

Local Elite Competition and Conspiracy in Regional Expansion in the Indonesian Archipelago Region

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ABSTRACT: This study aims to analyze and explain the forms of competition and conspiracy of local elites in regional expansion in the Indonesian archipelago. The research approach uses qualitative descriptive, with data collection through observation, interviews and documentation as well as data analysis through data collection, data assessment, data interpretation, data analysis, and data conclusions. To obtain data validity, this analysis will use data triangulation techniques, which means conducting cross-checks between one data source and another, and between sources. The findings of this study concluded that competition among local elites in the expansion was due to each elite, both on Obi Island, Bacan City, and Ternate City, having political interests after the regional expansion. The priority of political interests desired by local elites is position/power, while the occurrence of conspiracy among several local elites in regional expansion is due to the similarity of economic interests or business ventures located in the Obi Island area.

KEYWORDS: Conspiracy, Local Elite, Policy, Regional Expansion

INTRODUCTION

Indonesia is a unitary state in addition to being a state ruled by law. Indonesia is a unitary state of numerous distinct geographic areas (Fauzan, et al., 2020). These regions are all within the boundaries of the territorial integrity of The Unitary State of the Indonesian Republic (NKRI). As the State of Law, the Indonesian government always operates according to the various legal provisions (Djunarsjah et al., 2022). Consequently, the Government of the Republic of Indonesia consistently separates itself into a central administration and numerous regional administrations. The formation of local government in the Republic of Indonesia is regulated by law. This includes the form and structure of government (Krishnamohan, 2016). The fact that power is distributed in a country based on function, authority, and position indicates that the country adheres to the fundamentals of democracy (Nye, 2008).

Along with the dynamics of community development in the reform era in Indonesia, there is a phenomenon of the desire of people in various regions to form autonomous regions. These include provinces, regencies or cities that are separated from their parents. Such desires are based on various political, economic, social and cultural dynamics. The Government of the Republic of Indonesia has issued Government Regulation of the Republic of Indonesia Number 78 of 2007 concerning the procedures for the formation, elimination and merger of regions (Adnan et al., 2019).

The anticipated effects of regional autonomy involve delivering more fulfilling public facilities, welcoming citizen involvement, growing the pressure on central government, increasing regional flexibility and sophistication, and planning projects more in line with national needs (Hook, 1991, Rochmansjah, 2019). Decentralization or regional autonomy is an administrative form in an organization and is used to determine administrative methods for regulating regions, where central authorities provide legislative, judicial, and executive power to the regions (Albehadili et al, 2016, Safa, 2020).

The regional government is faced with various challenges and obstacles in the implementation of regional autonomy, but there are two important institutions of the regional government, namely (1) the Regional House of Representatives, (2) The Regent and regional apparatus including sub-district heads (Engkus et al., 2019, Suhardi, 2025). Regional expansion is a process of dividing an existing administrative region (autonomous region) into two or more new autonomous regions based on Republic of Indonesia Law Number 9 of 2015 concerning Regional Autonomy and Regional Government as a result of the second amendment to the Law of the Republic of Indonesia Number 23 of 2014 (Fadhilah, 2016).

The determination of regional boundaries in Indonesia has been carried out since Indonesia's independence in 1945. For the purposes of state management, Indonesia is divided into provincial areas. Provincial areas divided into regencies and cities, each of which has a regional government. However, this division of regions is still more administrative in nature because the government system is still centralized. Since the collapse of the New Order era in 1998, the Reform Era was born. In the Reformation Era, Law Number 22 of 1999 concerning Regional Government or better known as the Regional Autonomy Law was born which was later

revised to Law Number 9 of 2015 concerning Regional Autonomy and Regional Government as a result of the second amendment to the Law of the Republic of Indonesia Number 23 of 2014 (Akbal, 2017). In line with the spirit of regional autonomy, since 2000, many new regions were established, both in provinces and districts/cities (Rachayu, 2019; Afandi, 2013).

The division of the region into several regions results in changes to regional boundaries both administrative and spatially. Expansion, which is more meaningful as a regional solution, always raises problems in determining territorial boundaries. Since the era of regional autonomy, the number of border dispute cases between regions includes 17 problems involving 19 provinces and 50 problems involving 81 districts/ cities (Sahyana, 2019). The demand for the expansion of the Obi Islands Regency was declared on March 20, 2008, in conjunction with the South Halmahera Regency-level Musabakah Tilawatil Qur'an (MTQ) held in Laiwui, Obi Island District. However, the demand for regional expansion faced challenges from various parties. On the one hand, this expansion was intended to shorten government distances, bring services closer to the community, and ensure equitable development, as well as improve the welfare of the people in the region. However, the good intentions of the regional expansion turned out to be a source of competition and conspiracy among the local elites of Obi Island.

RESEARCH METHODS

This research uses a case study method, which is intensive, thorough, and in-depth research conducted on a specific organization, institution, or phenomenon (Arikunto, 2002). The qualitative approach emphasizes inductive analysis, not deductive analysis (La Suhu et al., 2019, La Suhu et al., 2023). To obtain the required data, the data collection techniques used were observation, interviews, and documentation (Ibrahim et al., 2020).

Data analysis in this study refers to the steps taken in qualitative research. These steps are: data collection, data assessment, data interpretation, data analysis, and data conclusion. This comprehensive approach aligns with the research objectives. To ensure data validity, this analysis utilizes data triangulation, which involves cross-checking data sources and informants (Lexy, 2006).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Competition Among Local Elites in the Expansion of the Obi Islands Regency

Regional autonomy is a phenomenon that involves governmental, political, and sociocultural dimensions. As such, studying the development of regional autonomy in Indonesia has become a highly relevant topic. In terms of authority, regional autonomy is rooted in society, the nation, the state, customs, religion, and local cultural identities. Therefore, the central government must refrain from efforts to homogenize all regions under a single model by forcing local identities to conform to a national character. This approach is grounded in different legal frameworks, as various laws have emerged based on the political and legal contexts of specific times (Suriadi et al., 2023, Kholik, 2020, Radjak et al., 2025).

The formation of new autonomous regions also opens up new spaces of power, expanding the field for political contestation at the regional level. Regional elites often exploit this momentum for their own political interests. This includes the struggle for strategic positions to strengthen the interests of their respective groups. Another, often undisclosed, reason is the effort to divide power at the local level. Consequently, various methods are used to expand regions so they can gain positions or power. Moreover, those who have contributed to the expansion of the regions have positioned themselves as those who deserve a share of the positions, political positions, and power in the regions after the expansion. This process has given rise to various conflicts in a number of regions. Given these strategic positions, regional elites often impose their will based on their personal and group interests to achieve their desired goals.

The idea of regional expansion is beneficial from two different aspects. First, for the elite, regional expansion is intended to address their culture of personal interests; political, economic, and social. Second, for the wider community; regional expansion to improve public services. Interests are what drive individual action at several fundamental levels; interests are intense social phenomena. Interests drive people to take action; interests can supply energy (strength) and motivate people to work hard to achieve what they desire. A person's interests will become a significant force if they can mobilize and convince the public, so that they will follow what they convey.

It has become a common and undeniable paradigm across all groups that regional expansion is an effort to distribute power at the local level. The slow turnover of elites at the regional level makes other elites anxious, afraid of missing out on positions. Some regional elites, already comfortable in their seats of power and office, continue to hold on to them through various means. Positions that have already expired two terms are then passed on to their wives, children, in-laws, or relatives through candidacy in regional elections, thus arousing jealousy among other power-hungry elites.

Competition among local elites for power and positions is often unavoidable, including involving the people in horizontal conflicts. As a result, various methods are used to expand regions so they can gain positions or power in the new regions. Moreover, those (local elites) who feel they have contributed to the expansion of the new regions naturally position themselves as those who deserve a share of the positions, political power, and power in the new regions, at the very least, they should receive a share of the projects in the new regions.

Local Elite Competition and Conspiracy in Regional Expansion in the Indonesian Archipelago Region

The competing interests among the elite groups pro regional expansion of the Obi Islands Regency are very clearly visible in the egoism of each elite in maintaining and/or gaining strategic positions after the expansion. There are several organizations/forums formed by Obi elites in the demands for regional expansion, the purpose of forming these organizations/forums on the one hand to consolidate between the community and Obi elites and on the other hand because to maintain and/or gain elite interests after the expansion. The organizations/forums formed by Obi elites are as follows:

1. Elites in the Obi Islands region formed the Obi Care Forum (FPO), driven by the Obi Sub-district Head and businesspeople.
2. Elites in the Bacan region (Labuha, the capital of South Halmahera Regency) formed the Obi Family Association (IKO). Its driving force was politicians, bureaucrats, businesspeople, students, and educational staff.
3. Elites in the Ternate region formed the Obi Islands Regency Expansion Committee. Its driving force was academics and politicians.
4. The Expansion and Student Consortium, based in the Obi Islands region, was driven by the Obi community and students: a combination of students from various sub-districts in the Obi Islands, which later became the Obi Students and College Students Association (HIPMO).
5. Team 5 (Five), appointed directly by Regent Muhammad Kasuba, on April 12, 2011, met with Commission II to present the conditions of the Obi Islands region as a candidate for a new regency at the Bella International Hotel in Ternate. This team was appointed based on regional/sub-district and religious representation in the Obi Islands region.

Despite competition among local elites stemming from differing interests, the struggle for regional expansion of the Obi Islands Regency remains unified, championing the cause of Obi Island becoming a new regency. Similarities in ethnicity, religion, and profession do not necessarily foster alliances among local elite groups. In the process of championing regional expansion, Obi elites from various regions—Obi Island, Labuha-Bacan, and Ternate—joined forces to advocate for the expansion of the Obi Islands Regency, regardless of ethnicity, religion, or profession. However, the differing interests of each elite led to competition among Obi elites in North Maluku Province.

Not just one elite or group is involved in the regional expansion process; many elites are involved. Each elite plays a role in the regional expansion, possessing its own ideas, interests, and goals. Each elite involved employs various methods to achieve their goals. In each regional expansion, local elites inspire the struggle for the expansion. Therefore, there is the potential for competition and struggles among the respective elites in the struggle for power. Therefore, this struggle for elite interests is not limited to intra-elite struggles. Grassroots communities also have interests, namely, the pursuit of prosperity.

Competition of interests among pro-district expansion groups occurs between elites in the Obi Island region and in Ternate. This competition among pro-district expansion elite groups creates disharmony and discommunication among them. Competition among pro-district expansion groups is essentially a struggle for influence and support from the Obi community. To gain influence and support from the masses/society, Obi elites build an image to gain public trust and be seen as the Obi elites most instrumental and instrumental in the process of fighting for regional expansion. This image building is achieved by the formation of various organizations/forums. The elite in the Obi Island region, to build their image as Obi elites in regional expansion, formed the Obi Care Forum (FPO) and likewise other Obi elites in the Labuha-Bacan region (Regency Capital) by forming the Obi Family Association (IKO) and the Obi elite in Ternate formed a committee for the expansion of the Obi Islands Regency.

The image-building carried out by local elites during regional expansion aims to demonstrate their existence to the masses/society, demonstrating that these elites play a crucial role in championing regional expansion and to build trust that they are truly the most influential and instrumental in the regional expansion process. Consequently, the relationship between elites and the masses is always strong. Obi elites strive to demonstrate their identity by advocating for regional expansion. The elites prominent in the regional expansion of the Obi Islands are the elites on Obi Island. These elites, in addition to being bureaucratic and economic elites, are also social elites.

Their close ties with the people/masses on Obi Island provide social capital, enabling them to exert significant influence in the regional expansion process, particularly in influencing the community and mobilizing the masses. Their level of trust in the community/masses is higher than that of other Obi elites. With the resources possessed by the elites on Obi, this group strives to maximize their use to achieve its political goals. Despite the limited intellectual resources of the Ternate elite, they still desire to use their resources for political ends. Their relationship with the community/masses is not particularly close, as these local elites reside in Ternate. Regional conditions hinder elite-mass relations. Consequently, the people of Obi Island tend to be pessimistic and have little understanding of their existence. Nevertheless, this elite can demonstrate its role in the process of regional expansion at the provincial level.

Local Elite Conspiracy in the Expansion of the Obi Islands Regency

Since 2003, following the expansion of South Halmahera Regency, along with several other regions, namely North Halmahera Regency, Sula Islands Regency, East Halmahera Regency, and Tidore Islands City in North Maluku Province, the Obi Islands region has become one of the areas in South Halmahera Regency with considerable natural resource potential. Its 3,111 square kilometers (3,111 square miles) holds a variety of natural resources not found on other islands in South Halmahera Regency.

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With its abundant natural resources in the mining, fisheries, and plantation sectors, the Obi Islands have become a business hub for the interests of the regional elite.

Obi Island's most dominant natural resources are in the mining sector: gold, nickel, copper, iron sand, and coal. The mining sector in the Obi Islands region represents a natural resource that is utilized by the elite for business purposes. Therefore, elites, both within the Obi Islands region and outside the Obi Islands, have a significant interest in gaining economic benefits.

The elites who conspired in the regional expansion of the Obi Islands Regency were both pro- and anti-expansion elites. The conspiracy occurred because the local elites shared common interests, namely economic interests: to gain personal (private) profits, maintain and secure their businesses in the Obi Islands region. In addition to the economic interests (business affairs), there were also relationships between the opposing parties; the Regent and the elite in the Obi Islands region. The relationships built between the local elites were intended to win the Regent's side in the 2009 Regional Election contest in South Halmahera Regency, which then resulted in the Regent's re-election.

Due to their status as prominent businessmen in the Obi region, businesspeople donated funds to the Regent, with the assurance that if the Regent were re-elected, all of their companies would run smoothly without any problems in the business licensing process or other matters. Meanwhile, the Obi Sub-district Head, also a businessman on Obi Island, therefore, his relationship with the Regent not only served to maintain his status as Obi Sub-district Head but also to secure and smooth the way for all matters related to his companies. The local elite's conspiracy in the regional expansion stemmed from economic interests (business ventures) in the Obi Islands region and the closeness of the elites in terms of financial contributions. The conspiracy was formed solely to protect and maintain the resources each elite already possessed. Some local elites fundamentally shared the same goal (business) and owned companies operating in the Obi Islands.

The elites consciously and collaboratively conspired to design and implement their interests. The division of areas or company locations on Obi Island is inextricably linked to the manipulation of certain local elites, who are perceived as more dominant than others. The majority of nickel mining on Obi Island is located in and around Kawasi Village, in Obi District. This location is highly strategic, both economically and geographically. Gold mines on Obi Island are spread across several areas, including Air Mangga Village and Anggai Village in Obi District, and coal mines in Kello Village in East Obi District. The choice of mining locations among local elites within a single district suggests an economic conspiracy. The motive for this conspiracy is economic interests, aimed at maximizing profits and capitalizing on other hidden interests.

The conspiracy among local elites arises because each elite has a shared goal: personal interests to profit from the resources on Obi Island. The economic interests of these local elites are not shared by other local elites, preventing any collusive relationships between them. Other local elites tend to pursue their own interests, including politicians, bureaucrats, and academics. In fact, the conspiracies of some local elites are largely unknown to the local elites in North Maluku Province. Geographical conditions and the polarization of local elites across various regions are key factors in the misunderstanding of each elite's interests.

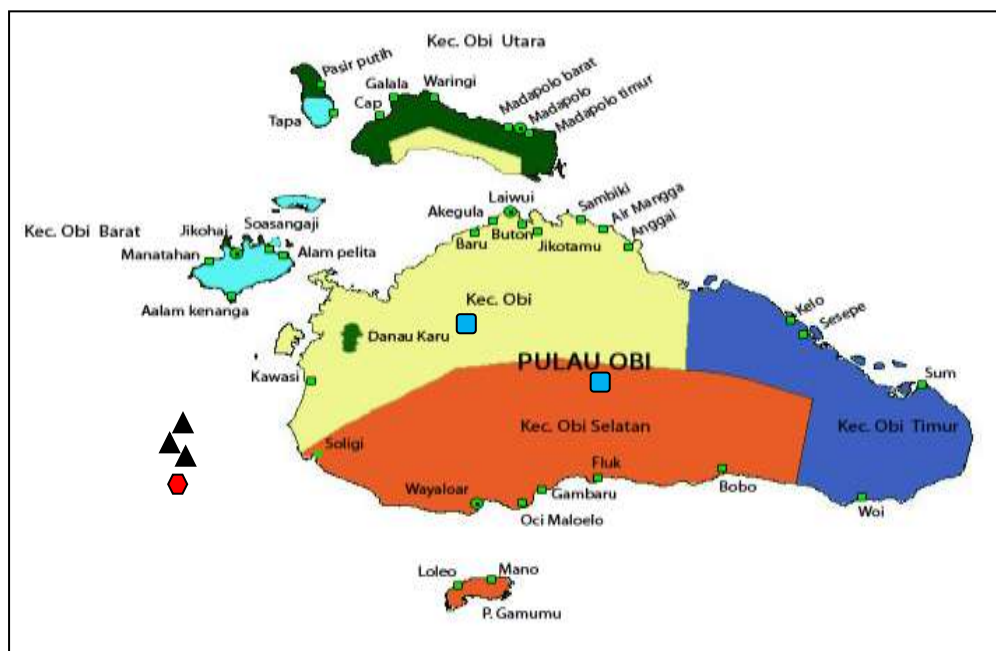


Figure 1: Map of the Distribution of Companies Owned by Conspiring Elites

Description:

- ▲ Company Owned by the Regent
- ♦ Company Owned by the Obi Sub-district Head
- Company Owned by an Obi Businessman

CONCLUSION

Geographically, Obi is an archipelago located in the southern part of South Halmahera Regency. Due to its archipelagic nature, Obi Island consists of Obi Major and Obi Minor. As an archipelago comprising diverse ethnicities and religions, with acculturation and primordial ties between the Obi people, the long span of control from the central government is a key factor in the demand for regional expansion. In the context of the regional expansion of the Obi Islands Regency, the geographical aspect tends to inspire the Obi people and local elites from various regions in North Maluku Province to demand regional expansion.

The demand for regional expansion on Obi Island has apparently sparked competition among several local elites, including those on Obi Island, Bacan Island, and Ternate City. This competition stems from each local elite's specific political interests in establishing Obi Island as a New Autonomous Region (DOB). Furthermore, several local elites have conspired behind the demand for regional expansion. This conspiracy stems from several local elites' shared interests in conducting business (economic) activities on Obi Island. A local elite even owns a 20% stake in three companies operating on Obi Island. Economic interests are the primary reason for this conspiracy by several local elites.

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