Political Clientelism, Family Power and Conflict Permanence in Local Elections: The Case of Maluku

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Abstract

This article examines the relationship between political clientelism and the establishment of family power in local elections. It argues that the use of clientelism networks impacts the creation of family power, the application of which results in the perpetuation of social conflict. Clientelism networks serve as ready-to-use networks which can be mobilised to support relatives during political events. This article uses the case of local elections in Central Maluku (2007–2017) to show the clientelist processes used by the relatives of Tuasikal. The use of alternate clientelism networks enabled the Tuasikal family in Central Maluku to successfully establish power and perpetuate conflicts between supporters and opponents. This study used field observations to collect data in fifteen villages, focusing on the elites and community members involved in the 2007, 2012, and 2017 elections, as well as a review of relevant literature. This study concludes that clientelist practices are used to create political networks to maintain family power and perpetuate conflict between opposing community groups during elections.

Keywords*: family power; political clientelism; conflict; local elections*

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1. Introduction

To date, studies of clientelism have tended to emphasise the provision of support to candidates and political exchange (Aspinall & Sukmajati, 2019; Hopkin, 2008). Clientelism is seen more as a relationship wherein voters provide support to candidates and function as intermediaries in local elections (Robinson & Verdier, 2013: 262; Wale, 2014: 232; Hopkin, 2006: 5; Brienkerhoff & Goldsmith, 2002: 3; Kitschelt & Wilkinson, 2007: 2; Aspinall, & Sukmajati, 2019). It is as if clientelism only works through political exchanges and does not consequently impact the formation of family power and conflict in society, even though, as a support organisation, such networks can be used to win over relatives.

Likewise, studies of family power generally view it as a network and political modality that is concentrated on the family sphere (Susanti, 2017; Fokatea & Mas'udi, 2020; Djati, 2013; Habbodin, 2017; Rusnaedy & Purwaningsih, 2015; Haryanto, 2014). At the same time, these studies also do not clearly link the creation of family power with the use of clientelism networks within the family to claim the same support bases. Several studies see family power as the intergenerational inheritance of power within a small family sphere (Habbodin, 2017; Rusnaedy & Purwaningsih, 2018). They do not examine relatives' operation of clientelism networks to work on the same support base in turn. In fact, family power—as a form of network and political capital—is also maintained through political co-optation (Fokatea & Mas'udi, 2020) and the inheritance of mass bases and bureaucratic networks (Rusnaedy & Purwaningsih, 2018).

Previously, a study of clientelism and family power was conducted by Malik, Mirza, and Platteau (2021), who highlighted the practice of clientelism and its involvement in the establishment of family power in Pakistan. They described the relationship between clientelism and family power through the role of incumbents, who have the political discretion to use public goods to win elections. Such clientelist practices are detrimental to the quality of development, as seen in Punjab. Despite looking at the expansion of family power through clientelism networks, this study focuses more on the impact of family power on economic stagnation at the regional level. As such, it does not provide further exploration of how political clientelism and associated networks are used to shape family power and conflict in society.

Ravanilla, Hicken, and Davidson (2017) looked at the relationship between clientelism and the formation of family power in the Philippines. They showed that the clientelist operations that take place through family political networks contribute to changing voting behaviour. In the Philippines, clientelist networks also operate by exploiting the political loyalties of candidates and support providers as well as their reciprocal relationships in favour of family power (Ravanilla, Hicken & Davidson, 2017: 2). Despite developing research by Cruz, Labonne, and Querebin (2016) on the use of the family power networks in Philippine elections, both studies emphasise loyalty and the political exchanges that take place in clientelism networks as the basis for creating family power; loyalty and political exchange are not only means of providing support, but also the

main prerequisites for binding candidates and support providers (Stokes, 2019; Sukmajati, 2019; Aspinall, 2014; Hutchcroft, 2014; Hopkin, 2006;) and creating family power (Ravanilla, Hicken & Davidson, 2017).

Political loyalty, which operates through clientelism networks, can be used as a means of political mobilisation to ensure candidates' electoral victory (Aspinall & Berenschot, 2020; Stokes, 2019:3; Dunning, Thad & Stokes, 2008; Chubb, 1981). Leveraging the loyalty of support providers, clientelism networks mobilise the masses while connecting candidates and voters (Aspinall & Berenschot, 2020: 3). The political loyalty created by clientelism helps candidates detect defections from support providers (Aspinall, 2014: 547; Stokes, 2013; Stokes, 2005) while making it easier for voters to identify candidates based on their familial ties (Rivanilla, Hicken & Davidson, 2017:5). In fact, organising family power networks also makes it easier for candidates to earn and transfer political capital within the family (Purwaningsih, 2015: 99).

The local elections in Central Maluku Regency, which took place from 2007 to 2017, were important examples of the use of clientelism networks as the basis for the formation of the Tuasikal family's power. Clientelism operated through political exchanges that were nurtured as hereditary engines for supporting the family's electoral victory. These practices work through voters' loyalty to their raja (traditional leaders) as well as customary institutions

such as saniri and mataruma.[2] All of these customary institutions were used as political brokers by the Tuasikal family.

Starting from Abdullah Tuasikal's rise to political power in the 2007 local election, clientelism networks were used by Abua Tuasikal—Abdullah's older brother—and his relatives to secure electoral victory in the 2012 and 2017 elections. These political actors used the same clientelism networks to organise the raja and other traditional institutions as support providers. At the same time, clientelism was also organised through formal institutions such as the bureaucracy and civil servants. Formal actors linked the Tuasikal family with voters even as they facilitated political compromise between the family and the raja/adat institutions. This was possible because family power was supported by strong political networks that were shared within the family (George, 2019; Habbodin, 2017; Muraoka, 2018; Fokatea & Mas'udi, 2020).

Clientelism networks were by Abdullah Tuasikal during the 2008 and 2013 gubernatorial elections; although his bids were unsuccessful, he was able to mobilise support in Central Maluku. Abdullah Tuasikal's wife, Miranti Dewaningsih, used clientelism networks to gain a seat in the People's Consultative Assembly (2009–2024) and Regional Representatives Council (DPD; 2014–2019). Amrullah Amri Tuasikal, the son of Abdullah Tuasikal and Miranty Dewaningsih, also gained support from the same clientelism network when contesting the 2019 legislative elections.

2   The *raja* is the head of government at the *negeri* (village) level; the position, thus, is equivalent to village head. In Maluku, the position of *raja* is based on lineage/clan (*mataruma*). *Saniri* is equivalent to the Village Consultative Body (BPD). Finally, *negeri* is the customary name for villages in Maluku.

The use of these alternative clientelism networks divided communities based on their affiliation with the Tuasikal family as well as the raja and customary institutions that were connected to their power centres. At the same time, unaffiliated elites became the political opponents of the Tuasikal family. The division became widespread, sowing the seeds of political conflict in local society. With the Tuasikal family's far-reaching tendrils, political polarisation provided alternative avenues for conflicts between opposing groups (Ficher, 2002).

On the one hand, the networking of these groups strengthened the political polarisation of society. Likewise, the repeated use of clientelist political networks perpetuated the conflict between different groups. This situation was exacerbated by the political intervention of Abdullah Tuasikal and Abua Tuasikal as incumbents, who organised family power as well as mobilised support through clientelist nodes within the bureaucracy and at the village level. Political polarisation was caused not only by socio-ideological divisions but also stemmed from the abuse of power by local executives (Arugay & Slater, 2018: 93). In the context of Central Maluku's local elections, the two incumbents—Abdullah Tuasikal and Abua Tuasikal—created political reach by co-opting the bureaucracy, the raja, and traditional institutions to mobilise support for relatives even as they dragged communities into political conflicts.

The organisation of clientelism networks in Saleman Village, Northwest Seram, for example, also created division within society. The co-optation of the raja and other customary institutions resulted in the

selection of leaders attuned to Abua Tuasikal's political interests. As regional leaders, both Abdullah Tuasikal (2002−2007) and Abua Tuasikal (2012−2017) received political support through their clientelist relationships with the raja, and thus they sought the appointment of local leaders whose interests aligned with their own. This political penetration had a significant effect on political divisions in society. The conflict between top-level elites, both candidates and other elites, resulted in broader political divisions. In other words, the polarisation of elites was extended to create conflict between different elements of society (Gunterman & Blaiss, 2022:141).

In Saleman Village, the community was divided into those opposed to the Tuasikal family (matahari nai) and those who supported the Tuasikal family (matahari turung).[3] Each formed its own village government, appointing its own raja, saniri, and village administration, as well as their own village office. Similar conflicts and political divisions were found throughout Central Maluku. Tactically organising clientelist networks enabled the Tuasikal family to maintain its power base. Clientelism was used to support family members, even as society was divided.

This article discusses the Tuasikal family's use of clientelism networks as the basis for establishing power and perpetuating conflict through Central Maluku's local elections in 2007, 2012, and 2017. Data were collected through field observations in fifteen villages as well as in-depth interviews

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3   The *matahari turung* (sunset) referred to community members who lived in the western part of Salamen. Meanwhile, the *matahari nai* (sunrise) were concentrated in the eastern part of the city. These groups came into conflict because of their different political affiliations.

with seventy-five informants, consisting of both elites and community members, as well as campaign teams and non-political elites. Each informant participated in at least one of the three local elections (2007, 2012, and 2017), either in support of or opposition to the Tuasikal family. To expand on this information, interviews were conducted with elites who were clientelistically connected and politically affiliated with the Tuasikal family in the local/legislative elections.

Structurally, this article is divided into five parts. First, it provides an introduction that discusses clientelism, family power, and political conflict within the case of local elections in Maluku. Second, it examines the socio-historical roots of clientelism in Maluku and places it as an entry point for the formation of political clientelism and conflicts in local elections. Third, it discusses the use of

clientelism networks as a basis for establishing the power of the Tuasikal family in Central Maluku through executive or legislative elections. Fourth, it shows that the use of clientelism networks by the Tuasikal family expanded conflict and perpetuated the political divisions in society. Finally, this article concludes by discussing the links between clientelism, family power, and conflict.

Results and Discussion

a. The Roots of Clientelism in Maluku: From Trade Politics to Local Elections

An examination of the practice of political clientelism in Maluku quickly uncovers the co-optation of the *raja* by the Dutch East India Company (VOC). As shown by Chauvel (1990), the VOC worked by installing *raja* in Maluku as trade intermediaries at the village level. Chauvel (1990: 8) notes that the *raja* occupied

three important roles in the company's trade-politics chain: as community representatives at the village level; as representatives of the colonial government who held the highest authority in the village; and as colonial agents who served to regulate the supply and demand for cloves.

These three roles placed the *raja* of Maluku as brokers in trade politics and as despotic figures in conflict with the common people. *Raja*, as traditional leaders, were originally considered prominent figures in their villages, but this was eroded by their involvement with the VOC (Knaap, 1987). The expansion of political/trade interactions between the *raja* and VOC resulted in division between community members, based on their support or opposition to this situation (see Widjojo, 2013; Chauvel, 1990; Pamungkas, 2014).

These conflicts stemmed from the political tactic whereby colonial authorities arbitrarily appointed and replaced *raja* to advance their trade interests at the village level (Chauvel, 1990; Widjojo, 2013). Any *raja* who refused to cooperate was replaced (even when he came from a different clan), while *raja* who were willing to cooperate were retained. From a regulatory perspective, the customary laws of other lands were also introduced to advance colonial political interests (Ter Haar, 1948).

Such political intervention created conflict and confusion regarding matters of lineage and clan. Such practices have been echoed by the Tuasikal family, which used the conflicts of the *raja* as political capital for mapping its support and consolidating its networks in Central Maluku. This practice was identified by the community as

"Dutch politics" or "split bamboo politics"−one blade is stepped on, the other is lifted. Conflicts in villages in Leihitu and Seram,[4] for example, provided an entry point for clientelist political exchanges in support of Abdullah and Abua Tuasikal (Kelihu, 2021).

Aspinall and Berenschot (2019: 247) show that, in remote and economically backward parts of Indonesia, traditional leaders function as political brokers. Despite noting a link between economic growth and political clientelism, they agree that traditional leaders such as clan/*marga* or *fam* leaders have the political power to mobilise large numbers of voters.[5] The

link between the *raja*, *saniri*, and *mataruma*, which had been institutionalised for generations, provided Abdullah Tuasikal (2007−2012) and Abua Tuasikal (2012−2021) with permanent support in every local election. The *raja* cleverly used their capacity to establish connections with the Tuasikal family through personal compromises before the elites' appointment. At the same time, as political incumbents, Abdullah Tuasikal and Abua Tuasikal have had the political discretion to appoint the raja according to their interests.

Ibrahim Ruhunussa—the former chairman of the Regional People's Representative Council (DPR; 2014−2019), who was involved with Abua Tuasikal in appointing the *raja*—explained that the scheme for determining the *raja* was designed from the start to appoint individuals whose interests aligned with those of the incumbent.

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4   Leihitu is located on Ambon Island; Seram, meanwhile, refers to Seram Island. These two regions are home to the largest voter bases in Central Maluku; one-third of voters in the regency live in Leihitu, while half live in Seram area.

5   Based on the Clientelism Perception Index (CPI) / Survey Scored Districts and Provinces conducted by Edward Aspinall and Ward Berenschot, Eastern Indonesia has a CPI score of 6–7 (out of a range of 3–7). Maluku received a score of 6.06.

Many villages have regulated the process of determining their *raja*. So, when the process of determining the *raja* operates, they [incumbents] can use the *raja* to secure their political interests in their respective villages.[6]

These compromises became one way to ensure the loyalty of the *raja* as support providers in local elections. Although *raja* in Central Maluku are appointed based on hereditary considerations, the requirement for them to be approved by the regent has provided a political loophole for incumbents such as Abdullah Tuasikal and Abua Tuasikal. Local Regulation No. 3 of 2006 concerning the Nomination, Election, and Inauguration of the Heads of Village Governments requires that *raja* be ratified after being elected through customary processes at the

village level; this holds the *raja*, *saniri*, and *mataruma* hostage to the clientelism networks of the Tuasikal family. This is exacerbated by the enduring ambiguity about the lineage of *raja* during the colonial period (see also Chauvel, 1990; Widjojo, 2013; Knaap, 1978).

The *raja* eventually became involved in clientelist networks that supported the Tuasikal family, becoming indebted through their compromises with the incumbents. The *raja* thus acted simultaneously as traditional leaders as well as political power brokers in every election. In this context, the *raja* of Central Maluku were not only connected to the Tuasikal family because of their control over society, but also held hostage by the political exchanges and loyalties they established with the incumbents in every election. Aspinall and Berenschot (2019: 197) include the *raja* as part of the

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6   Interview with Ibrahim Ruhunussa in Hila Village, Leihitu District, May 2021

influence network of clientelism.[7] In the influence network, religious character or identity, the culture and social identity attached to traditional leaders are useful for organising support. *Raja* play an incredibly significant role because of their capacity as clan (*marga*/*fam*) representatives in various conflict resolutions, traditional rituals, and interactions with outsiders (Aspinall & Berenschot, 2019: 194). This clientelistic network has shaped the power of the Tuasikal family and exacerbated the conflict and political division within society.

b. Clientelism and the Power of the Tuasikal Family

Important in the practice of clientelism during local elections in Central Maluku (2007–2017) was its use in expanding the power of the Tuasikal family. The clientelist networks that have operated in the 20 years since the election of Abdullah Tuasikal (2002–2007) and Abua Tuasikal (2012–2023) have underpinned half a century of Tuasikal rule.[8] The age calculation not only shows the durability of the clientelism network of the Tuasikal family, but also the success of the Tuasikal family in maintaining the loyalty of the king, the traditional institution as a provider of support.

The clientelist networks established in Central Maluku involving the *raja*, customary institutions, and local elites

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7   Aspinall identified two types of mobilisation network: *influence networks* and *benefit networks.* Influence networks are organised through elites or traditional leaders who rely on their social, cultural, and religious influence. Benefit networks are formed through trade chains that connect candidates and entrepreneurs. Unlike influence networks, benefit networks rely on the benefits derived from trade/exchange relations.

8   Adding up the terms of every member of the Tuasikal family (children, wife, and siblings) results in more than fifty years of time served.

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as support providers worked through two modes of operation: through political co-optation and personal compromise. The incumbents (both Abdullah Tuasikal and Abua Tuasikal) co-opted the *raja* and *saniri* into their network through formal hierarchies and regional political structures. The *raja* thus became subordinate to the regent, expected not only to obey their administrative instructions but also advance their political interests. Meanwhile, political clientelism operates through personal compromise between the *raja* and the incumbents, during which traditional processes are adjusted to suit the political interests of the incumbents. The operations of these clientelist networks can be described as follows:

Figure 1. Political Clientelism Networks in Local Elections Central Maluku (Kelihu, 2021)
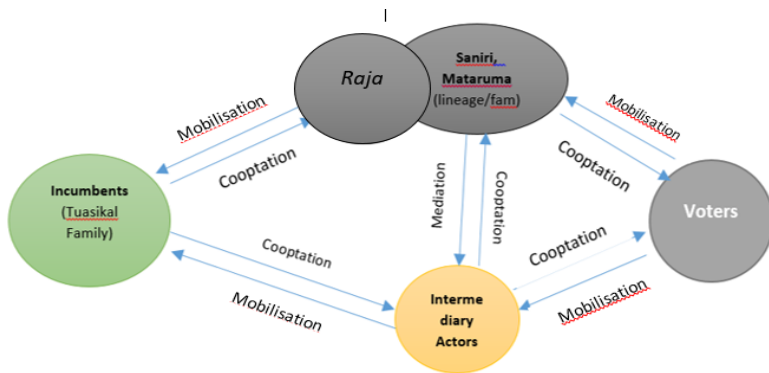
As subordinates to the regent, the raja must not only be administratively obedient but also engage in political exchanges that position them as the political brokers of the incumbent. Meanwhile, the personal compromises between the *raja* and incumbents were converted into loyalty to the incumbent. The capacity of Abdullah Tuasikal and Abua Tuasikal as regional heads to appoint *raja*, pursuant to Local Regulation No. 3 of 2006, has provided them with a means of imposing their political interests. This loophole, it would appear, was adapted as a political exchange to ensure the loyalty of the *raja* as supporter providers.

Three important actors are involved in the clientelism network operated by the Tuasikal family. *First*, the incumbents themselves. *Second*, the go-between elites, including civil servants in regency/district offices and village-level elites such as community leaders, teachers, politicians or contractors.[9] *Third*, *raja* and customary institutions such as *saniri* and *mataruma*. These various actors serve to connect *raja* and incumbents in clientelistic political exchanges. In an interview, one member of the elite power circle surrounding Abdullah Tuasikal and Abua Tuasikal stated that the political co-optation of the raja was mediated by elites in the regency government. According to him:

Usually [control over the raja] goes through bureaucratic channels. Through BAN, the Village Administration Section, which is directly tied to the *raja*. BAN brings together the *raja*, to influence the regent. The regent

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9   Generally, actors in the regency government are bureaucrats who are directly involved in village governance or have close ties to the *raja*. Meanwhile, the local village elites are generally community leaders, politicians, and contractors who are involved in a number of projects; it may also include small contractors or community leaders.

will usually ask, "how can you win 60%? How? How many polling stations are in the village?" In such a case, the raja may answer "there are 30 polling places, and *katong* (ours) can win."[10]

Civil servants in the regency government function as intermediaries that connect the *raja* and the incumbents in elections. Through these political relations, the *raja* further carry out the co-optation of traditional institutions (*saniri* and *mataruma*) to facilitate voter mobilisation. The role of the *raja* is further shaped by their willingness to obey the incumbent as the regional leader and as a political patron, in exchange for being appointed to their position. Through this hierarchy, political clientelism is practised, connecting the civil servants, contractors, and local elites, all of whom serve to facilitate the compromises between the *raja* and the regent.

Such personal political compromises between the *raja* and the regent occur during the appointment of the village leader. Although the position is filled along hereditary lines, the *raja* must still be appointed by the regent; in such cases, the regent chooses individuals whose political interests align with his. If the potential *raja* comes from two lineages (*mataruma parenta*), the one chosen is the one that reflects the incumbent's political interests. On the other hand, if they come from one lineage (*fam*), the raja is chosen in accordance with the incumbent's electoral interests. In an interview with Ibrahim Ruhunussa, he explained that:

In Wolu Village, in the last two periods, the process of determining the *raja* has

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10 Interview with BSE in Masohi City, February 2021

been regulated from the start. For example, at that time (the appointment of the *raja*) was communicated by BMBG and Mr MS [a local politician]. They brought the future *raja* to meet the regent. Once the communication was completed, the process at the state level could proceed… They made sure that the [prospective *raja*] could be [invited to work together], [saw] his type and character. Finally, they approved the process.[11]

Such political compromise shows that the appointment of the *raja* at the village level is related directly to the incumbent's political interests in the local elections. As such, the appointment of the *raja* is a battleground for political elites, as it influences decision-making at the regency and provincial levels (Budiman, 2019: 298). Such political linkages not only hold the raja and traditional institutions hostage in clientelism networks but also positions them as support providers for the incumbent's relatives.

In Maluku's 2008 and 2013 gubernatorial elections, although Abdullah Tuasikal—the former regent of Central Maluku (2002–2012)—did not win, he received the largest share of votes in Central Maluku. Abdullah Tuasikal, who contested the 2008 gubernatorial election with Hematang Septinus, received 78,918 votes (of 192,112 total) in Central Maluku Regency. Meanwhile, in the 2013 Gubernatorial Election, in which Abdullah Tuasikal ran with Hendrik Lewerissa, he received 85,724 votes (of 162,525 total votes) in Central Maluku.

After these two failures, Abdullah Tuasikal ran for the People's Consultative Assembly in the 2019 legislative election; his wife, Mirati Dewaningsih,

contested a seat in the DPD. Both received the largest share of votes from Central Maluku Regency, as they benefitted from the same political networks and support systems. Abdullah Tuasikal received 38,269 votes (of 51,827 total), while Mirati received 42,246 (of 62,135). Previously, Mirati Dewaningsih had been elected to the DPD through the 2009 legislative election, having received 76,181 votes (out of 90,092 total) in Central Maluku (Maluku Province KPU, 2009). Tuasikal's nephew, Fatzah Tuankotta, was elected to the local legislature with 1,295 votes and appointed the Chairman of the Central Maluku Regional People's Representative Council (DPRD; 2019–2024). Previously, in the 2014 legislative election, Mirati Dewaningsih and her son Amrullah Amri Tuasikal were respectively elected to DPD and DPR through their network.

These electoral victories depended heavily on the clientelist networks that placed the *raja* and traditional institutions as support providers in every election. They not only played a role in organizing support during the local election but also used clientelist networks to support Tuasikal's relatives by exploiting the available political capital. In other words, the formation of family power is usually conducted through the same political networks and power bases (Purwaningsih, 2015; Querubin, 2012). In the context of Central Maluku, the power of the Tuasikal family is operated through a clientelism network that places the *raja* and customary institutions as ready-made political structures to be exploited by the Tuasikal family. One *raja* in Saleman Village, Northwest Seram, described his loyalty and support for the Tuasikal family.

Since the time of Abdullah Tuasikal, under two terms, and when his son (Amrullah Amri) was running for the DPR, we still won. Pak Abua Tuasikal, who served two terms, we still won them.[12]

This recognition shows not only political loyalty to the Tuasikal family but also the strong resilience of clientelism as a tool for political mobilisation used by the Tuasikal family. However, the iterative process of mobilising support for family members through the Tuasikal clientelism network received different responses from the community. Diverse political groups not only protested the involvement of the incumbent in co-opting the raja but also opposed the involvement of Tuasikal's relatives and supporters in the general election. These political implications, in turn, contributed to the perpetuation of social conflict between groups affiliated with the Tuasikal family and those opposed to it.

c. **After Clientelism: The Permanence of Conflict in Society**

The use of clientelism to support the Tuasikal family not only ensured the continued loyalty of the *raja* and customary institutions but also created conflict and division between supporters and opponents of the family. This division was maintained as family members used the same networks to mobilise voters in executive and legislative elections. For example, Abua Tuasikal's candidacy in the 2012 local election relied heavily on the clientelism networks created by his younger brother, Abdullah, during his term as regent (2002–2007). Through this network, Abua focused on networking and cultivating

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12 Interview with AM, *raja* of Saleman Village, Northwest Seram, February 2022

support from the ideological mass segment he inherited from Abdullah. As such, the use of the clientelism networks perpetuated the conflict that has existed within society since the reign of Abdullah Tuasikal.

Likewise, the mobilisation of support for Mirati Dewaningsih during her efforts to contest the 2009, 2014, and 2019 legislative elections was organised through the clientelism network. The use of this network also encouraged the creation of a consensus, whereby supporters not only voted for Abdullah Tuasikal in the local election but were also obligated to support his wife in the legislative election. As a result, the support for Abdullah Tuasikal was reworked to provide his wife with a political support basis using the same organisational model, in which the *raja*, traditional institutions, and civil servants functioned as support providers. On the other hand, opponents—unwilling to accept dynasty politics—refused to support Tuasikal and his wife, and thus they switched their support to other candidates. One local elite in the village of Teon Nila Serua (TNS), who was involved in the 2007 election, explained:

In all the villages in Central Maluku, there are always divisions. There are two political forces. Politically, [the incumbent] already has political capital. This is no longer a secret; those who support the decision to legalise the *mataruma* (clan), which is considered able to provide support. So, it's like, villages are divided into two groups, with 50% in favour and 50% in opposition. That's why Pa Dulla [Abdullah Tuasikal] and Mrs Miranti can sit in DPR and DPD, because of that capital.[13]

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13   Interview with DSM, August 2021

Society was thus divided between supporters and opponents of the Tuasikal family. Supporters of the family identified themselves as "pro groups", "Tuasikal people," or "*pandopo* groups." Opponents, meanwhile, identified themselves as a counter group. Each performed self-differentiation repeatedly, even as they maintained distance in their daily interactions. Society is thus divided into conflicting factions, even after the *raja* is appointed and the elections have concluded.

Tactically, these conflicts and divisions mark the clear distinction between the supporters of the Tuasikal family and other groups. In the future, although this segmentation will enable members of the family to organise support and cultivate the existing supporter base, it will also perpetuate conflict between elites and ordinary members of society. The strict political segmentation of each group also enabled the Tuasikal family to detect potential defections. In every campaign, several people are assigned to assist with mobilisation and record the *raja*, civil servants, and local village elites who are considered disloyal.[14]

The network supporting the Tuasikal family facilitated the process of mobilising the masses. However, political divisions have endured at other electoral moments, such as during gubernatorial or general elections, and this has exacerbated the conflict between the supporters and opponents of the Tuasikal family. Over time, this political conflict has been strengthened by the political intervention of the incumbents

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14 Village elites as well as village government officials spoke about the role of several people in recording and photographing people (civil servants and Tuasikal support groups) who attended the Jusuf Latuconsina/Leonard Lohy campaign activities in Hila and Kaitetu. Interview in Hila Village, May 2022

(Abdullah Tuasikal and Abua Tuasikal) who have regulated the appointment of *raja* according to their political interests. The compromises established between the *raja* and the incumbents in the process have expanded into physical conflicts.

The conflict between supporters of the Tuasikal family and supporters of Jusuf Latuconsina in the 2007 and 2012 regional elections, for instance, became known for the conflict between *orang lawan* (those supporting Tuasikal) and *orang nagri* (those supporting Latuconsina). This resulted in division within families and led to physical conflict. In Saleman Village, Northwest Seram, the conflict between the supporters of the *raja* who was appointed by the regent (king of the regent) and opponents exacerbated the polarisation between the political groups in the election. The involvement of Abua Tuasikal

in appointing Arsad Makatita as *raja bupati* (king of the regent), outside the customary processes, was opposed by groups who associated themselves with traditional *raja* as well as groups who were against the Tuasikal dynasty.

This conflict even permeated the diverse governance structures within the village. Each group appointed its own *raja, saniri*, and administrative policy, based on distance and political affiliation with the Tuasikal family. Likewise, post-election conflicts have also been massive. The following table highlights the various conflicts and political divisions that have occurred in Leihitu and Seram, both during the appointment of the *raja* and during executive/legislative elections.

Table 1. Political divisions in Leihitu and Seram during executive/ legislative elections (Kelihu, 2021).

Division of Conflict In Society	Village/ Ethnicity	Incumbent-Affiliated *Raja*	Non-Incumbent Affiliated *Raja*	Details
Merah/ Putih (Red/White)	Assilulu Village/ Leihitu	Merah	Putih	Often stronger during executive elections
Raja Adat/ Raja Bupati (Traditional Raja/ Regent's Raja)	Saleman Village/ Seram	Regent's Raja	Raja Adat	Began in 2014, after the appointment of the raja, and continued through the 2017 executive election. Saleman has two *raja* and two *saniri*, as well as two village offices.
Larike Atas/ Larike Bawah (Upper Larike/ Lower Larike)	Larike Village/ Leihitu	Upper Larike	Lower Larike	Often stronger during executive elections

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Orang Ucu/ Orang Abdullah (Ucu's People/ Abdullah's People)	Hila Village/ Leihitu	Abdullah's people	Ucu's people	Formed in the 2007 and 2012 executive elections in response to the candidacy of Jusuf Latuconsina (Ucu), who was considered the candidate who would advance the Leihitu people
Matahari *Nai/* Matahari *Maso* (Sunrise/ Sunset)	Liang Village/ Leihitu	Matahari Nai	Matahari Maso	This division has existed for a long time, even before the executive elections; it is often stronger during the process of appointing the raja and during local elections.
Orang Nagri/ Orang Lawan (Village People/ Opponents)	Kaitetu Village/ Leihitu	Regent's People/ Opponents	Village People	Began in the 2007 and 2012 local elections, but strengthened during the appointment of the *raja*

Orang dari Lau/ Orang Nagri (People from Across the Sea/ Village People	Wahai Village/ Seram	Orang dari Lau	Orang Nagri	Strengthened during local elections and administrative division; returned during the appointment of the *raja*
Orang Pandopo and Orang Panta Gunung/ Orang Sabalah (Pendopo People and Mountain People/ People from Nearby)	Tamilouw Village, Sepa Village/ Seram	Orang Pandopo/ Orang Panta Gunung	Orang Sabalah	Began and strengthened during the 2007 local election, when Lamdjal Waleuru ran for office. Strengthened again during the appointment of the *raja*
Orang Dong/Orang Katong (Their People/Our People)	Tehoru Village/ Seram	Orang Dong	Orang Katong	Began and strengthened during the 2007 local election, when Lamdjal Waleuru ran for office. Strengthened again during the appointment of the *raja*

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Orang Pro/ Orang Kontra (Pros/Cons)	Wolu Village/ Seram	Orang Pro	Orang Kontra	Began during the appointment of the *raja* in 2007 and continued during every election.
Antua Bapa/ Orang Dong (Our Father/ Their People)	Seti Village/ Seram	Antua Bapa	Orang Dong	Began during the 2012 and 2017 elections; strengthened during the administrative division process

Political division did not only occur during local elections but also during the appointment of the *raja*. The incumbents' political intervention in the appointment of the *raja*, in accordance with their interests, exacerbated the conflict between these groups. These groups position themselves in local elections based on their political affiliations. Supporting the *raja* is considered equivalent to supporting the Tuasikal family, as the *raja* is considered a political agent of the Tuasikal family and involved in organising support for the Tuasikal family.

The *raja* are perceived as loyal to the incumbents, those who appoint them, a situation only made possible by clientelist practices.

This conflict and political division emerged due to two factors. First, the Tuasikal family uses the same network to ensure that *raja* act as political brokers during local elections. Second, the incumbents— Abdullah Tuasikal and Abua Tuasikal—tend to use clientelism networks to win support for their family. Their intervention

in the appointment of the *raja* was rejected by individuals who felt that their interests were undermined. The incumbents were seen as destroying the traditional order, and thus resisting the Tuasikal family was considered equivalent to maintaining the traditional order. As a result, conflicts and political divisions have been common during political contestations.

Proponents and opponents of the incumbents are divided by region, primordial affiliation, and proximity to the regent. Territorial divisions include those between *matahari nai* and *matahari turung* in Liang Village, as well as those between Upper Larike and Lower Larike in Saleman Village. Such territorial divisions occur when political affiliations are concentrated in certain areas.

Meanwhile, division according to primordial affiliations occurs when communities' association with the *raja* is influenced by religious or ethnic considerations. In such cases, support for the Tuasikal family is considered opposition to customary institutions, as well as support for particular ethnic identities. Such a division can be seen, for example, in the villages of Kaitetu (*orang nagri/ orang lawan*), Wahai (*orang negri/ orang dari lau*), and Tehoru (*orang dong/ orang katong*).

Finally, there is division based on proximity to the regent. Such division occurs because of the groups' different political affinities. Such divisions occurred, for example, in Hila Village (*Orang Ucu/Orang Abdulla*), Wolu Village (*pro/ contra*), Tamilouw Village (*orang pandopo/orang sabalah*), and Seti Village (*antua bapa/orang dong*). This political division was also expanded during elections

through the polarisation between the elites associated with the Tuasikal family and those opposed to the family.

This results in mass polarisation, which was received differently by each group (Gunterman & Blaiss, 2022: 144). When the elites are polarised, the masses are likewise swayed. This polarisation, in turn, stresses the relationship between different segments of society (Levendusky, 2010) even as it sways like-minded individuals to support the cause (Druckman, Peterson & Slothuus, 2013). This situation, wherein elite polarisation results in mass polarisation, occurs because the elites' influence as patrons encourages the masses to act in a certain way (Nurchasim, 2005: 19).

On the one hand, this political division contributes to conflict during elections as well as the appointment of the *raja*, which is used as a precondition for mapping the family's support at the village level. These divisions and conflicts persist because they are nurtured through the clientelism network that supports the family. The political consolidation promoted by the Tuasikal family further divides society, due to their sentiments regarding the dynasty. At the same time, such segmentation is also organised to regulate clientelism networks and maintain support for the Tuasikal family from generation to generation through bureaucratic organisations, traditional institutions, and the political affiliation of the *raja* in local and general elections. In this context, political division not only strengthens the conflict but also creates recurring political loyalties to the Tuasikal family in Central Maluku.

Conclusion

Studies of clientelism and family power still tend to position these topics separately. Family power is operated through networks of clientelism that provide support, which is maintained through the repeated practice of clientelism. Through these networks, it is easier to mobilise support for family members, as every elite from the family who contests an election has the opportunity to use the networks as a ready-made campaign structure.

This use of clientelism has resulted in permanent political divisions and conflicts in society. This occurred because the political polarisation during local elections is also repeated during other electoral moments, such as legislative and gubernatorial elections. Patterns of conflict and political division are repeated, with the implication that the use of clientelism networks has not only successfully established family power but also resulted in permanent political conflict and division in society.

Clientelism, family power, and conflict are interrelated concepts. Clientelism operates by leveraging political loyalties and exchanges. Family power is formed when members of the same family use the same clientelism network in turn. Meanwhile, conflicts and political divisions occur because of the political polarisation that occurs during elections (local, legislative, or gubernatorial). In the case of Central Maluku, this power has been reaffirmed by the incumbents' use of the *raja* and traditional institutions as intermediaries between candidates and voters, either through personal compromise or political co-optation. Both practices mediate

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political exchanges while simultaneously triggering conflict between groups who supported or opposed the Tuasikal family.

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