



The Distribution of Political Power of Karaeng in Jeneponto

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Abstract

This study examines the distribution of political power within the social structure of Karaeng in Jeneponto, South Sulawesi. As a local entity with a strong history of traditional power, Karaeng plays an important role in the social structure, governance, decision-making, policy formulation, and social control. This research aims to understand how political power is distributed by the Karaeng group within the government structure and how this influences the social structure and local political dynamics. A qualitative approach is used in this study, with in-depth interviews and literature review as the primary data collection techniques. The results show that the distribution of political power carried out by Karaeng within the government structure is strongly influenced by factors such as lineage, kinship, social networks, social status, and strong patron-client relationships, all of which contribute to the significant influence of Karaeng in local politics in Jeneponto.

Keywords: Distribution, Power, Karaeng, Government, Political.

1. INTRODUCTION

Jeneponto Regency is one of the regions in South Sulawesi rich in culture and tradition. One of the social groups that plays a significant role in the local power structure is the Karaeng. The Karaeng, originating from the aristocratic system of the Makassar ethnic group, holds a historical tradition of power and authority in various aspects of societal life. Along with the passage of time, the role of the Karaeng in the distribution of power has undergone changes, particularly in the context of modern politics [1]. This phenomenon is interesting to study due to the blending of tradition and the modern political system in the dynamics of power in Jeneponto.

This study aims to explore in depth how the distribution of power carried out by the Karaeng group takes place in Jeneponto and how their role influences local politics [2]. By understanding these dynamics, this study aims to provide a clearer picture of how the power held by the Karaeng has adapted to the context of modern politics and how this system operates in everyday practice in the society of Jeneponto. The power held by the Karaeng group cannot be separated from the strong kinship system they possess, particularly during political contests [1].

Culturally, Jeneponto is known for its strong cultural traditions and the role of the noble class in the social structure. The Karaeng is one such entity with its own distinct identity, maintaining a strong influence

within society as a group characterized by symbolic markers [3]. The title of Karaeng is traditionally used by leaders and prominent figures who hold significant power and authority, both in the social and political spheres [4]. In this context, Karaeng not only serves as a customary leader but also exerts influence in decision-making and policies related to the broader interests of society. Furthermore, as the authority figure and elected leader within the governance structure, Karaeng holds the power to regulate the distribution of power from top to bottom, based on the level of contribution made by supporters, particularly the Karaeng who were actively involved during political contests [5].

Historically, the power of Karaeng in Jeneponto has evolved alongside changes in both the social and political structures, at local and national levels. The shifts in the governance system, from the kingdom era, colonial period, to the independence era, have impacted the role and position of Karaeng within the local power structure. Overall, their power has been strengthened by well-maintained familial ties [6]. However, despite experiencing changes, Karaeng continues to play an important role and has managed to maintain its influence into the modern era. This enduring power is also closely linked to the strong familial bonds established by Karaeng [7]. This phenomenon is intriguing to further examine, particularly in understanding how Karaeng power has

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adapted to the modern political context and remains relevant amidst the ongoing changes.

The dynamics of Karaeng power are also closely linked to the patron-client concept, which is a characteristic feature of the Makassar people, particularly in Jeneponto. In this system, the relationship between Karaeng and his community is established through reciprocal ties, where Karaeng acts as the protector or patron, providing support in various aspects of life, while the community offers loyalty and political support in return [8]. This model of relationship has strengthened Karaeng position within the social structure and enabled them to maintain a stable base of both external and internal power [5]. In the context of modern politics, this patron-client relationship continues to play a crucial role and remains one of the factors that strengthen the political legitimacy of Karaeng in Jeneponto [9].

In the context of local politics, the distribution of power carried out by Karaeng also reflects how the hierarchical social structure operates, where positions of power or strategic roles are assigned to those who have made significant contributions during political contests such as local elections, legislative elections, and similar events [10]. The presence of Karaeng is not only as a formal leader but also as a key determinant in shaping policy directions in various areas, such as in the election of regional heads or local legislators, by practicing Karaeng co-optation politics [11]. Nevertheless, this distribution of power is not without challenges, particularly regarding the changing values of democracy that are emerging in society. The democratization process, especially through direct elections, demands greater transparency and broader public participation in the political process. As a result, Karaeng must adapt in order to maintain its relevance.

Given these various backgrounds, this study is important for understanding the distribution of power of the Karaeng in Jeneponto from the perspective of local politics [12]. Through this analysis, it is expected to gain a deeper understanding of how traditional power plays a role in modern political dynamics and how this system endures amid existing challenges. This study not only focuses on the formal aspects of Karaeng power but also examines their interactions with the community and the adaptations made in response to socio-political changes.

2. METHOD

This study employs a qualitative approach with a case study design to understand the distribution of political power among the Karaeng in Jeneponto [13]. A qualitative approach was chosen because it allows the researcher to explore in-depth information about the experiences, perspectives, and patterns of power

relations formed between the Karaeng and the community [14]. Primary data was gathered through in-depth interviews with various Karaeng and community leaders in Jeneponto, while secondary data was sourced from literature, historical documents, and local government reports [15]. This study employed purposive sampling, where informants were selected based on their roles within the social and political structure of Jeneponto [13]. Data analysis was conducted using a thematic approach to identify patterns of power distribution among the Karaeng and its influence on local social and political dynamics [16]. Using this method, the study aims to provide an in-depth and comprehensive understanding of how the traditional power of the Karaeng can adapt and continue to play a significant role within the context of modern local politics.

3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The results of this study indicate that the distribution of political power among the Karaeng in Jeneponto is heavily influenced by the social structure and the strong traditional values still prevalent in the community. The factor of descent or bloodline plays a primary role in determining who can be recognized as a Karaeng and possess power within the community. The title of Karaeng is typically passed down through specific noble families, which grants their authority widespread acceptance among the people. This demonstrates that power within the Karaeng social structure is exclusive, accessible only to individuals who meet the requirements of descent and are acknowledged as part of the noble family.

Lineage in the Power Structure

In the society of Jeneponto, the status of Karaeng is primarily determined by lineage and bloodline. Individuals with Karaeng ancestry are automatically recognized as part of the elite group with authority and influence within the community. Membership in the Karaeng structure, inherited through generations, serves as the foundation for the legitimacy of power that is widely acknowledged by the society. This structure reflects a social system that strongly maintains the principle of hierarchical lineage, where only individuals from noble bloodlines can access positions of power. This tradition makes the distribution of power exclusive, accessible only to certain groups that have long held their place within the social structure of Jeneponto.

The responses from the interviewees regarding the influence of lineage in determining the status of Karaeng in Jeneponto are as follows:

"In Jeneponto, lineage plays a significant role in determining one's status as a Karaeng. We have a

tradition that has lasted for centuries, where someone is considered a Karaeng if they have noble blood from either their father or mother. The community still highly respects this system, as they believe that the Karaeng have the responsibility and obligation to lead and protect the people. (EK-12/06/24)"

Regarding the patron-client network and its influence on the power of Karaeng, the response was:

"The patron-client network is like a spider's web, where everything is interconnected. The Karaeng provide assistance, both in financial terms and access to resources, to their clients. In return, the community gives loyalty to the Karaeng. For example, during local elections, support from this network is highly influential, as the people will choose candidates supported by the Karaeng. (EK-12/06/24)"

An interview with a local academic about the role of lineage in maintaining Karaeng power in Jeneponto yielded the following:

"Lineage is a key factor in the social structure of Jeneponto. The majority of political and social power is held by individuals from Karaeng families. This is a form of social stratification that is highly traditional, where the legitimacy of power is obtained through bloodline, rather than competence or broader societal participation. However, this could also be a barrier to social change, especially in the context of modern democracy. (AL-12/06/24)"

On the influence of patronage patterns in maintaining political stability in Jeneponto, the response was:

"Patronage patterns play an important role in maintaining local political stability. The Karaeng serve as mediators between the people and the government, directing the aspirations of the people to those in power. This provides political advantages for the Karaeng and maintains their legitimacy. However, this system creates a high level of dependency within the community, which may ultimately hinder more democratic political participation. (AL-11/08/24)"

Observational evidence also revealed:

"At the ceremony for welcoming a new Karaeng, it was evident that the people of Jeneponto greatly respect individuals who have Karaeng lineage. The event was attended by community leaders, village heads, and members of the Karaeng family from various regions. In his welcoming speech, the newly appointed Karaeng emphasized the importance of maintaining tradition and the patron-client relationship. He also provided financial aid and food packages to the attending community members as a

symbol of support and protection. During the event, there were noble symbols such as traditional red and gold clothing worn only by Karaeng family members. This demonstrated a clear social hierarchy. The attending community members showed respect by kissing the Karaeng hands, a symbol of respect and acknowledgment of his authority. (Observation-12/06/24)"

From the interviews and observations, it can be concluded that lineage plays a dominant role in the power structure in Jeneponto. The Karaeng status, inherited through lineage, provides a strong legitimacy within the community. Although the democratic system emphasizes broader political participation, the influence of Karaeng remains strong due to the deeply rooted patronage system. The patron-client relationships maintained by Karaeng create strong loyalty from the community, which in turn strengthens the political power of Karaeng. This results in an exclusive power structure where only individuals from noble families can access important positions. At the same time, this practice acts as a barrier to more inclusive social and political changes in Jeneponto.

The distribution of political power among the Karaeng in Jeneponto is greatly influenced by three main factors: lineage, social status, and the patron-client network. Lineage plays a crucial role because the position of Karaeng is typically inherited from one generation to the next, which makes their authority widely accepted by the community. Additionally, an individual's social status in the community also plays a role in determining the amount of power they can hold. In this regard, Karaengs with higher social status tend to have greater influence in decision-making processes [17]. Beyond lineage, the social status of Karaeng is also heavily influenced by their ability to maintain strong patron-client relationships. These relationships allow the Karaeng to retain the loyalty of the community through protection, financial support, and access to economic resources [18]. In the political context, this patron-client relationship serves as an essential mechanism for strengthening the political support base of Karaeng, particularly in political situations that require collective support, such as local elections. This patronage system is deeply entrenched in the society of Jeneponto and is one of the reasons why the Karaeng continue to enjoy high legitimacy in the eyes of the public, despite the fact that modern democratic systems call for broader participation and openness.

Patron-Client as Power Reinforcement

The interview with a head of family in the Karaeng village regarding the role of the patron-client

relationship in reinforcing the power of the Karaeng in Jeneponto revealed the following:

"The patron-client relationship is crucial in maintaining our power. As Karaeng, we provide protection, financial assistance, and access to various resources to the people in need. In return, they offer support and loyalty to us, especially in political situations such as regional elections. This relationship is not just about power, but also about trust and our sense of responsibility to help the community" (AK-12/08/24).

Further, regarding the relevance of the patron-client system in the context of modern politics and its impact on supporting the Karaeng in political activities, the response was as follows:

"It is highly relevant. Although we now have a democratic system and open elections, the people of Jeneponto still deeply respect tradition. They prefer leaders who are close to them, who are known and trusted. This relationship acts as a bridge between the people and the government, as we often become intermediaries to voice the needs of the community to the authorities" (AK-12/08/24).

"We support the Karaeng because they have helped us in many ways. When there are difficulties such as failed harvests or the need for funds for our children's education, we can ask the Karaeng for help. They are always ready to assist, and in return, we give them our support when they need it, for instance, in local elections. This is a long-standing reciprocal relationship" (AK-12/08/24).

Regarding the direct benefits of this relationship to the community, the response was:

"Of course, we feel the benefits. The Karaeng help open access to government aid, such as agricultural subsidies or social assistance. They also often advocate for our village's needs to the local government. Therefore, this relationship not only helps us personally, but also benefits the community as a whole" (AK-12/08/24).

Similarly, the results of the observation revealed:

"This meeting was attended by the Karaeng along with local people, including farmers, fishermen, and small traders. During the event, the Karaeng discussed several important issues faced by the community, such as the low prices of agricultural products and access to government assistance. The community appeared enthusiastic and offered direct input to the Karaeng regarding their concerns. The Karaeng then promised to facilitate a meeting with the local government to find solutions to the issues raised. Furthermore, the Karaeng also provided

financial assistance to several families experiencing economic difficulties. The observation showed that the community has high trust in the Karaeng as figures capable of representing their interests" (AK-12/08/24).

From the interviews and observations, it is evident that the patron-client system remains a crucial element in reinforcing the power of the Karaeng in Jeneponto. This relationship enables the Karaeng to maintain the loyalty of the community by providing support and access to resources. In turn, the community offers political support to the Karaeng in activities such as local elections. Despite the existence of a democratic system, this patronage pattern remains highly effective and relevant. The Karaeng plays a role as an intermediary between the community and the government, utilizing the patron-client relationship to advocate for their community's interests. This strategic role enhances the legitimacy of the Karaeng power, as they are not only recognized as traditional leaders but also as representatives of the community in the modern political structure.

The patron-client relationship has become one of the key elements that strengthen the Karaeng power. Through this relationship, the Karaeng acts as the patron who provides support, protection, and access to economic resources to the people, or clients, who in return offer loyalty and political support to the Karaeng. This patronage pattern strengthens the Karaeng position in society and maintains a reciprocal relationship that solidifies their legitimacy. For example, in political activities such as local elections, the patron-client network allows the Karaeng to mobilize collective support and influence the political choices of the community. Although this relationship may seem traditional, it remains highly effective in the local political structure in Jeneponto.

The patron-client network serves as an important mechanism in the distribution of the Karaeng power. In this system, the Karaeng maintains patronage relations with the community, providing protection and financial support in exchange for loyalty and political backing. This patron-client system strengthens the Karaeng position in local politics and serves as a source of legitimacy for their power. Additionally, in the context of modern politics, the Karaeng also acts as a liaison between the community and the government, bridging the community's interests with local government policies [19]. The dynamics of the Karaeng power are also influenced by their role as intermediaries between the community and the government. As respected traditional leaders, the Karaeng often serve as a link between the needs and aspirations of the community and local government policies. In many cases, the Karaeng has

the capacity to influence local policies to be more responsive to the needs of their community. This role adds strategic value to their power in the social structure, as they are not only seen as traditional leaders but also as representatives of the community in front of formal government institutions.

Challenges in Maintaining Stable Power

Along with changes in the political system, internal conflicts have emerged among the Karaeng. Differences in political orientations and party affiliations sometimes lead to tensions between the Karaeng, especially when there are divergent supports for certain political candidates or when personal ambitions conflict. These conflicts not only impact the stability of the Karaeng structure but can also lead to divisions among the communities that support each Karaeng. This tension has become one of the primary challenges in maintaining unity and stability within the Karaeng power in Jeneponto, particularly as the demands for openness and democracy from the public continue to increase.

However, this power distribution also faces significant challenges in the era of modern democracy. A more open political system and a more competitive political environment have brought about significant changes in the power dynamics in Jeneponto. Some Karaeng have begun to adjust by becoming more participatory in the political process, such as by directly participating in political candidacies or forming coalitions with certain political parties. This adaptation demonstrates that the Karaeng are striving to remain relevant within the modern political system, where political support is no longer solely based on patronage relationships but also on their ability to respond to the needs of the community and the political competition. On the other hand, these challenges have also allowed the Karaeng to survive by preserving and maintaining their power, which is, of course, linked to the interests of power distribution from top to bottom.

The results of observations indicate that:

“At this campaign event, the Karaeng campaigned by bringing together traditional values and modern political programs. The Karaeng opened the campaign with a speech emphasizing local cultural values, inviting the public to continue upholding the traditions of Jeneponto. Afterward, he introduced the programs he would support if elected, such as improving access to education and providing economic assistance for farmers. The community appeared enthusiastic and listened attentively. Many of them came wearing traditional clothing as a sign of respect for the Karaeng. At the end of the event, the community was invited to meet the Karaeng directly, and several residents were seen expressing their

aspirations and complaints directly to him. This shows that, although involved in formal politics, the Karaeng continues to fulfill their role as representatives of the community who are close and actively engaged with their people (AK-17/08/24).”

This finding indicates that despite the changes in the political system and the pressures of democratization, the Karaeng in Jeneponto have managed to maintain most of their power by adapting their traditional roles into a modern context. By integrating traditional values into modern political practices, the Karaeng can remain relevant and influential within the socio-political dynamics of Jeneponto. This suggests that traditional power has not been entirely replaced by the new political system but rather has transformed in accordance with the demands of the times.

Furthermore, interview results also indicate that:

“Changes in the political system, especially with the advent of democratization, have indeed become a great challenge for us. In the past, Karaeng power was more strongly based on patron-client relationships. But now, the public has become more open to leaders from various backgrounds. Therefore, we must adjust to the demands of the times. I myself am active in a political party to accommodate these changes. By being part of the formal system, I can ensure that the aspirations of the community are still represented (TM-17/08/24).”

This finding suggests that although the Karaeng are symbols of traditional power, they have successfully adapted to the modern political dynamics in Jeneponto. The Karaeng power structure, which is based on lineage and patron-client relationships, remains relevant but has undergone transformation in line with the socio-political changes that have occurred. This adaptation demonstrates that traditional power can remain in existence within the context of modern politics, especially when traditional actors manage to integrate their roles into a more open and competitive political system.

Additionally, the factor of public trust and loyalty toward the Karaeng also plays an important role in the distribution of power. The people of Jeneponto generally still uphold the traditions and values that have been passed down through generations. This has led them to continue respecting the authority of the Karaeng as leaders who are both authoritative and deeply rooted in local culture. This respect is not solely based on formal power but also on the Karaeng ability to maintain societal norms and social stability. In practice, the Karaeng power is reinforced through a value- and culture-based

approach, in which they serve as guardians of tradition, as well as protectors of the community's moral and cultural identity.

On the other hand, some Karaeng who are active in modern politics have started to balance their traditional roles with their formal roles as political leaders. They adapt by performing a dual function as both traditional leaders and politicians. This strategy allows the Karaeng to expand their influence, not only at the local community level but also in the formal political arena. By having access to formal structures, the Karaeng can voice the community's aspirations directly in government forums and address the needs of the people in various sectors, such as economy, education, and infrastructure. This adaptation of roles reflects the Karaeng ability to transform and develop new ways to strengthen their position of power.

Interview results show:

"Many members of the public see this as a positive development. We feel that our voices are being heard more because the Karaeng we respect now hold positions in formal politics. They can convey our needs and aspirations directly to the government. However, some feel that the traditional role of the Karaeng has diminished because they are busy with political activities (AK-17/08/24)." "Yes, now they are more involved in political activities such as campaigning or policy discussions. The public is also starting to consider the programs offered, not just loyalty to tradition. However, trust in the Karaeng remains strong because they are still seen as guardians of local traditions and culture that have been passed down for generations (AK-17/08/24)."

From the interviews and observations, it is revealed that the Karaeng in Jeneponto face challenges in maintaining the stability of their power in the era of modern politics. Internal conflicts between the Karaeng often arise due to differences in political affiliations and personal ambitions, which have the potential to cause tensions in the community. However, the Karaeng have demonstrated the ability to adapt to this situation by directly engaging in formal politics through political parties or candidacies for public office. This adaptation shows that the Karaeng no longer rely entirely on traditional patron-client relationships but have begun to integrate more participatory and modern approaches. The people of Jeneponto, while becoming more open to a more democratic political system, continue to respect the authority of the Karaeng because their role as guardians of local traditions and culture remains important.

Moreover, the Karaeng ability to adjust to modern political dynamics through participation in formal politics demonstrates that traditional power

can transform without losing its relevance. The patron-client-based power structure still exists, but it has been supplemented with new strategies tailored to meet the demands of the times, such as political campaigns that emphasize programs responsive to the community's needs. Overall, the findings of this research show that the distribution of political power among the Karaeng in Jeneponto is the result of a complex blend between the symbolic power of the Karaeng and their adaptation to modern political dynamics. Although their power is based on traditional structures and patron-client relationships, the Karaeng in Jeneponto have managed to maintain their relevance by adopting new roles and responding to contemporary political demands. This research highlights the importance of the Karaeng role as symbols of traditional power who have managed to endure and transform amidst socio-political changes, and it demonstrates that traditional power still holds strategic value in local political contexts.

This study shows that despite significant changes in the political system, particularly with the advent of democratization, the power of the Karaeng in Jeneponto has endured through adaptation. The traditional power, which was previously based on patron-client relationships, has undergone transformation, with the Karaeng beginning to engage in formal politics, either through political parties or by running for public office. This adjustment aligns with findings from research by Helberger [20], which demonstrates that in several regions in Indonesia, traditional elites (such as kings or adat leaders) who once relied on patron-client relationships have adapted to the new political system by becoming part of the formal political structure in order to maintain their relevance and influence in society. However, this study also reveals that, despite the shift towards modern politics, the traditional role of the Karaeng as guardians of local values and culture is still respected by the community. This is in line with the findings of Acemoglu and Robinson [21], which indicate that even though there are changes in the political structure, traditional leaders can maintain their authority by adapting to existing systems, especially by preserving their role as protectors of social norms and local culture.

This study notes that internal conflicts among the Karaeng have emerged as a result of differences in political orientation and party affiliation. These conflicts can create tensions that affect the stability of the power structure in Jeneponto. These findings reflect the dynamics observed in Dugan and Chenoweth [22] study of power structure changes in Indonesia, which shows that traditional power, which once had no internal political divisions, can fragment

when individuals who previously shared similar views become involved in the formal, competitive political system. Geertz highlights that these changes can lead to internal conflicts that affect the stability of traditional elite groups.

However, this study also highlights that despite political differences among the Karaeng, they continue to maintain their influence in the community, both by strengthening old patron-client relationships and by adapting to a more open and democratic political system. This is consistent with the findings of Brisbois [23], which emphasize the importance of adaptation strategies by traditional leaders in facing political change. In this case, even though there is internal conflict, traditional leaders who are able to adapt to these changes will continue to hold influence, both within traditional communities and in formal politics. The study further notes that some Karaeng have begun balancing their traditional roles with their involvement in formal politics, either through candidacies or joining political parties. By doing so, they can more directly communicate the aspirations of the community to government forums. This approach is similar to research by Tee et al. [24] in the Philippines, which found that traditional leaders involved in formal politics can use their positions to enhance their influence, both in public policy and in maintaining social stability within the community. This strategy has also been employed by Karaeng involved in formal politics to extend their influence beyond traditional structures and reach a wider community.

Although some Karaeng are now more involved in formal politics, many in the community still view their role as guardians of culture and tradition as essential. This aligns with Rius-Ulldemolins and Díaz-Solano [25] findings, which suggest that traditional power can be sustained if adat leaders continue to play a role in preserving local cultural values. In Jeneponto, despite changes in the political role of the Karaeng, the community continues to respect them because they are seen as symbols of social stability and cultural identity.

Public trust in the Karaeng also plays a significant role in the distribution of their power. The people of Jeneponto still honor the authority of the Karaeng, both because of their closeness to local traditions and because they are seen as protectors of social stability. Reis [26] study on the role of trust in society shows that communities with trust in their traditional leaders are more likely to support their power, even when changes occur in the political structure. This trust is not solely based on formal power but also on the Karaeng's ability to uphold social and cultural norms valued by the community. In Jeneponto, even as the community becomes more open to a more democratic political system, they still view

the Karaeng as guardians of culture and tradition. These findings reinforce Colgan et al. [27] argument that social trust and networks formed through traditional relationships remain crucial in maintaining local power. By maintaining strong ties with the community, the Karaeng in Jeneponto can overcome the challenges posed by political modernization and sustain their relevance.

4. CONCLUSION

The political power distribution of the Karaeng in Jeneponto demonstrates that traditional power still holds an important place in the local political dynamics. Factors such as lineage, social status, and patron-client relationships are key components that influence how power is distributed among the Karaeng. Despite the challenges posed by the modern political system, the Karaeng continue to maintain a significant influence in political decision-making in Jeneponto. This indicates that the traditional power system can adapt and remain relevant in the context of contemporary politics, playing a strategic role in maintaining local social and political stability.

However, with the increasing openness and competitiveness of politics, the Karaeng in Jeneponto have started to adjust to the changing times. In general, the Karaeng have successfully integrated their traditional roles and values into the formal political arena by collaborating with or joining political parties, allowing them to maintain a strong influence in society while also performing more formal political functions. This adaptation not only expands the role of the Karaeng but also enables them to act as a bridge between the interests of the community and government policies, ultimately enhancing their strategic value in the practice of power distribution in the local political context.

Author declaration

Author contributions and responsibilities

The authors made major contributions to the conception and design of the study. The authors took responsibility for data analysis, interpretation and discussion of results. The authors read and approved the final manuscript.

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Competing interests

The authors declare no competing interests.

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