



The Myth of Kaomu in Local Election of Muna Regency: The Politic of Language and the Emergence of Local Oligarchy

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ABSTRACT

This research examines kaomu as a political myth that continues to be reproduced in the post-reformation era in Muna Regency, Southeast Sulawesi, Indonesia. Kaomu is a group of people who have been narrated as leaders since the beginning of the founding of the Muna kingdom. It is produced as a political myth in era of Muna ancient kingdom and reproduced through language politics until the post-reformation era in Indonesia. As a result, the descendants of the Kaomu group have received social and cultural legitimacy to be chosen as leaders compared to other candidates; Walaka or Maradika social classes. Data was collected through historical documents, oral traditions, and interviews. This study suggested that kaomu myth in the post-reformation era on regional elections has become an instrument of political power in Muna. The myth of kaomu as collective knowledge directs society to elect someone based on a knowledge regime that has been established for hundreds of years. On the other hand, candidates from the kaomu group are also increasingly develop their capital not only in political arena but also economic and sociocultural ones. By this way, their existence is strengthened both in the party and in strategic positions in the local and national axis.

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INTRODUCTION

This research is focused on the discussion of the myth of *kaomu* in contemporary political life in Muna Regency of the Southeast Sulawesi Province. It seemd that kaomu has been played as one of the political instruments in order to gain and maintain power in direct regional head elections (Pilkada) in the post-reform era of 2005-2015 in Muna regency, Southeast Sulawesi, Indonesia. Kaomu is one of the social class in Muna which is officially established during the reign of King Titakono and Bhonto Bhalano—La Marati (1600s) of Muna's Kingdom as it is stemming from the descendants of King Muna, Sugimanuru (Niampe, Syahrin, & Aso, 2018). It has been outlined that kaomu is the descendants of the former Sugi (royal family heirs) and considered as the highest class in Muna (Couvreur, 2001; Niampe, Syahrin, & Aso, 2018). They are identified with the

naming ties 'La Ode' for men and 'Wa Ode' for women, though in the present decade most of kaomu descendants prefer not to use the ties in their name.

Over time, kaomu has been created and perpetuated as a myth of power during the kindom era up to these days, asserting kaomu as the leading class (Bilu, 2020 & Bilu, 2021). The myth is described as a narrative (story) which is shared, preserved, and developed through the use of symbols, imagery, and rituals. The popularity and significance within the community reflects and resonates the fundamental issues that the community faces, offering comfort, assurance, meaning, value, and frequently a model for behaviour in both daily life and community rituals (Rasiah R, 2017; Rasiah & Bilu, 2021; George A, 2020). Kaomu myth that previously associated with heroes, gods, and other paranormal occurrences in Muna turned to be a legitimization of power in contemporary political and societal life (Bilu, 2021).

Politic of language has been a mechanistic of politicization of the myth and has given rise to a local oligarchy model. Singer (2020) explains that mythological reality is closely related to psychology and politics since it has two spectrum eyes. The human psyche is between myth and politics which mediates the exchange of the two. Individual fears, aspirations, and conflicts are parts of the psyche. Moreover, myth serves as a representation of universal integrity that includes the mind as one of its constituent parts, as a means of self-articulation and a standard of self-knowledge. So, this's why myth used to be maintained and narrated as a political propaganda (Thychkin, 2015; Baier, 2017; Shirinyants, 2019). "Political myth" today is recognized as the typical and old fashioned, those story played an essential part in the formation of our culture and are not devoid of political themes (Lara, 2017; Ceglarska, 2018; Pitigoi, D. Maria, 2021; Davis 2022) and provided a distinctive analytical lens by exploring the political myth understood as meaning which animate a leadership project (Schenoni, Ribeiro, Lopes & Casaroes, 2022).

In Indonesia, decentralization that associated with democratization (Nordholt & Gerry, 2014), also enable authoritarianism under certain conditions. Scholars such as Robison & Hadiz (2004), Hadiz (2007), Winters (2011), Aspinall & Sukmajati (2015), and Haryanto (2014) highlight how material resources are central to gaining power. They argued that modern democratic institutions have ironically revived traditional political forces, with culture and custom playing significant roles, especially in regional elections where nobility is politicized as capital (Ernawati, 2019; Aisyah, 2019). Although previous studies have shown myth's role in shaping political power and leadership, they overlook its relationship to oligarchy. This study aims to fill that gap by examining the Kaomu myth as a political language that both legitimizes leadership and contributes to the formation of local oligarchies, offering a fresh contribution to local and global political discourse. This study seeks to answer the questions: How has the politicization of language through myth shaped political dynamics in Munahas been contributed to the emergence of oligarchy, particularly in the post-reformasi era (2005–2020)? Thus, this study sought to reveal the genealogy of myth of Kaoumu and the sketch of social classes; (2) language political strategies, (3) reproduction of Myths in Strengthening Local Oligarchies.

In the Greek tradition, myths were divine narratives that conveyed heroic values and moral courage (Adi, 2008; Wadiji, 2011). Spradley and McCurdy (1975) categorized myths as narratives involving supernatural or religious elements, often centered on sacred objects, though not exclusively so. Frye (1990) defines myth broadly as a story

that serves a specific social function. [Encyclopædia Britannica \(2025\)](#) adds that myths can be seen as part of a structural framework that reflects cultural contexts and societal reactions. Similarly, [Sahoo and Rath \(2022\)](#) link myth with motifs—symbolic and expressive elements that appear in creative works and reflect a society's religion, philosophy, environment, and social dynamics. [George \(2022\)](#) highlighted that myths typically do not relate to well-known or comprehended concepts. Instead, they have a connection to something enigmatic and unknown, particularly when they cause anxiety and fear. Campbell stated that "if an individual's understanding is so deep and important, the communication he makes will have value and power as a living myth for people who accept these experiences with recognition and without coercion" ([via Adi, 2008, p. 1](#)).

Myth has a major component of an ideology ([Roland, 1996](#)) that developed which socially and culturally accepted ([Frye, 1990](#)). [Bottici \(2007\)](#) shows that myth is a process, continuously narrated to fulfill basic human needs in a significant way. [Segal \(2002\)](#) and [Labov and Waletzky \(2006\)](#) emphasized that myths are actually apolitical, but can be a political vehicle. The narrative transforms into a strategy for knowledge regarding the origins and myths that can be enhanced in its function as a tool for legitimizing power. It has the potential to develop into an ideology or paradigm. Myths are used strategically by the political elite as a part of their (nationalist) propaganda ([Güldeniz, 2019](#)). In this sense, myth functions not only as a cultural narrative but also as an instrument through which collective identity and power relations are constructed and maintained.

The role of myth in contemporary political discourse to be fairly straightforward, to call something a myth is usually to call it a falsehood. [Digeser et al \(2022\)](#) argued that in general, the ordinary language of politics resembles the language of modern science in which the notion of myth is used to describe a falsehood or a lie that may be usefully deployed to persuade but is deceitful nonetheless. Whenever myth appears in ordinary politics so does the odor of mendacity. In contrast, the relationship between myth and Western political philosophy is intricate and difficult to define. [Digeser et al \(2022\)](#) highlight in their contribution to this discussion that there is a strand of political thought mirroring our everyday political language, which aligns with a scientific perspective that links myths to idols and falsehoods. Some interpretations of the history of political thought argue that modernity is characterized by the rejection of myths, viewing this rejection as a form of disillusionment with the world. Within the modern rationalist framework of political philosophy, narratives may occasionally be used to clarify specific points through 'thought experiments' (like trolley problems) or 'hypothetical scenarios' (such as Rawls's original position), but those who use them do not consider them to be myths. Instead, they are regarded as tools that can be modified or discarded to support a logical argument.

METHOD

This study is classified as a case study, since it investigates an individual or group phenomena (kaomu group) in the context of real life in the political realm in Muna Regency, Southeast Sulawesi. It is also used qualitative design method ([Creswell, 2013](#)) in exploring an event, activity, process of the kaomu group in the regional elections in Muna Regency. The case of kaomu's power in the regional elections was bound by time and activities, so researchers collected detailed information using various data collection

procedures over a continuous period of time. Data collection was carried out by involving various methods such as; observation, interview, documentary report.

First, observations were carried out to obtain information regarding the existence of the Kaomu group in society and the political map in Muna district, observing the behavior of the general public regarding the existence of the Kaomu group in the leadership composition in Muna district, observing Kaomu's movements in strengthening its existence in the local and national political arena. Second, interviews were conducted to discover information about the attitude or perception of folks towards the myth of kaomu in political power. Informants were selected purposely based on specific criteria, namely academicians, local culture expert, spokesperson, folks; from kaomu class, walaka, and maradika. It is urgently considering the relevance of to the research objective, the accessibility, and the level of trust and good relations. Third, searching for documents such as Muna Regency General Elections Commission (KPUD) documents, folklore manuscripts and intangible and tangible cultural artifacts to obtain information about the 'texts' and 'signifying practices' of a culture in Muna society and analyze them textually. Storey (2015) stated that textual analysis is not only done by considering the socio-cultural environment in which the text was produced, but also efforts are made to deconstruct the text.

Before being used, the collected data is, whenever feasible, double- and triple-checked to ensure data veracity. A triangulation strategy is used to verify the accuracy of information gathered from reliable sources and other parties. Researchers clearly consider the validity of the data while evaluating it, employing four criteria: the degree of trust, transfer-ability, reliance, and certainty. These steps are to offer an interpretation of the data after completing research and analysis. The reality of the research still needed to be evaluated by others and put to the test in a variety of other contexts; this interpretation only represents the researcher's point of view.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Genealogy of the Kaomu Myth and Classification of Social Class

"Noble" and "king's descendants" are some common associations with kaomu. Subsequently, this group gained legitimacy as a leadership group by inheriting the fundamental characteristics of their descendants. The kaomu is a group of people whose origins tied with the legend of the first Muna King, La Eli alias Baidhuldhmani, who was crowned *Betheno ne Tombula* (born from bamboo) in the early 13th century, or approximately 1210s (Couvreur, 2001). The presence of a leader from the bamboo in this story finally led to legitimacy which was necessary to defend the Muna monarchs' authority at the outset of the Kingdom's establishment. In a nutshell, the lineage of Betheno ne Tombula eventually served as a precursor to the formation of the kaomu myth and has now evolved into a shared folktale (Couvreur, 2001; Rere, 2017). One of La Eli's (Betheno ne Thombula) sons named Kaghua Bangkano then inherited the Muna kingdom with the title Sugi Patola in the year 1395-1420. This period also marked the beginning of the Muna kingdom led by Sugi, which means 'the Majesty'. Sugi Manuru (1501-1517) brought many changes to the Muna kingdom and starting to emphasize social divisions through his children since then.

During the Sugi Manuru dynasty, four social groupings arose in society: (1) the *kaomu*, *walaka*, *wawono liwu*, and *fitu bengkauno* clans. According to Suryati (2013), the

social grouping grew more powerful between 1600 and 1625, when La Titakono, also known as Sultan Muhammad Idrus, was in throne. The classification of society in society appeared into: (1) kaomu, the guardian (the royal). It inherited from the sons of Sugi Manuru; La Kilaponto, La Posasu, and La Rampei Somba. They are attributed with leadership, intelligence, and wisdom, making them the rightful kings. (2). Walaka (Sara/legistalive), the actors who assigned to administer government affairs. The heirs of Sugi Manuru from the first wife of Wa Tubapala's daughter whose filled this social class. Although they are primarily Sara's councillors because to their intelligence in case decision-making, this group also has the right to rule as king; (3) Wawono Liwu, the first residents of Muna. This group is crucial, particularly in the selection, proposition, ratification, or administration of the oath to the monarch and the king's removal (this group dispersed as the kingdom dismissed); (4) Maradika, ordinary community or working class. It is divided into two namely; first, the Maradika Ghata (slaves) the Lakono Sau Poino Kontu, ordinary folks; farmers, hunters, fishermen or traders.

Three of these four groups—Kaomu, Walaka, and Maradika, remain extant and are still readily recognised in modern society. Then, during reign of King Omputo Sangia (16th-century) also called La Ode Husaini, these social divisions were distinguished by name prefixes/ties. The Walaka and Maradika groups are identified by the names La and Wa, meanwhile the kaomu group is identified by the names La Ode for men and Wa Ode for women ([La Niampe, Syahrin, & La Aso, 2019](#)). It was during La Ode Husaini's reign, Islam was introduced to Muna's societal life. The Walaka group was allowed to take positions outside of the King class, the Maradika were common people, and the identity of La Ode/Wa Ode started to be mythologized as nobles and leadership individuals. In Muna traditions, the kaomu group's dominant position is reinforced, particularly when it comes to deciding customs (marriage dowry) in relation to the Walaka and Maradika groups. In Muna, the division of society rationalized by custom (dowry) is essentially based on the concept of a social contract, which is the people's directive to the leader to exercise leadership in accordance with their wish and permission ([Syamsuddin, 2001](#)). It is thought that Kaomu is the group's leader and that the cosmos has granted him metaphysical validity.

Kaomu Turns to be a Political Myth

Kaomu as myth is a narrative or legend that first appears in society before becoming performance ideals of bravery and heroic deeds ([Wadiji, 2011](#)). As a folktale that is still spoken in society and widely accepted as true, the Kaomu myth gained notoriety. Two categories of myths can be used to classify the Kaomu myth and all of its accompanying myths: "traditional and creative myths". As a traditional narrative, the Kaomu myth uses rituals upheld by a culture to exhibit symbols. People are forced to experience, or pretend to have had, witnessed, particular feelings or commitments through these rituals. In contrast, those who have specific mystical experiences and convey them through a succession of signals are the subjects of creative myths. As emphasized by Lévi-Strauss ([Shri Ahimsa-Putra, 2014](#)), myths also contain certain political philosophies, namely various main views that are considered true, which are the basis of political activity, the formation of political structures and organizations as well as decision-making processes related to interests of community. Political philosophy encompasses more than just political cultural values; it also includes opinions about

political organizations and their constituents, including political structure, division of labour, and other aspects, in addition opinions about the good and negative aspects of politics. It is necessary to understand this political philosophy in order to comprehend how cultural values are applied and embodied in a political system. This is where the relationship between myth and politics or power emerges.

Kaomu group as descendants of kings who were legitimized as leader character by; (1) *kokoimani* (having faith to God/believers); (2) *nopande nofekatahi mie baino* (possessing the ability to enhance others); (3) *nokoadhati* (respecting social norms and conventions); (4) *nokofeeli* (possessing a feeling of humanity) (La Niampe, Syahrin & La Aso, 2019). Accordingly, *kaomu* has status, power, and a position that stems from societal validation in addition to customary rules. This has to do with how obediently the society follows and respects customs and customary leaders. However, customs is obligated to uphold their moral standards as leaders and modernizers in their community.

Additionally, "Ode" has a positive connotation as the identity of a "pious human being" and serves as the naming identity of the *kaomu* class. This is why the Muna people use to value, respect, and even miss those who go by the moniker Ode (*kaomu*). The reason is they are seen as individuals who exhibit competent leadership attributes and abilities. His attitude of defending the groups beneath him (Walaka or Maradika) is a constant reflection of who and where they belong to. The folks will no longer be reluctant to refer to any "Ode" that deviates from these standards as "*Ode pata mepandehaono ghuluha*" (nobleman who doesn't know himself, doesn't know the rules, or forgets himself). The word "Ode" connotes good deeds attributes. They are trustworthy, socially sensitive, tolerant, and capable of offering safety. Naturally, these are not hyperbolic remarks, it grounded in the actual lives of the traditional Munanese's people, who exhibit great loyalty, daring in the face of adversity, and agility in action, among other crucial traits (Niampe, 2014).

As a result, *Kaomu* should embody a code of conduct that sets an example for leaders and the elite. The following behaviours are culturally prescribed for *kaomu* and are expected of them: *peda kolipopo*, which means "like a star," *peda wula*, which means "like the moon," *peda gholeo*, which means "like the sun," *peda kawea*, which means "like the wind," *peda kabawo*, which means "like a mountain," *peda lia*, which means "like gua," *peda oe* (like water), and *peda bhake*, which means "like a banyan tree" (La Niampe, interview, 2018). The star represents height and wide vision; the moon represents goodness, beauty, and purity and has the ability to illuminate darkness; the sun represents life, knowledge, and authority; the wind represents movement, speed, direction, and freshness; the mountains represent a firm position; the cave represents security and tranquilly; water--being colourless, represents neutrality, justice, and cleanliness; and the banyan represents sacredness.

Kaomu in Muna's Political Practices

Since the Muna Regency was founded, *kaomu* has possessed significant political clout. The Minister of Home Affairs nominated La Ode Abdul Koedoes as Regent Head of Muna I (1960–1961), followed by La Ode Rasyid as the 4th Regent of Muna (1965–1970), La Ode Kaimuddin as the 6th Regent of Muna (1974–1981), La Ode Saafi Amane as the 7th Regent of Muna (1981–1986), H.M. Saleh Lasata as the 9th Regent of Muna (1994–1998), and Ridwan Bae as the 11th Regent of Muna (2004). Certain other Muna regent officials,

such as M. Tholib, the second regent (1961–1965), F. Latana, the third regent (1965), and Drs. La Ute, the fifth regent (1970–1974), were from other regions. Although he was a native of the Muna region, he was not included in *kaomu* social class. In addition to being nominated directly by the Central Government, a number of regional authorities beyond the Muna Regency area have appeared since the Central Government, via the Governor or the Minister of Home Affairs, has encouraged aspirations. La Ode Ate (interview, 2018) claims that cadre formation by the Southeast Sulawesi Governor or encouragement from the national government led to the admission of officials from outside the area. Political lobbying, particularly through Golkar and the Armed Forces of the Republic of Indonesia (ABRI) faction, conditioned the appointment process, which also involved the election of Regional House of Representatives (DPRD) members. It is possible to find out who the chosen candidates are before to the poll. But the Regent candidate's aptitude and skills have been investigated and their background tracked out, particularly if they are not directly linked with the G30S/PKI and other standards.

Kaomu in the local direct election era

The political notion of nobles as rulers made a comeback in the post-reformation era (1998 and after). The public began to trust the aristocrats after multiple direct regional head elections. According to Hamuda Piino, during the first direct regional elections in Muna Regency in 2005, it was evident that the *kaomu* myth (La Ode) was being politicized. Elites in politics have brought up the powerful topic of nobility. The current regent Ridwan Bae, who served from 2000 to 2005, was classified as an aristocrat, while Malik Ditu, a potential candidate, was classified as non-nobility.

When election day drew near, attention to nobles and non-nobles started to surface. Ultimately, Malik Ditu, who was challenging the incumbent, was unable to mount a strong campaign and was officially pronounced as the loser by the KPU. Here is where mythology comes into play, with people thinking that if the leader is not of the *kaomu* group, the cosmos will react similarly to the drought that occurred during the New Order era when La Ute governed Muna(1970s). In this situation, "myth" was used to describe any discourse that aims to promote or uphold the status quo among social groupings. Friedrich and Brzezinski (Tudor, 1984) asserted that mythology gives those in positions of authority within a community a distinctive interpretation of historical events that is still relevant today.

The question of nobles versus non-nobles also arose in the 2010 regional elections, as La Ode Baharudin and Rusman Emba were labelled as nobles, while La Pili was labelled as non-noble. Even though La Ode Halami was La Pili’s partner, who had the primary backing of the Prosperous Justice Party (PKS), met the same experience in the regional elections, that is, failing to secure a majority of votes. Although La Ode Halami is coming from *kaomu* in Muna, He was not the first and lack the potential to be elected due to his deputy status. The following table shows the distribution of regent candidates in Muna Regency's regional head election.

Table 1. Political Configuration in the 2010 - 2015 Muna Regional Election

No.	Candidate pairs	Parties	Votes	(%)
1	La Ode Kardini - Kamarudin Tanzibar	Patriot, PNBKI, PDK, Kedaulatan, PVR, PPD,	19.609	14,90

		Merdeka, PKNU, PKP, Pelopor, PPIB, PNU,, PMB,, PNIM, PKDI, dan PKPI		
2	La Pili – La Ode Halami	Independen Path	12.827	9.75
3	LM. Baharuddin-Malik Ditu	PDIP, PAN, & Demokrat	47.463	36.07
4	La Ode Gawu-Arwaha Adi Saputra	PKPB, PKB, PDP, Gerindra, & PBB	8.363	6.36
5	LM. Rusman Emba-Haridin	Partai Golkar, PPP, Partai Republikan, Partai Barnas, Partai Buruh, PPD & PPRI	43.329	32.93
Total			131,591	100

Source: General Election Commission of Muna Regency, 2020.

The table displays 36.07% of the 131,591 total votes needed to cast a ballot were cast for the La Ode Muhammad Baharudin-Malik Ditu ticket, or 47,463 votes. The myth of nobility was heavily politicized during the campaign, which contributed to this win. The polititization is happened through word of mouth that is community discussing the candidate and tracing the family tree of the candidate.

The topic of nobles versus non-nobles was something of an underground movement that the nobles carried from heart to heart rather than something that the candidate pairs brought up at the pulpit where they campaigned. Not because non-nobles cannot lead Muna, but because of the custom, a position is considered less blessed if it is not inherited. Despite being a nobleman, La Ode Halami is ignored because he is only a deputy regent and not a regent. However, La Pili's status as a *ustadz* makes it impossible to dispute his affiliation with the Sara group. This group in Muna society is in charge of making decisions and giving counsel to the other groups in Muna society (La Baasi, 2018). With 8,363 votes, or 6.36% of the total, the candidate pair La Ode Gawu – Arwaha Adi Saputra received the lowest amount of support. Despite being a nobleman in Muna, La Ode Gawu was less well-known to the local folks since he spent a greater portion of his career in the Ambon Maluku region during his lifetime. As the supplementary table illustrates, the political landscape of the Muna regional elections for the 2015–2020 term reflects the robust politicisation of the myth of nobles and non-nobles.

Table 2. Political Configuration in the 2015-2020 Muna Regional Election

Candidate Number	Candindates Pair	Parties	Gained Votes	
1	LM. Rusman Emba – Malik Ditu	Golkar, Demokrat, & PDIP	47.649	47,37 %
2	Arwaha Adi Saputra- La Ode Samuna	PKB & Partai Hanura	5.380	5,33 %
3	LM. Baharuddin- La Pili	PKS, PAN, Gerindra,& PBB	47.585	47.30 %
Total			100.585	100. %

Source: General Election Commission of Muna regency, 2020

Data showed (Table 2) that the candidate of La Ode Muhammad Rusman Emba - Malik Ditu received 47,649 votes, or 47.37% of the total votes cast. The closest competitor, however, was the candidate pair La Ode Muhammad Baharudin - La Pili, who received 47,585 votes, or 47.30% of the total votes cast. In contrast, the candidate duo Arwaha Adi Saputra - La Ode Samuna garnered only 5,380 votes, which accounts for 5.33% of the total valid votes cast. It suggests that the *kaomu* (nobility) concept is still heavily politicized in the Muna regional elections. The Muna nobility's persistent commitment in regional head elections has been reinforced by their great belief in the leadership-election tradition.

Lahae Maitu? : Electability Strategy in Language Politics

The political elements of language engineering, or "linguistic engineering," have always played a crucial role in the establishment of nation-states (Suwignyo, 2018). It is said that language has the ability to either unite or destroy a society and all of its components. In reality, the myth of *kaomu* (nobility) in Muna Regency politics gave risen to the strength of self-awareness and a cohesive society. This has to do with the mythological imagery used when the previous Muna monarchy was forming its power structure. For elected politicians or regents, the notion of *Kaomu* as a leading class has become a valuable asset. In Muna, the concept of nobility is typically expressed through worship as individuals who possess strength and blessings from God and their ancestors, as well as human physical prowess and imaginative faculties.

As royalty, *kaomu* is still revered and acknowledged by almost all residents of Muna Regency. The public frequently asks "*lahae maitu?*" (who is he?) during regional election contestations. The investigation into the candidate's ancestry or family genealogy (and lineage) is guided by this brief question. Yields social stratification the backgrounds, children, ancestors, and other details of potential candidates are started to be questioned. The response to this query also becomes a preference for the Munanese people as they sort and choose applicants who deserve of being the candidate among the numerous rival regent contenders.

"*Lahae maitu,*" or "who is he," is the query that actually lead to linguistic politics in which Muna society is very entrenched. La Niampe (interview 2018) stated that the public's primary inquiry was not about the supporter party or the amount of money being raised, but rather on the identity of the candidate—whether or not they are from *kaomu* social class. Society will make fun of the candidate if he is not from a *Kaomu* group. The words that are commonly uttered are "*anesuano kaomu koemo nekara-karaku*" (if you are form *kaomu* lineage, don't try to act). Citing Adi's idea (2008), this fact leads to the opinion that the regional elections' *kaomu* myth produces a "cult of self-knowledge" that is developed around the idea of contemporary society. Stated differently, this conventional code of conduct, which takes the shape of self-awareness, then shows itself in the language politics they engage in throughout the election process, with the sole goal being to become electable.

The Emergence of the Local Oligarchy Model

Two decades of reform and the process of democracy and democratisation have produced strange outcomes in Indonesian municipal politics. While modern democratic institutions have been widely installed, old political dynamics that have a tendency to

establish oligarchies have also been introduced by the institutional design (Hariyanto, 2014). Oligarchy is power led by a group of people - power not to serve the people. In an oligarchy, power only applies to the self and the group (Alcantud, 2020; Bonoan & Dressel, 2025; Doehne et al., 2023; Regilme, 2024). The results of the 2005-2020 regional elections in Muna Regency have given rise to an oligarchy, where the people's mandate to live in prosperity is distorted for the interests of the elite. Family lineage (Kaoumu) has been a power to exist. On average, it only lasts for one period or 5 years.

From the naked eye, the existence of a ruling class or periodic change of leadership meets democratic standards, however, this change is still within the nobility circle. The politicization of the myth of nobility remains a powerful weapon in maintaining political power in today's democratic era. Data shows that in the 2005 local election, Ridwan Bae emerged as the winner, in the 2010 Pilkada the winner was Baharudin, and in the 2015 was Rusman Emba, and still 2020 Rusman Emba also was elected. They are actually still coming from the same embryo, the same family lineage of *kaomu*.

It is also undeniable, though, that the *kaomu*'s internal reforms and the expansion of their network have contributed to the tradition's strength. According to Hamuda Piino (interview 2019), the oligarchic lifestyle that is evident in Muna can be viewed from the perspective of managing the economic sector that is engaged in the building industry. This is demonstrated by the fact that only the oligarchy group that able in carrying out work (projects) for the government and private sector, regardless of whether funding comes from the National Budget (APBN) or Local Government Budget (APBD). Several qualities that the *kaomu* groups upgraded are: (1) they have a platform of a company; Limited Partnership (CV) or Limited Company (PT); (2) they have capital to finance the work well, (3) having public trust for business orientation and carrying out work well and responsibly, and (4) have a broad and systematic network for planned project work in this country.

The gap between society in general and the oligarchic group is very different because of the monopoly on construction work, both building, road, bridge construction and procurement activities for the needs of the people of Muna Regency. People only become workers for their efforts. This encourages Kaomu's electability in social and political terms to remain high. Democracy in Muna has not significantly improved due to the strong influence of local traditions that continue to dominate regional head elections. In addition to the openness of the recruitment system for civil officials in the region which is still controlled by the authorities and supporting political parties after winning the regional elections.

These days, the oligarchy amid the swift democratization is becoming more and more fascinating. In the reform era, some of the questions raised about the origins of oligarchic authority have been addressed. As stated by Aristotle (2006) democracy relies on quantity or number, while oligarchy relies on the quality of its organization. Jeffrey A Winters (2011) emphasizes the superiority of material resources as political and economic power. Democracy and oligarchy are not necessarily zero-sum politics, as is clear in the case of Indonesia. Oligarchy is a political product of extreme material stratification in society and not a democratic deficit. This means that democratic transitions do not automatically affect the power resources of oligarchs, and the same goes for oligarchs. Democracy and oligarchy are defined as distributions of very different

types of power. Democracy refers to formal political power distributed based on rights, procedures, and the level of popular participation.

Meanwhile, oligarchy is defined as concentrated material power based on enforcing claims or rights to property and wealth. The nature of political power that is widened or narrowed as the system becomes more or less democratic is different from political power that can be distributed or accumulated materially. That is why democracy and oligarchy are very compatible if the two realms of power do not conflict with each other. [Tambunan \(2023\)](#) argued that suggestion of post-Soeharto Indonesian politic have become more democratic actually misleading. Oligachy has used cartel-like strategies to overcome the legislative process in the parliament. It is evident in the legislative process of the Election Act 7/2017. Indonesiam oligachy have hijacked the parliament's democratic policy-making process, finding ways to achieve consensus in passing bills and thereby evading complex disputes to dictate policy to their economic and political benefit.

The rise of kaomu group in the leadership and control of local political parties is indicative of the oligarchy local in Muna Regency. The political parties, particularly the larger ones, are dominated by the kaomu, who also set policies. The nobility has dominated the Golkar Party, PDIP Party, Democrate Party, Gerindra, and PKS since the reformation era until the present. Since the kaomu were regarded as having integrity, they were trusted to take the lead. The Kaomu groups' experience heading political party organizations was not the result of reform; rather, their responsibilities in political organizations were typical since Indonesia was not an independent nation until it stepped into that territory.

CONCLUSION

In a nutshell, the kaomu has been instilled in folks consciousness dealing with political power in Muna regency by requiring some steps; first, the myth has been perceived as the same collective memory within a Muna society and it is operated in the myth. Myth becomes the language politic to gain political power, second, myth that are used as instruments to gain or maintain power have the opportunity to be reproduced in social and cultural spaces, one of which is through language political strategies This study confirmed that the Kaomu myth has an adaptive and political nature to the changes taking place around it, though the position of the myth itself is deeply rooted and operated as a collective memory for the local community. Its existence was reproduced and utilized by the kaomu as the noble elite as a means of political instrumentation for election, both in order to gain and maintain power.

On the political side, this study also confirms that the practice of decentralization and regional autonomy in turn tends to expand opportunities for the noble elite in placing old instrumentation strategies, such as the reproduction or commodification of myths, as a means that is still considered important and strategic in order to achieve success and maintain power. Efforts to reproduce myths as a competition strategy in the electoral process have the potential to include the return of the old elites (kaomu) and this strategy is even used to maintain their existence in the arena of power. Efforts to reproduce myths by the noble elite emphasize how myths are still considered strategic for reproduction, especially by the ruling elite in the Muna nobles, because the myths that exist and develop in Muna society are still believed to contain a collective memory that still firmly embedded in society.

This study limited the discussion on the period of 2005-2020 direct local election. So, the possibility of gab of year or biases influecing the study's outcome is one possible drawback. It is crucial to recognize that the study's conclusions advance the reseacrh comprehension about Local Election by using the diiferent informant and interpretive technique in the given era, setting and context. The result might not applicable recent sttings and interpretation. Despite these drawbacks, the researchers think the information gathered from it greatly advances the body of knowledge currently in existence and provides the framework for future research that will address these problems and expand our comprehension of political myth and its legacy in the present era as contributions to political studies.

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