

The struggling aristocrats? noble families' diminishing roles after the splitting of tana toraja region

Ratri Istanja, author

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Abstrak

How did the splitting of the Tana Toraja region in 2008 challenge the local aristocrats' dual role in adat and politics in the new North Toraja? Why and how did these aristocrats fail to secure their dual role after the 2015 election? After 32 years of the New Order regime, adat rights were finally revived through the Return to Lembang regulation in 2001. The law channelled noble families' hereditary rights back to local political affairs. However, the splitting of the region, or pemekaran daerah, opened a new venue for power contestation in North Toraja District. Following the second direct local head election in 2015, noble families' role in politics gradually diminished due to the participation of a growing class of wealthy and politically strong non-traditional elites in democratic elections. Using interviews, triangulated with government archives and media resources, I extend previous studies of North Toraja aristocrats' advantage to reassert their dual role—in adat and politics—after the region's split. I argue that decentralization policies initiated through democratic elections came with high risks for aristocrats to again secure their traditional hereditary rights. This study was inspired by Lee Ann Fujii's (2014) accidental ethnography study based on stories and unplanned encounters in Bosnia, Rwanda, and other places. It aims to contribute to an understanding of decentralization and indigenous minority groups' survival in Indonesia's multicultural society.