

The Political Mediatization of the Golkar Party in West Sumatra

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Abstract

This study addresses a critical gap in the scholarship on the mediatization of political parties at the local level in post-Suharto Indonesia, namely the limited attention to how party-media interactions unfold outside the national arena and beyond Java-centric analyses. By examining the case of the Golkar Party in West Sumatra, this article shows how local dynamics shape distinctive patterns of political communication and mediatization. Drawing on in-depth interviews, intensive observation, and documentary analysis, including local newspaper coverage from Singgalang, the study demonstrates that Golkar has strategically employed mediatization to reinforce organizational networks, disseminate political and social programs, and mobilize electoral support. At the same time, the case reveals persistent constraints such as polarization, money politics, and dynastic influence, which highlight the limits of mediatization in advancing democratic consolidation at the local level. By situating the West Sumatra case against broader Indonesian patterns, this article makes a novel theoretical contribution to political mediatization by illustrating how local socio-political contexts condition party-media relations in ways that complicate assumptions derived from national-level studies.

Keywords: mediatization, media logic, political logic, political parties, Indonesia

Introduction

The relationship between political parties and the media at the local level in post-Suharto Indonesia is still poorly studied. Existing scholarship mainly emphasizes the dynamics of national politics, revealing the dominance of party clientelism and media oligarchy separately (Tomsa & Ufen, 2012; Tapsell, 2017). In this context, party clientelism and media oligarchy have been

proven to damage Indonesian democracy over the past two decades (Aspinal et al., 2015; Power & Warburton, 2020). However, political parties must be observed in their relations with the media at a certain level.

This study addresses this gap by examining the mediatization of the Golkar Party's politics in West Sumatra, in the context of the broader democratic decline under Joko Widodo's second government (Power & Warburton, 2020). The main research question is what the dynamics of the relationship are between the West Sumatra Golkar Party and the local media in strengthening the party organization, campaigning for the party's policy program, and winning its electoral politics in the midst of the challenge of democratic stagnation in the Joko Widodo era? The thesis proposed here is that the mediatization of the Golkar Party at the local level reflects the dynamics and challenges of the institution, the party's program, and its electoral politics because it requires local media to represent the Golkar Party in the public sphere.

Adopting a case study approach, this article provides a theoretical analysis of political mediatization in Indonesia beyond a Java-centric perspective. This puts the Golkar Party's adaptation of local media in West Sumatra in a broader debate about political communication, party institutionalization, and the decline of democracy. Finally, this article contributes to an ongoing discussion on how local socio-political contexts shape party-media relations differently from national studies.

Theoretical Framework

Various contextual factors across regions have shaped the dynamics of the media and political parties in post-Suharto Indonesia. Over the past two decades, oligarchic networks have exercised significant control over parties and the media, limiting democratization (Robison & Hadiz, 2004; Heryanto & Hadiz, 2005; Arifuddin, 2016). Party politics is becoming increasingly personal (Mietzner, 2020), while private television stations are often mobilized by media owners who have close ties to oligarchic power, especially during presidential elections (Heychael, 2014; Tapsell, 2017; Noerdin, et al., 2023). Although the influence of these oligarchs has been extensively documented at the national level, their operation at the local level has still not been adequately examined, especially in democratic regression (Anugrah, 2020).

In this context, the Golkar Party in West Sumatra offers an important case to be analyzed. As a historically influential party, Golkar must adapt to the logic of the local media, especially the Singgalang newspaper, to strengthen organizational capacity, policy communication, and election strategy. The proliferation of digital platforms such as television, newspapers, online portals, and social media has further changed how parties such as Golkar are involved in electoral competition and promote local democratization (Arifuddin, 2014). In the 2019 election, for example, Golkar won 9.1 percent of the vote in West Sumatra, ranking fifth behind PKS, which won 16.29 percent (KPU, 2019).

The literature on political mediatization provides a conceptual foundation for this research. Mediatization refers to the increasing influence of the media in shaping political processes and institutions (Strömbäck, 2008). It highlights how political actors adapt to the logic of the media in various political, economic, and social conditions. Research has shown that parties in countries such as Indonesia, Brazil, and Italy often exercise considerable control over the media to serve partisan interests (Mazzoleni & Schulz, 1999). In Indonesia, the dominance of oligarchs at the national level significantly determines the party-media relationship, with implications for politics and democratization (Hadiz & Robison, 2013; Arifuddin, 2017; Mietzner in Power & Warburton, 2020).

The emergence of digital technologies has intensified political mediatization by transforming traditional political communication into digital, professional, and commercial practices (Esser & Strömbäck, 2014). Media has been embedded in political, social, and cultural life (Hjarvard, 2008; 2013; Hepp, Hjarvard & Lundby, 2010; Lunt & Livingstone, 2016), forcing political parties to adjust their organizational strategies and electoral agendas. At the same time, post-Suharto democratization in Indonesia has been challenged by oligarchy forces (Hadiz & Robison, 2013; Mudhoffir, 2023), encouraging civil society and media freedom advocates to defend democratic rights, the rule of law, and participatory governance (Diamond, 1994; 1999; 1999; Fung & Wright, 2003; Mietzner, 2012; 2013).

Method

This study uses a qualitative research design with a case study approach to analyze the political mediatization of the Golkar Party at the local level in post-Suharto Indonesia. The case

study approach is appropriate because it allows for an in-depth examination of contemporary issues in their real-life context and integrates various sources of evidence (Stake, 1995; Gerring, 2007; Creswell, 2007; Yin, 2014). Through this approach, this study systematically explores the organizational development process, program implementation, and election strategy of the Golkar Party in West Sumatra in relation to local media.

The data collection phase took place between January and October 2022 using three techniques. First, in-depth interviews were conducted with eight informants: four West Sumatra Golkar Party elites, two academics, one journalist from local media, and one civil society organization actor. The informants were deliberately selected based on their relevance and expertise regarding the activities of the Golkar Party and media practices in West Sumatra. Second, participants and non-participants were observed in organizational meetings, campaign activities, and public events of the Golkar Party in West Sumatra. Third, conduct a document analysis of political news coverage from the local Singgalang daily and selected local online media from the news around April 2022 to September 2022 for the Singgalang daily newspaper and January 2022 to August 2024 for relevant local online media. This diverse documentation data technique is designed to expand data and understanding of party dynamics and local media representation.

This study uses an interpretive qualitative approach using thematic analysis for data analysis. Interview transcripts, observation notes, and documents were systematically coded to identify recurring themes related to organizational strategy, policy programs, and electoral politics associated with local media opinion. Thematic categories are refined through repeated comparisons across data sources. This process follows the stages of qualitative analysis suggested by Miles and Huberman (1994), namely data reduction, data display, and conclusion-drawn/verification. Data triangulation across interviews, observations, and documents was used to reinforce validity and ensure a comprehensive understanding of how Golkar adapted to local media at the local level. With the framework of a case study methodology, this study sheds light on the complex relationship between political parties and local media and contributes to the development of a contextual understanding of political mediatization at the local level of West Sumatra (Stake, 1995; Strömbäck, 2008; Yin, 2014).

Results and Discussion

Development and Challenges of the Golkar Party Organization in West Sumatra

The Golkar Party in West Sumatra has grown into a strong party since the Suharto era and controlled the legislature from 2014 to 2019 in 15 districts/cities in West Sumatra. However, the Golkar Party has only become the chairman of the regional legislature in two districts, Solok and South Solok, for the 2019-2024 period (Dalmenda, interview, 20 September 2022). That is why the Chairman of the Golkar Party in West Sumatra, Khairunas, strongly rearranged the party's infrastructure from provinces, municipalities, and districts to the ballot box in anticipation of regional and general elections in West Sumatra (Akbar, 2020).

The post-Suharto era has seen the Golkar Party in West Sumatra develop a strong party machine, allowing it to counter external criticism and effectively manage internal crises, distinguishing itself from other parties. One of the key factors contributing to the resilience and strength of the Golkar Party in West Sumatra is its moderate ideology and support from national and local businesspeople, which contributes to the party's costs and campaign budgets. Khairunas is one of the local oligarchs who has financially supported the Golkar Party organization since 2020 and served as the regent of South Solok from 2021 to 2024 (Mastian, interview, 9 August 2022).

The consolidation of the Golkar Party occurred since the era of Akbar Tanjung (1998-2004) managed to gain broad public support because the Golkar Party promoted a solid and comprehensive organizational arrangement of the party, a broad territorial reach, access to diverse financial resources, professional and loyal cadres, high popularity and recognition, extensive use of political and cultural symbols, and strong relations with the media (Tomsa, 2008). The Golkar Party is greatly influenced by its dynamic adaptation to society, autonomy from external influences, structural coordination, and the commitment of its cadres to effective institutionalization. The Golkar Party emerged as a good institution (Basedau & Stroh, 2008; Piñeiro Rodríguez & Rosenblatt, 2020). The Golkar Party aims to promote economic and social development and moderate ideology (Mastian, interview, 9 August 2022).

Golkar cadres in West Sumatra still play an important political role at the provincial, city, and district levels. Furthermore, the Golkar Party has been a well-established institution from the sub-district to the provincial level. The party periodically replaces its party chairman through

organizational mechanisms and democratic deliberations to avoid power abuse and excessive leadership centralization (Mastian, interview, 9 August 2022). In addition, party leaders are strongly encouraged to serve no more than two terms to promote professionalism within the Golkar Party, leading to a strong and modern party (Okatavianus et al., 2019).

The Golkar Party in West Sumatra has officially built a large party office secretariat in the middle of the city of Padang since the 1980s. This office functions as the headquarters of the Golkar Party and is equipped with computer equipment, meeting rooms, and seminar rooms to support cadre activities. The party secretariat office operates regularly from Monday to Saturday and is controlled by the headquarters and its office staff. The Golkar Secretariat often serves as a regular meeting place for the Golkar Party's agenda. The Golkar Party has also strategically provided as many membership cards (KTA) as possible in its constituencies. Incentives were even given to Golkar Party cadres who collected membership cards in their constituencies. The Golkar Party has encouraged cadres and elites to support the KTA fundraising (Zikri, interview, 6 August 2022).

Golkar Party's Support for Young Politicians and Gender Representation

The Golkar Party has opened opportunities for the millennial generation to lead (Suardhika, 2021). That is why the Golkar office in Padang City is led by a young leader, Iqra Chissa Putra (28 years old). Iqra's leadership has created a new image of the Golkar Party as a party that is friendly to the millennial generation in Padang, West Sumatra. Likewise, the Golkar Party is also led by a young figure in South Solok, Zigo Rolanda (24 years old). Statistics show that 30.56% of Generation Z and 24.25% of Millennials are in West Sumatra (Harlina, 2021). The leadership of young politicians makes the Golkar Party more attractive among young voters in the election. The Golkar Party also contributed to the youngest cadres in the 2020 Regional Elections and managed to pass as regional heads and deputy regional heads (Suardhika, 2021).

The Golkar Party and elite in West Sumatra are also institutionally proactive in promoting gender representation in politics, to have 30% female representation, even though many parties have found it relatively challenging to seat female representatives in strategic public positions both at the provincial and national levels. According to Mastian (interview, 9 August 2022), the Golkar Party has appointed its female politician, Hj. Nurnisma, as Chairperson of the Solok City DPRD for the 2019-2024 period, as well as the Chairperson of the Solok City Golkar DPD, also

installed its female politician, Elfia Rita Dewi, as Deputy Chairperson of the Sawahlunto City DPRD for the 2019-2024 period. The party and the Golkar elite have taken inclusive steps to accommodate women's political quota of 30 percent in running party organizations and engaging with local communities.

From the 2019 national election records, women's representation in the House of Representatives is still 20.8 percent, or only 120 out of 575 members of the House of Representatives. This figure is still below the 30 percent of women's representation mandated by Law Number 7 of 2017. In West Sumatra, women's participation in the political scene has increased significantly. Currently, at least four women sit in the House of Representatives of the Republic of Indonesia, and 14 are members of the House of Representatives of the Republic of Indonesia from West Sumatra. In particular, two came from Constituency 1 of West Sumatra, and two from Constituency 2 of West Sumatra.

On the other hand, in the West Sumatra Regional People's Representative Council (West Sumatra DPRD), there was a decrease in the number of female council members. From 2019 to 2024, only four women will serve as members of the West Sumatra DPRD. Previously, there were seven female DPRD members in the 2014-2019 period (Langgam, 2023).

The Dilemma of the Golkar Party and Dynastic Politics

However, the Golkar Party in West Sumatra has faced widespread rumors that dynastic politics currently control it. It is a political fact that a risky political dynasty has emerged within the Golkar Party in West Sumatra (Dalmenda, interview, 20 September 2022). As Heryanto and Hadiz (2005) clearly explain, this local trend emerged in the post-Suharto era, which was characterized by the reorganization of local oligarchy power in various ways, including dynastic politics. Local oligarchs have exerted substantial control over economic resources and supported their family members in occupying party positions to have political power and protect their businesses.

Nevertheless, there are pros and cons related to political dynasties in West Sumatra. Some argue that it is not as widespread or severe as the practice of political dynasties in various regions of Java, especially in Banten (Hamid, 2010; Sukri, 2020). So far, the practice of political dynasties in West Sumatra has only been observed in one area, namely in South Solok Regency, which was once led by Khairunnas as the Regent and Chairman of the West Sumatra Golkar DPD, and Zigo

Rolanda as the Chairman of the South Solok Regency DPRD. Both are related as father and son (Atviarni, 2023).

Dynastic politics can be seen in the cadre competition to lead the Golkar Party in West Sumatra. Political competition between different factions to become the Chairman of the Golkar Party at the Regional Assembly (MUSDA) has resulted in conflicts and political intrigues during the political competition (Mastian, interview, 9 August 2022). However, MUSDA participants tend to collectively select the strongest candidates associated with their strong family and business networks. Iqra Chissa Putra has won the Golkar MUSDA in Padang City as part of the Khairunas family, who also succeeded in becoming the Chairman of the West Sumatra Golkar DPD. The victory of both is related to their strong family and business relationships in West Sumatra (Waskita, 2020; Nasution, 2021).

The political implications of the political dynasty caused internal friction within the Golkar Party in West Sumatra. Khairunas has politically promoted soft clientelism by supporting his close relative, Iqra Chissa Putra, to become the Chairman of the young Golkar Party in Padang (Tomsa & Ufen, 2012). As a result, internal political factions emerged where the Golkar Party could not accommodate all the interests of the elite within the Golkar Party, so many Golkar Party cadres moved to other parties, such as the Berkarya party and the Nasdem party in West Sumatra. This situation has weakened the political position of the Golkar Party in West Sumatra (Wendi, interview, 30 July 2022).

Golkar Party's Social Program and Rural Community Development

Political parties often face scrutiny regarding their political programs and current central role in various countries (Diamond & Gunther, 2001; Tomsa & Ufen, 2012). According to Wendi (interview, 30 July 2022), the Golkar Party in West Sumatra is strong and prominent because its political program has existed and is firmly rooted in society since the Soeharto era. One of the programs is called the Village Territorial Mobilization Cadre Program (Karakterdes) or Village Territorial Activators. This program aims to encourage community development in rural areas. The program was revived by Akbar Tanjung when he led Golkar after the collapse of the Suharto regime from 1998 to 2004 and contributed to the Golkar Party's victory in the 2004 elections. This program is also Aburizal Bakrie's flagship program, which was created when he led the Golkar Party from 2009 to 2016 (Setiawan, 2011).

However, the Golkar Party's program is heavily dependent on its politicians at the local level, which looks more intense ahead of the election. The Golkar elite competes among other politicians from various powerful parties in West Sumatra, especially PKS and Gerindra. To revitalize its position in West Sumatra, the Golkar Party in West Sumatra needs a new initiative from its political elite to create a political program that meets the community's basic needs, a promising direction for the party's future (Tomsa, 2008).

The Golkar Party's policies and political programs in West Sumatra aim to improve the welfare of the community by supporting social activities related to religious events, disaster management, and community capacity building in collaboration with their local organizations, such as AMPG and MKGR, and related political actors (Mastian, interview, 9 August 2022). Long-term public policies effectively responding to the community's needs are essential, especially in preparation for elections. However, political party programs in West Sumatra have been criticized for not being effective in building the economic capacity of the lower class (Virtous Setyaka, interview, 21 September 2022).

However, the elite of the Golkar Party politicians claim that they consistently focus on the real sectors needed by the community, running strategic programs up to the sub-district level even at their own expense (Wendi, interview, 30 July 2022). For example, Darul Siska, a Golkar politician in West Sumatra, has prioritized financing programs needed by the community, which has led to a positive image of the Golkar Party. The unwavering commitment of the Golkar political party elite to work consistently to improve people's living standards and promote local democracy has created a positive image and reputation for the political party and the Golkar Party elite. Golkar Party cadres in West Sumatra have strengthened the party's program and helped prevent Golkar from declining as a status quo party (Diamond & Gunther, 2001; Higley, 2010; Tomsa, 2008).

In addition, the Golkar Party in West Sumatra has also contributed to building and repairing roads in several constituencies by utilizing the Aspirasi Fund. Such funds, worth two and a half billion rupiah per year in the Padang DPRD, are strategically managed by DPRD members to help the community and facilitate development and programs the government does not handle. The distribution of government funds worth sixty million rupiah to each household, which can reach sixty-five households, is considered inadequate and meaningless. At the Provincial DPRD

level, the Aspiration Fund is even more substantial in helping the community, worth seven and a half billion rupiah per year per person.

The Golkar Party in West Sumatra has also promoted popular programs such as donations for orphans, sharing food during Ramadan, da'wah competitions, and MTQ competitions with many participants in 2020. The Golkar Party's strategic program can be seen in work programs such as SME training, entrepreneurship, and collaboration with many stakeholders. The spirit of Golkar collaboration is critical to empower the government and civil society in Padang, West Sumatra (Zikri, interview, 6 August 2022).

Afrizal, another Golkar Party politician, creatively distributed one billion rupiah annually in 2015 to train and empower the community. This community training and development regularly accommodates fifty to one hundred selected participants, fully facilitated by accommodation and allowances. Although the training seems elitist, it is hoped that the participants will be productive after completion and work with the Golkar Party in Padang to implement social programs that will significantly impact the Golkar Party in the election. Unfortunately, the practice of such Golkar Party programs has limited media exposure (Wendi, interview, 30 July 2022).

Political Polarization and the Setback of the Golkar Party in the Election

Golkar, the winner of the 2014 election in West Sumatra, obtained 11.8 percent of the seats, occupying the fifth position out of 16 parties in the 2019 election. In 2014, Golkar controlled 89 percent of the districts/cities in West Sumatra. However, in 2019, Golkar only managed to control 16 percent of the region. Along with the drastic decline in Golkar's dominance, Gerindra emerged as the ruling party in 68 percent of the regions in the Minang realm. In 2015, Golkar experienced a similar situation. Despite dominating the legislative scene in most regions, the candidates supported by Golkar struggle to get votes in the regional head elections. In the 2014 election, Golkar managed to dominate the acquisition of seats in the Regional People's Representative Council (DPRD) in more than 80 percent of the regions in West Sumatra. Golkar is dominant in several regions, such as Dharmasraya and Pasaman, where it is the only party to secure 20 percent of the seats in the DPRD (Afrianto, 2020).

However, Golkar achieved the opposite result in the 2015 regional elections. Of the nine pairs of candidates supported, the Golkar candidate only won in three regions, namely Sijunjung,

Tanah Datar, and Padang Pariaman. In six other regions, Golkar-supported candidates faced defeat. The defeat occurred in an area that had been a stronghold of Golkar in the 2014 election. In Dharmasraya, for example, despite being the only party to secure 20 percent of the seats in the DPRD, the candidate supported in the 2015 regional elections failed to win. The Golkar Party machine struggled to compete with candidates from the PDI-P, which garnered almost two-thirds of the total vote. Golkar experienced a similar situation in the South Coast area. Victory in the 2014 election does not guarantee success. Among the four contestants, the candidate for regent and deputy regent supported by Golkar only ranked third (Afrianto, 2021).

The Golkar Party suffered defeat in the 2019 Presidential Election because it supported Joko Widodo against Prabowo Subianto. The polarization of Joko Widodo and Prabowo Subianto's supporters in the 2014 election persists in the 2019 election. This created divisions among the people of West Sumatra (Wendi, interview, 30 July 2022). That difference occurs even within the family circle. The people of West Sumatra became victims of political parties' electoral strategies in the 2014 and 2019 elections (Wanto & Sebastian, 2020).

In the 2019 election, the Gerindra Party replaced Golkar's dominance in the West Sumatra legislature. Gerindra's seat acquisition has increased significantly compared to the 2014 election. Of the total 669 seats contested at the provincial level of the House of Representatives (DPR) and the House of Representatives (DPRD), Gerindra won 16.4 percent of the seats (Afrianto, 2020). This achievement is higher than that of other major parties in West Sumatra, such as PAN (13 percent), PKS (12.6 percent), and the Democratic Party (12 percent).

However, Virtous Setyaka (interview, 21 September 2022) argued that the Golkar Party at the local level in Padang, West Sumatra, has declined compared to other parties, such as the PKS and the Gerindra parties. However, this stagnation did not lead to losing loyal Golkar Party sympathizers after the Suharto era in West Sumatra. Instead, the party has provided opportunities for local politicians with human capabilities and financial resources to compete in political elections. The Golkar Party in West Sumatra survived after the reforms despite losing the 2019 election due to extreme political polarization in West Sumatra (Arifianto, 2019).

This polarization was observed in almost all provinces, with voters preferring Prabowo's populism, which saw the Golkar Party and its politicians lose in the 2019 election. Indeed, the votes and seats of the Golkar Party have continued to decline in the last two decades.

Furthermore, the competition between political parties in West Sumatra in the 2014 and 2019 elections benefited the Gerindra party because of Prabowo's popularity. Prabowo's effect made Gerindra emerge as the winner of the election seat in Padang, West Sumatra. Oligarchist populism, Prabowo Subianto works positively in the conservative culture and traditions of the Minangkabau people and the high public dissatisfaction with democracy nationally (Aspinall & Mietzner, 2014; Aspinall, 2015). This also caused the Gerindra party in Padang, West Sumatra, to gain more votes as people quickly identified the Gerindra Party as Prabowo's Party (Wendi, interview, 30 July 2022).

Prabowo's victory in West Sumatra in 2014 and 2019 must be explained contextually to provide a more rational explanation for Prabowo's victory in West Sumatra, which lies in the local cultural factors supported by the party's campaign budget. The people of West Sumatra tend to choose an authoritative, decisive, and capable leader, as Prabowo has shown, rather than Jokowi. Leaders should not whine and talk carelessly. A leader must be authoritative, firm, and capable, known as *takah* in Minangkabau culture and tradition (Mastian, interview, 9 August 2022). This explains why Jokowi's vote in West Sumatra declined from around 22 percent to 14 percent when facing Prabowo in the two presidential elections in 2014 and 2019.

Despite the electoral challenges faced by the Golkar Party in West Sumatra in the 2019 election, the party's resilience was proven. Support for Jokowi, which puts the Golkar Party and its cadres in a dilemma due to traditional and cultural issues, cannot counter Prabowo's popularity among most Minangkabau people. However, it is important to note that Joko Widodo's defeat in West Sumatra is unique. Although Golkar suffered defeats in West Sumatra because it supported Jokowi, Golkar has received blessings and victories in other provinces, such as Bali and Central Java (Mastian, interview, 9 August 2022). This resilience and adaptability mean that supporting Joko Widodo amid political polarization has a different impact on the Golkar Party in West Sumatra, and is not necessarily a mistake in Golkar's national strategy. Jokowi's populism has different electoral impacts in various places in Indonesia (Aspinall & Mietzner, 2014). Even nationally, Golkar's votes remained in the top three in 2019, not much different from its position in 2014.

Table 1. The Percentage of Political Parties' Vote Acquisition, Seats, and Their Campaign Budget in the 2019 General Election

No	Party	Total Votes	Seats	Party's Campaign Budget
1	PDI-P	19.33	128	345 billion
2	Gerindra	12.57	78	134.7
3	Golkar	12.31	85	307.6
4	PKB	9.69	58	142.3
5	Nasdem	9.05	59	259.5
6	PKS	8.21	50	150
7	Demokrat	7.77	54	189.7
8	PAN	6.84	44	169
9	PPP	4.52	19	76.6
10	Perindo	2.67	0	228.2
11	Berkarya	2.09	0	107.2
12	PSI	1.89	0	84.7
13	Hanura	1.54	0	48.5
14	PBB	0.79	0	117.9
15	Garuda Party	0.50	0	3.5
16	PKPI	0.22	0	6.3

Source: KPU (2019)

The Golkar Party's seats in Padang City, West Sumatra, decreased from five seats in 2014 to three in 2019. The Golkar Party seeks an effective formation and strategy for the upcoming elections. The Golkar Party in the DPRD only has three seats out of the 45 available. In fact, a few years ago, in 2004, the Golkar Party still had a chairman in parliament and a deputy chairman of the DPRD in 2009. In this case, hard work and strategies are needed to strengthen the Golkar Party in the upcoming elections (Wendi, interview, 30 July 2022). One of the electoral problems of the Golkar Party is that some of its cadres who have the potential to win the election have moved to other political parties. Internal friction within the Golkar Party and pragmatism among Golkar cadres are the root of the problem. Golkar's internal friction has occurred before and was also a factor in Golkar's defeat in the 2004 presidential election, despite winning several political seats nationally (Tomsa, 2008). Another electoral political problem for the Golkar Party is the conservatism of the Golkar Party, which usually only nominates internal candidates from the beginning rather than looking for highly reformist and charismatic figures outside the party (Virtous Setyaka, interview, 21 September 2022).

The Power of Money Politics in Elections

Despite the challenges, the Golkar Party is determined to learn from past mistakes and improve its strategy. Current politics in post-Suharto Indonesia is expensive and often influenced by money politics and clientelist parties (Tomsa & Ufen, 2012; Aspinall & Berenschot, 2019). Political programs hardly operate more democratically. The success of political programs depends on a strong program, a campaign, and a well-funded party. For example, the case of Prabowo Subianto and the Gerindra Party in West Sumatra dominated in the 2014 and 2019 elections due to well-funded programs, strategic campaigns, and strong parties (Syahda & Rafni, 2021). In this case, the Golkar Party sees this opportunity to learn from the Gerindra Party and create a more sympathetic political program that positively impacts the election (Wendi, interview, 30 July 2022).

Vote buying was also another factor in Golkar's defeat. More recently, electoral politics in Padang and other district cities outside Padang, West Sumatra, in 2019, not only required social capital and support from Niniak-Mamak institutions and social organizations such as Muhammadiyah and Tarbiyah, but also required well-funded campaigns, including high-cost money politics. Parties and their current elites in West Sumatra commonly play this financial factor. The more money you have, the more chances you have of being elected in the election. However, the Golkar Party is committed to building social capital and strengthening relations with these institutions to ensure a more democratic electoral process (Mastian, interview, 9 August 2022).

The cheapest political cost incurred by a candidate to compete for a seat in Padang for the DPRD is two hundred million rupiah if he has good social capital (Zikri, interview, 6 August 2022). However, if there is a shortage of social capital, it will cost at least one and a half billion rupiah. Politics in the city of Padang is getting more expensive to convince the people who are also becoming smarter, and sometimes the candidates come from the district, city, province, and central levels.

In the midst of the high cost of electoral politics (Aminuddin & Attamimi, 2019), several candidates have tried to win elections in Padang proportionally and at low cost by combining social capital and political costs of at least 300,000,000 (three hundred million) rupiah. The trick is that if people experience marriage or misfortune, the candidate diligently visits them to pay

attention and build trust in the electorate. Another cheap way is to drink coffee together at a traditional coffee shop called Lapau and visit and take care of potential voters emotionally first. This method, known as the raso jo pareso approach, effectively gained votes in some polling stations (Zikri, interview, 6 August 2022).

The Use of Religion in Election Politics

The defeat of the Golkar Party in the 2019 election in West Sumatra was attributed to several factors. PKS plays with religious sentiments, and Gerindra frames Prabowo as Soemitro's son. This is related to his father's history in PRRI West Sumatra and Gerindra's affiliation strategy with Islamic groups nationally (Virtous Setyaka, interview, 21 September 2022). Another factor that contributed to the defeat was the strong influence of identity politics through the polarization of voters' identities, called the Cebong vs Kampret split. Cebong supports Jokowi, while the Kampret results are based on the recommendations of scholars (Aspinall, 2015).

The consensus of scholars through the Islamic populism movement 212 recommended only supporting the Gerindra, PKS, PAN, Demokrat, and Berkarya parties by not supporting blasphemous parties (PDI-P, Golkar, and their coalition parties). The 212 ulama campaign is widespread in West Sumatra and exploited by political party cadres who support Prabowo, taking advantage of the religious sentiments of the relatively religious population in West Sumatra, including the city of Padang, to erode the votes of the Golkar Party (Törnquist, 2019). Despite losing to the Golkar Party in the 2019 election, this party has been influential and attracted community leaders from young and old entrepreneurs significantly (Dalmenda, interview, 20 September 2022). The Golkar Party has tried to meet the aspirations of prospective voters in offline elections by recruiting party members, providing them with membership cards (KTA), distributing necessities, and providing many training programs. The party also developed political communication in the local media, Singgalang, to influence voters in West Sumatra.

Electoral Politics and Golkar Political Communication in Local Media

The mediatization of the Golkar Party in West Sumatra was seen strongly in the local newspaper, Singgalang, and created the identity of the Golkar Party as a strong party under the leadership of Airlangga Hartarto. Singgalang frames the Golkar Party and its Party Chairman, Airlangga Hartarto, as a big party and an important figure. Airlangga Hartarto visited Padang to meet with local cadres of the Golkar Party who fully support him as a presidential candidate in

the 2024 election. According to Indra Prana Radja, a Golkar Party think tank (interview, 17 July 2022), the Golkar Party has invested much money to brand the Golkar Party and Airlangga Hartarto through the mass media at the national and local levels. That is why Airlangga Hartarto often appears in the main news of national and local media, including in the Singalang daily newspaper.



Figure 1. The representation of local and national elites of the Golkar Party in Singalang Daily
Source: Singalang Daily (9 and 11 April 2022)

The Golkar Party and Airlangga Hartarto are also represented in the Singalang daily as parties and figures who care about public issues and the digital economy. However, this is nothing more than a hegemonic narrative of the media (Virtous Setyaka, interview, 21 September 2022). The media's professional representation of the Golkar Party and the figure of Airlangga Hartarto has created the dominance of public opinion in the public space. Singalang not only mediated the Golkar Party but also, to some extent, facilitated the political hegemony of the Golkar Party (Eriyanto, 2001). The lesson learned here is that the leaders of influential political parties at the national level can make headlines in local media as long as they are profitable in business and professional in today's digital age (Tapsell & Jurriens, 2017).

As a result, the Singalang daily connotatively frames the electoral interests of the Golkar Party through the character of Airlangga Hartarto. By utilizing the semiology of Roland Barthes (Bouzida, 2014), this local media headline has reproduced the mythology of Airlangga Hartarto and his party, which fully strengthens the electoral interests of the Golkar Party. According to Dalmenda (interview, 20 September 2022), local media in West Sumatra have often collaborated

with parties and elites to share benefits to overcome the cost of local media. This process, known as political mediatization, refers to the media's increasing influence on the political process and political actors' strategic media use.

The political mediatization of the Golkar Party and Airlangga Hartarto occurred in the context of preparing the party and Airlangga Pribadi for the 2024 election. As the Chairman of the Golkar Party, Airlangga Hartarto has been proficient in using media strategies for political communication. His appearance in the Singgalang daily has shown his party's financial power in influencing the media at the local level. This strategy not only strengthens the Golkar Party's organization and programs at the local level but also increases the party's popularity and the electability of Airlangga Hartarto and the local Golkar elite.

Conclusions

This study reveals that at the local level of West Sumatra, the Golkar Party is still quite strong and has a diverse social program. However, the Golkar Party operates in a structure of organized clientelism and local oligarchic patronage. Local elites maintain significant economic and political control over political parties and the media. Within the framework of political mediatization, political logic remains dominant, forming the relationship between the party and the media, especially during the election run-up. Although certain aspects of the party's organization and program are gradually mediated, electoral interests and strategies remain the main drivers. As a result, media institutions in West Sumatra continue to function largely under the control of political elites, thereby weakening their democratic role at the local level (Arifuddin, 2016). These findings confirm a broader argument about the stagnation and regression of democracy in Indonesian politics, as discussed by Aspinall et al (2015) and Power & Warburton (2020).

Despite these structural challenges, the Golkar Party has demonstrated resilience through institutional sustainability, stable organizational structure, leadership succession, and efforts to integrate youth and gender diversity. However, institutional weaknesses such as internal conflicts, attachment to patronage networks, marginalization of opposition voices, and central-level intervention remain obstacles to local democratization. The orientation of the party's program, which focuses on social development and infrastructure, portrays a substantive political

agenda. However, short-term election strategies, reliance on mass organizations, money politics, and instrumentalization of local media have weakened the institutions and image of the Golkar Party.

Airlangga Hartarto's representation in local media coverage, especially in the Singgalang newspaper, has further strengthened political clientelism to permeate local media practices. It confirms that the commercialization and sale of media exposure to political parties and elites endangers the democratic role of local journalism. While local media adopted mediatization to some degree, their autonomy was substantially limited by political logic and commercial imperatives.

The novelty of this research lies in its contribution to the theory of mediatization at the local level, especially in the context of Indonesian clientelist democracy. By examining the interaction between party politics and local media in West Sumatra, this study advances our understanding of how political mediatization operates not only as the dominance of media logic over politics, as suggested in much Western literature, but also as the persistence of political logic in controlling media institutions in developing democracies. This shows that political mediatization in Indonesia is revealed through a hybrid logic in which electoral pragmatism, clientelism, and commercialization intersect, thus enriching the theory of mediatization and the study of political communication.

This study shows that although the Golkar Party has maintained its organizational strength and strategic media presence, the dominance of political logic over media logic limits democratic development at the local level. These findings contextualize mediatization theory in Indonesia, especially at the local level, and deepen scholarly discussions about the relationship between political parties, media, and democracy in Indonesia.

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