051

Mietzner, M. (2009). Indonesia's 2009 elections: Populism, dynasties and the consolidation of the party system. *Lowy Institute for International Policy*, 19, 1-22.

Mukti, H. H., & Rodiyah, R. (2020). Dynasty Politics in Indonesia: Tradition or Democracy?. *Journal of Law and Legal Reform*, 1(3), 531-538. https://doi.org/10.15294/jllr.v1i3.38090

Nasution, F. A., Thamrin, M. H., Sinaga, R. P. K., Saraan, M. I. K., & Indainanto, Y. I. (2023). Humbang Hasundutan Regional Head Election In 2020: Empty Box Volunteer Political Communication Movement. *Studies in Media and Communication*, 11(1), 52–52. https://doi.org/10.11114/smc.v11i1.5807

Rajekshah, M., Subhilhar, S., Kusmanto, H., & Ridho, H. (2023). Regional Head Leadership Relations Model in the Perspective of Power in Deli Serdang Regency, Indonesia. *Research Journal in Advanced Humanities*, 4(4). https://doi.org/10.58256/rjah.v4i4.1306

Romli, L., & Efriza, E. (2021). Single candidate and the dynamics of 2020 Indonesian Simultaneous Election: A perspective on internal contestation. *Politik Indonesia: Indonesian Political Science*

Review, 6(3), 265-288. https://doi.org/10.15294/ipsr.v6i2.31439

Smith, B. (2012). Political Dynasties: Democratization and the Persistence of Oligarchies. *Comparative Political Studies*, 45(12), 1542–1573.

Thananithichot, S., & Satidporn, W. (2016). Political Dynasties in Thailand: The Recent Picture after the 2011 General Election. *Asian Studies Review*, 40(3), 340–359. https://doi.org/10.1080/103 57823.2016.1193473

Wardani, S. B. E., & Subekti, V. S. (2021). Political Dynasties and Women Candidates in Indonesia's 2019 Election. *Journal of Current Southeast Asian Affairs*, 40(1), 28–49. https://doi. org/10.1177/1868103421991144

Winters, J. A. (2011). *Oligarchy*. Cambridge University Press.

Winters, J. A. (2020). Oligarchy and Dynastic Rule in Emerging Democracies. Cambridge University Press.

Zulkarnain, I. (2020). Dynastic Political Ethics and the Urgency of the 2020 Regional Elections in the Threat of the Covid 19 Pandemic. *Journal of Ethics and Elections*, 6(1), Art. 1.