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## **Nepotism**

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# 3 On the Prominence of Family Ties in Politics

*“The public will never be made to believe that an appointment of a relative is made on the ground of merit alone, uninfluenced by family views”*

(Thomas Jefferson, 1801)

The term nepotism has such negative connotations in most societies that it seems unlikely that people would show ubiquitous support for it. And yet, examples of the prominence of families in politics are common in history and across the globe (Bellow, 2003). An example in the U.S.A is the success of the Bush dynasty, which can be traced back to George W. Bush’s grandfather’s political success in the 1950s. In India, the Nehru-Ghandi political dynasty has occupied a prominent position of political power for decades. Although the prominence of familial relations in politics could be a sign of a talented gene pool or an advantageous social environment, it also may give rise to beliefs that such successes are the result of something less than fair play—i.e., that they are the result of nepotism. Whereas mainstream media often seems to condemn nepotism, we know very little about how nepotism impacts people’s political attitudes and behaviors. In the present research, we addressed this issue by examining: (1) How the prominence of family ties in politics impacts people’s perception of nepotism, and (2) what the subsequent consequences of nepotism are on political cynicism, perceived procedural fairness, and political participation.

## **Nepotism**

Nepotism is defined as favoritism based on kinship (Bellow, 2003). Although nepotism may be more strongly associated with certain cultures, it is in fact a common and widespread phenomenon, and people in many parts of the world tend to view nepotism in politics and

government institutions negatively. For example, in Indonesia, the use of familial-connections in politics is seen as an unethical and criminal act (Indonesia Corruption Watch, 2017). A study by Ainley and colleagues showed that the majority of students in Hong Kong, Taiwan, and Korea believe that political leaders should not be allowed to give government jobs to their family members (Ainley et al., 2012). Although research that explicitly addresses people's attitudes toward political nepotism in Western societies is scarce, concern over nepotism in these societies is widely expressed in mainstream media. Such media coverages also seem to indicate a concern over, and negative sentiment toward, nepotism in Western politics.

The previous examples suggest that, although a common and global phenomenon, nepotism in politics is considered undesirable by the general public. This makes it imperative that we learn more about how nepotism in the political arena affects people's attitudes and behaviors. There is not much known about the consequences of nepotism in the political context. However, there are studies of nepotism in organizations that might be informative. In organizational contexts, the findings echo the epigraph of Thomas Jefferson presented at the beginning of this paper. More specifically, it has been shown that employees have a stronger belief that nepotism was at play as the density of relatives (i.e., the proportion of genetic overlap among employees) within the same organization increases (Spranger et al., 2012). In addition, a recent study showed that people tend to consider the recruitment of someone who is related to a prominent person in a company as nepotism, regardless of the hired person's competencies or qualifications (see Chapter 2).

Although the studies discussed in the previous suggest that an awareness of family ties among politicians is enough for people to infer nepotism, caution is in order when generalizing organizational findings to the political arena. Business and politics may share some similarities, yet they are not the same. An apparent difference is that politics involve larger groups of people. But more importantly, the aim of most businesses is to make a profit for their owners and shareholders, whereas the aim of politicians is (or should be) to represent citizens. Given the instrumental nature of businesses, it may be more common for business-owners to act in their personal (and family) interest, for example by

prioritizing family members over non-family members in the fulfillment of strategic positions. Family businesses are a good example of this. In contrast, political authorities, whether being congressmen or presidents, are representing their constituency. They are expected to make decisions that are congruent with the citizens' needs, voices and aspirations, and to leave their own interests out of these decisions (Lankester, 2008; Luna & Zechmeister, 2005; Muller, 1970).

### **Political Cynicism**

A particularly useful perspective for understanding the detrimental consequences of nepotism in the political arena is the relational model of authority in groups (Lind & Tyler, 1988; Tyler, 1994; Tyler & Lind, 1992). According to this perspective, effective leadership requires people to voluntarily accept and comply with the decisions made by their authorities. People comply (or not) with their authorities based on their perception of whether (or not) their authorities are acting fairly. Crucial in this assessment of fairness is their evaluation concerning the (un)trustworthiness of the authorities.

We propose that nepotism can be a cue for people to infer the (un)trustworthiness of their political authorities. In the political science literature, the belief that political authorities are untrustworthy is reflected by a concept called *political cynicism*, which refers to a negative attitude stemming from the belief that political authorities are distrustful, immoral, dishonest, incompetent, self-interested and out of touch with citizens (Rijkhoff, 2018). We argue, for three reasons, that perceived nepotism in politics could increase political cynicism. First, people generally view nepotism as a selfish act, motivated by the desire for personal and familial interests at the expense of others who are not family (Bellow, 2003). This way, nepotism among politicians can become a basis for the public to judge the selfishness of politicians. Second, studies have shown that people tend to stigmatize beneficiaries of nepotism as incompetent (Darioly & Riggio, 2014; Padgett et al., 2015). If people believe that politicians attained their position through nepotism, they may doubt the politicians' capabilities to govern them. Third, given that nepotism is globally regarded as unacceptable and unethical, the belief that nepotism is prominent in politics can lead people to conclude that politicians are immoral.

From the perspective of the relational model of authority (Lind & Tyler, 1988; Tyler, 1994; Tyler & Lind, 1992), the link between nepotism and political cynicism is important to be examined because when authorities are deemed untrustworthy, people tend to believe that their authorities are making decisions in procedurally unfair ways. Such lack of perceived procedural fairness can negatively influence people's political attitudes and behaviors.

### **Procedural Fairness**

Procedural fairness concerns the manner in which authorities reach their decisions (Tyler & Blader, 2003). In politics, this often comes in the form of formal rules and policies (Bøggild & Petersen, 2015). Procedural fairness includes (1) the extent to which politicians communicate the reasons behind policies, (2) the degree to which the public feels authorities are hearing their voices and aspirations, and (3) the extent that people think they are being treated respectfully (Tyler & Lind, 1992; van der Toorn et al., 2011).

As outlined above, political cynicism represents people's belief that political authorities are untrustworthy, which, according to the relational model of authority, is crucial in shaping perceptions of procedural fairness (Tyler, 1989; Tyler & Lind, 1992). This means that people who score high on political cynicism are more likely to believe that their political authorities are treating them in procedurally unfair ways. If nepotism can affect political cynicism, it can thus be assumed that nepotism can indirectly reduce people's perception of procedural fairness.

The link between nepotism, political cynicism, and procedural fairness is important to examine because perceptions of procedural fairness shape people's attitudes and behaviors toward their authorities. For instance, in the U.S.A., a higher approval of the Supreme Court was observed among people who believe that the Supreme Court is practicing fair procedures (Ramirez, 2008). During President Reagan's administration, Rasinski (1988) found that people who perceived the government as practicing unfair procedures in allocating governmental benefits and services were more likely to evaluate Reagan as ineffective and incompetent. Moreover, Rasinski also found a relationship between procedural fairness and diverse forms of political participation, such as

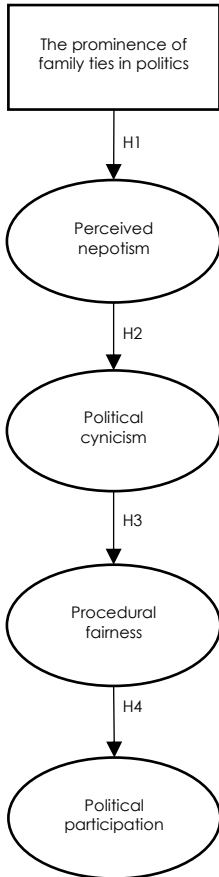
contacting political officials, or writing to a newspaper about political issues. This relationship suggest that people are less willing to voice their concerns and aspiration when they view that the government is practicing unfair procedures. If nepotism can affect people's perception of procedural fairness, it becomes important to also examine its consequences for political participation.

## **Political Participation**

Political participation refers to the actions of citizens to influence politics (van Deth, 2016). At its basic, political participation comes in the form of voting in an election, but it can also come in other behaviors such as contacting politicians, attending a political debate, partisanship, or working for a political party. In a democratic world, people have the opportunity to participate in politics, but this opportunity is only meaningful if they choose to use it. By contacting politicians, for example, people can exert their right to voice their concerns and to be heard by their representatives. By using their right to vote, citizens demonstrate their capacity to decide who has the right to lead or represent them. Such actions are an essential means to prevent the state from being controlled by a small number of elites with their own goals and interests (Parvin, 2018).

Although political participation is essential for a healthy democracy, research shows a declining trend of political participation across the globe (Parvin, 2018). The relationship between procedural fairness and political participation suggests that a low perception of procedural fairness may play role in this decline (Rasinski, 1988). For instance, fair procedural treatment entails that political authorities take serious account of people's voices and concerns—after all, when this is not the case, engagement in political participation is futile. Moreover, Miles (2015) argued that political participation such as voting in elections is a tacit endorsement of the legitimacy of an existing system. Since procedural fairness is key to the legitimization of authorities, dissatisfied citizens may deliberately refuse to participate in electoral voting as means to disconfirm the legitimacy of the existing system. If nepotism can increase political cynicism, and political cynicism decreases people's perceptions and beliefs about procedural fairness, it

can thus be expected that nepotism indirectly reduces people's political participation.



**Figure 3.1.** The proposed model

## Overview of studies and hypotheses

In four studies, we explored how the prominence of family ties in politics shapes citizens' belief that nepotism is at play as well as the impact of this belief on political cynicism, procedural fairness, and political participation. Three studies were conducted among American participants, while the fourth study was conducted in Indonesia. The structure of the model examined in the present research is described in Figure 1. Based on previous research (Spranger et al., 2012), we predicted that the presence of prominent family ties among politicians, compared to the absence of such prominent ties, leads people to infer nepotism in their nation's politics (Hypothesis 1). We further expected that perceived nepotism would be positively associated with political cynicism (Hypothesis 2). Following the relational model of authority (Tyler & Lind, 1992), we expected political cynicism to be negatively associated with perceived procedural fairness (Hypothesis 3). Finally, based on research demonstrating the link between procedural fairness and political attitudes and participation (Miles, 2015; Rasinski, 1988), we predicted that procedural fairness



would be negatively associated with political participation (Hypothesis 4).

## 3.1 Study 1 and Study 2

The aim of Studies 1 and 2 was to test the hypotheses described in the introductory section of this paper. Both studies were very similar in terms of methodology and results. For this reason, we report these studies in a single section.

### Method

#### *Participants and Design*

In both studies, participants were 200 American nationals recruited via Prolific-Academic who participated for a 1.5 GBP (approximately 2 USD) compensation. We excluded four participants in Study 1 and eight participants in Study 2 from further analyses because they completed the study unusually fast.<sup>7</sup> The final sample in Study 1 was 196 participants (89 men, 105 women, and 2 other;  $M_{age} = 34.83$ ,  $SD_{age} = 11.65$ ) and in Study 2 192 participants (91 men, 100 women, and 1 other;  $M_{age} = 34.1$ ,  $SD_{age} = 11.06$ ). The studies used a two-condition between-subjects experimental design; participants were either assigned into a *prominent family ties* or a *control* condition.

#### *Procedure*

In both studies, we asked participants in the *prominent family ties* condition to read a description about the prominence of family ties in the political history of the U.S.A., before completing a questionnaire.<sup>8</sup> The text explicitly described the kinship among various politicians with

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<sup>7</sup> College graduates read about 280 to 300 words per minute with 14% changes in speed—depending on the difficulty of the reading material (Carver, 1983; Taylor, 1965). With this in mind, for example in Study 1, we considered participants who completed the study faster than 2 minutes and 51 seconds ( $977 \text{ words} / (300 \times 0.14 + 300) \times 60 = 171.40$ ) as those who completed the study unusually fast.

<sup>8</sup> We explored the notion that people's perception of nepotism due to the prominence of family ties in politics may depend on their level of national identification, but we found no evidence to support this (see supplementary materials).

several examples, like: "... Franklin D. Roosevelt created an Office of Civilian Defense. He put his wife, Eleanor Roosevelt in charge of volunteer participation ... John F. Kennedy chose his younger brother Robert F. Kennedy to be attorney general ... Not only was George W. Bush's father president, but his grandfather was a U.S. senator, and his brother Jeb Bush was the 43<sup>rd</sup> governor of Florida ..." Participants in the *control condition* completed the questionnaire without reading any description beforehand. On completion, participants were thanked, debriefed, and paid.

### Measures

All answers were provided using five-point scales ( $1 = \text{not at all}$  to  $5 = \text{very much}$ ). We assessed *perceived nepotism* using two items ("To what extent does nepotism play a role in the politics of the U.S.A?", "How significant is family-membership in the politics of the U.S.A?";  $r_{\text{Study 1}} = .49, p < .001$ ;  $r_{\text{Study 2}} = .46, p < .001$ ). We assessed *political cynicism* using 10 items selected from prior research (Kabashima et al., 2000; Litt, 1963; Olsen, 1969: e.g., "For the most part, the government and politicians serve the interests of a few organized groups, such as business or labor, and aren't very concerned about the needs of people like myself", "Elected politicians stop thinking about the public's interest immediately after taking office";  $\alpha_{\text{Study 1}} = 0.85, \alpha_{\text{Study 2}} = 0.91$ ). We assessed *procedural fairness* using 14 items adapted from van der Toorn et al. (2011): e.g., "Overall, how fair do you think are the procedures used by politicians to handle problems in this country are?", "Politicians use methods that are equally fair to everyone";  $\alpha_{\text{Study 1}} = .94; \alpha_{\text{Study 2}} = .95$ ). *Political participation* was measured by assessing people's attitude and intention to participate in politics (8 items taken from Eckstein et al., [2013]: e.g., "We should take the chance to participate in politics", "I would support a political candidate during an election campaign";  $\alpha_{\text{Study 1}} = .86, \alpha_{\text{Study 2}} = .83$ ).

### Results

Descriptive statistics are presented in Table 3.1. To test the hypotheses, we conducted structural equation modelling. To keep the model at a limited complexity, we created three parcels each for the political cynicism and the political participation latent constructs by employing the domain-representative approach described by Coffman and

MacCallum (2005) and the factorial algorithm described by Matsunaga (2008). Because the items of the procedural fairness scale were based on three themes van der Toorn et al. (2011), we used the content-based method to create three parcels measuring procedural fairness (Matsunaga, 2008). The model is depicted in Figure 3.2. The model's fit indices were acceptable in Study 1, CFI = 0.98, RMSEA = 0.05, SRMR = 0.07, and verging acceptable in Study 2, CFI = 0.95, RMSEA = 0.08, SRMR = 0.11 (Schreiber et al., 2006: CFI > .95, RMSEA < .08, SRMR < .08).

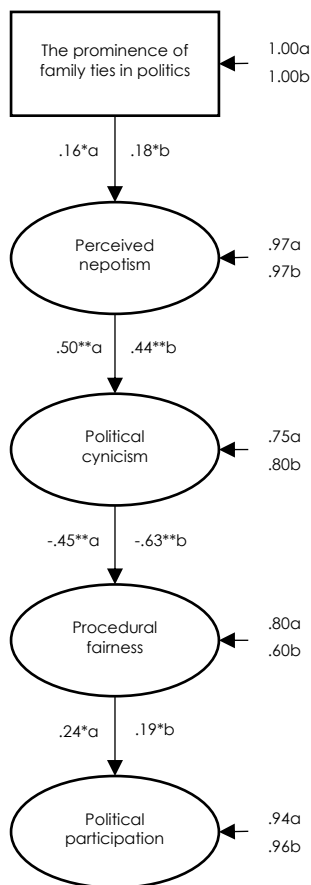
**Table 3.1** Means, standard deviations, and correlations in Studies 1 and 2

	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3
1. Perceived nepotism	3.61 <sup>a</sup> 3.72 <sup>b</sup>	0.88 <sup>a</sup> 0.87 <sup>b</sup>			
2. Political cynicism	3.75 <sup>a</sup> 3.78 <sup>b</sup>	0.67 <sup>a</sup> 0.77 <sup>b</sup>	.41** <sup>a</sup> .37** <sup>b</sup>		
3. Procedural fairness	2.35 <sup>a</sup> 2.31 <sup>b</sup>	0.75 <sup>a</sup> 0.76 <sup>b</sup>	-.13 <sup>ns</sup> <sup>a</sup> .18* <sup>b</sup>	-.42** <sup>a</sup> .59** <sup>b</sup>	
4. Political participation	3.01 <sup>a</sup> 3.45 <sup>b</sup>	0.86 <sup>a</sup> 0.79 <sup>b</sup>	.15* <sup>a</sup> .13 <sup>ns</sup> <sup>b</sup>	-.03 <sup>ns</sup> <sup>a</sup> .09 <sup>ns</sup> <sup>b</sup>	.23** <sup>a</sup> .19* <sup>b</sup>

Note: <sup>a</sup> = Study 1, <sup>b</sup> = Study 2, \* =  $p < .05$ , \*\* =  $p < .001$ , <sup>ns</sup> = not significant

### *Perceived Nepotism*

We predicted that the prominence of family ties in politics would lead people to believe that nepotism is at play (Hypothesis 1). As shown in Figure 2, Condition (coded 0 = control, 1 = prominent family ties) predicted greater perceived nepotism in Study 1,  $B = 0.17$ ,  $SE = 0.08$ ,  $z = 2.17$ ,  $p = .030$ , 95%CI: 0.016, 0.318, as well as in Study 2,  $B = 0.18$ ,  $SE = 0.07$ ,  $z = 2.43$ ,  $p = .015$ , 95%CI: 0.035, 0.323. Participants in the prominent family ties condition (Study 1:  $M = 3.78$ ,  $SD = 0.73$ ; Study 2:  $M = 3.93$ ,  $SD = 0.75$ ) perceived more nepotism than participants in the control condition (Study 1:  $M = 3.44$ ,  $SD = 0.97$ ; Study 2:  $M = 3.49$ ,  $SD = 0.93$ ). Supporting Hypothesis 1, the prominence of family ties in politics made participants more likely to believe that nepotism is at play in their nation's politics.



**Figure 3.2.** Structural equation model in Study 1 and 2.

Note: a = Standardized coefficients in Study 1, b = Standardized coefficients in Study 2, \* =  $p < .05$ , \*\* =  $p < .01$

### Political Cynicism

Supporting Hypothesis 2, an increase in perceived nepotism predicted greater political cynicism in Study 1,  $B = 0.57$ ,  $SE = 0.11$ ,  $z = 5.26$ ,  $p < .001$ , 95%CI: 0.360, 0.787, as well in Study 2,  $B = 0.64$ ,  $SE = 0.13$ ,  $z = 4.76$ ,  $p < .001$ , 95%CI: 0.377, 0.905. The indirect effect of Condition on political cynicism was significant in Study 1, 0.10,  $SE = 0.04$ ,  $z = 2.15$ ,  $p = .032$ , 95%CI: 0.008, 0.183, as well in Study 2,  $B = 0.08$ ,  $SE = 0.03$ ,  $z = 2.46$ ,  $p = 0.014$ , 95%CI: 0.017, 0.146. These indirect effects showed that the prominence of family ties indirectly increases participants' political cynicism via its relationship with perceived nepotism.

### Procedural Fairness

Supporting Hypothesis 3, an increase in political cynicism predicted reduced perceptions of procedural fairness in Study 1,  $B = -0.50$ ,  $SE = 0.09$ ,  $z = -5.82$ ,  $p < .001$ , 95%CI: -0.665, -0.330, as well in Study 2,  $B = -0.63$ ,  $SE = 0.05$ ,  $z = -12.78$ ,  $p < .001$ , 95%CI: -0.832, -0.531. The indirect effect of Condition on procedural fairness was significant in Study 1,  $B = -0.05$ ,  $SE = -2.04$ ,  $p = 0.042$ , 95%CI: -0.093, -0.002, as well in Study 2,  $B = -0.05$ ,  $SE = 0.02$ ,  $z = -2.39$ ,  $p =$

.017, 95%CI: -0.093, -0.009. This means that the prominence of family ties in politics indirectly reduces participants' perception of procedural fairness.

### *Political Participation*

In line with Hypothesis 4, a decrease in procedural fairness was associated with a decrease in political participation in both Study 1,  $B = 0.26$ ,  $SE = 0.08$ ,  $z = 3.08$ ,  $p = .002$ , 95%CI: 0.095, 0.425, and Study 2,  $B = 0.15$ ,  $SE = 0.06$ ,  $z = 2.44$ ,  $p = .030$ , 95%CI: 0.030, 0.271. However, the indirect effect of Condition on political participation was marginally significant in both Study 1,  $B = -0.01$ ,  $SE = 0.01$ ,  $z = -1.71$ ,  $p = .087$ , 95%CI: -0.027, 0.002, and Study 2,  $B = -0.01$ ,  $SE = 0.01$ ,  $z = -1.73$ ,  $p = .084$ , 95%CI: -0.021, 0.001. Thus, the prediction that the prominence of family ties in politics indirectly reduces citizens' political participation was only weakly supported.

## **Discussion**

Studies 1 and 2 showed that the prominence of family ties in politics led participants to believe that nepotism plays an important role in their nation's politics. This increase in perceived nepotism was followed by an increase in political cynicism, which signifies participants' belief that political authorities are untrustworthy. An increase in political cynicism reduced participants' perception of procedural fairness, which, in turn, reduced participants' preference for political participation.

Whereas the findings supported our hypotheses, it is important to address two potential limitations. First, the prominence of family ties in these studies was manipulated rather explicitly. For example, the explicit phrase that "John F. Kennedy chose his younger brother Robert F. Kennedy to be attorney general" may have inadvertently sent a signal to participants that this situation is reprehensible, thus stimulating them to respond negatively to the suggestion of nepotism. This makes it relevant to examine whether more subtle cues of family ties in politics would produce the same results.

## **3.2 Study 3**

In Study 3, we manipulated the prominence of family ties in politics not only explicitly (as in Studies 1 and 2), but also through a subtler, more

implicit approach. Examining the impact of the prominence of family ties in a more implicit approach is important because mere facts that politicians are tied by kinship do in itself not proof that nepotism is at play. However, the fact that family ties in politics are prominent may lead people to infer a pattern of family-based promotion. It is important to examine this in more detail because cues signaling nepotism often come in a subtle form, not explicitly referring to a kin relationship in conjunction with certain favors to family members as manipulated in the previous studies. Citizens of the U.S.A., for example, generally know that Hillary Clinton is the wife of a former president, that George W. Bush's father once was a president himself, and that Robert Kennedy was the brother of John F. Kennedy. It was the aim with the current study to examine whether people perceive nepotism by a mere collection of such knowledge, without any factual proof or suggestion of nepotism.

## Method

### *Participants*

Participants were 200 Americans recruited via Prolific-Academic (79 men, 118 women, and 3 others;  $M_{age} = 32.56$ ,  $SD_{age} = 12.45$ ).<sup>9</sup> They participated for 2 GBP (approximately 2.60 USD) compensation. The study used a between-subjects design with three conditions: *control*, *explicit nepotism* and *implicit nepotism*.

### *Procedures*

The prominence of family ties in the *explicit nepotism* condition was manipulated by presenting participants with the same text as in Studies 1 and 2 before completing the questionnaire of the study. In the *implicit nepotism* condition participants read a list of ostensibly random facts about the same politicians mentioned in the explicit condition, without mentioning the family ties of the politicians. For example, "Hillary Clinton was the first female candidate to be nominated for president by a major political party in the U.S.A.", "George W. Bush was both one of the most popular and unpopular presidents in the history of the

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<sup>9</sup> As in the previous studies, we assigned a filter for participants who completed the study unusually fast. No participants were omitted based on the filter.

U.S.A.”, and “Ivanka Trump’s real name is Ivana Marie Trump.” Participants in the *control* condition completed the questionnaire of the study without reading a text beforehand. On completion, participants were thanked, debriefed, and paid.

### Measures

Unless indicated otherwise, all responses were assessed on five-point scales ( $1 = \text{not at all}$  to  $5 = \text{very much}$ ). We used the same items as in the previous studies to measure perceived nepotism but added one new item to meet the suggested minimum number of observed variables for measuring a latent construct (Hair et al., 2014: e.g., Politics in the U.S.A. is often a family affair”;  $\alpha = .85$ ). Political cynicism (10 items:  $\alpha = .86$ ) and procedural fairness (14 items:  $\alpha = .95$ ) were assessed using the same items as in the previous studies. We revised the way we assessed political participation by following (Ajzen, 1991), in which we optimized the correspondence between the measurements of the attitude and the intention to participate in politics in the sense that they referred to the same behavioral objects (8 items: e.g., “How much do you value supporting a political candidate during an election campaign?”, “I would support a political candidate during an election”,  $\alpha = .90$ ).<sup>10</sup>

## Results

Descriptive statistics are presented in Table 3.2. As in the previous studies, we analyzed the data through structural equation modeling. We created parcels to measure political cynicism, procedural fairness, and political participation as latent constructs. Condition was dummied with the control condition treated as a point of reference for the explicit (coded 0 = control, 1 = explicit) and implicit condition (coded 0 = control, 1 = implicit). The proposed model (see Figure 3.3) had acceptable fit indices (CFI = 0.98, RMSEA = 0.04, SRMR = 0.06).

### Perceived Nepotism

Consistent with the previous studies, there was support for Hypothesis 1. Participants in the explicit nepotism condition ( $M = 3.62$ ,  $SD = 0.94$ )

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<sup>10</sup> The response format for the attitude part of the political participation was 1 = very negative – 5 = very positive.

perceived more nepotism than participants in the control condition ( $M = 3.01$ ,  $SD = 0.92$ ),  $B = 0.49$ ,  $SE = 0.14$ ,  $z = 3.47$ ,  $p = .001$ , 95%CI: 0.215, 0.772. Similarly, participants in the implicit nepotism condition ( $M = 3.52$ ,  $SD = 0.94$ ) also perceived higher nepotism than participants in the control condition,  $B = 0.41$ ,  $SE = 0.14$ ,  $z = 2.91$ ,  $p = .004$ , 95%CI: 0.134, 0.684. Perceived nepotism in the explicit nepotism condition was not significantly different from perceived nepotism in the implicit nepotism condition,  $B = 0.08$ ,  $SE = 0.14$ ,  $z = 0.61$ , 95%CI: -0.186, 0.355. This means that a subtler, more implicit cue of the prominence of family ties in politics produces similar results as a more explicit cue.

**Table 3.2** Means, standard deviation, and correlations in Studies 3 and 4

		<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3	4
1	Perceived nepotism	3.38 <sup>a</sup>	0.99 <sup>a</sup>				
		3.76 <sup>b</sup>	0.88 <sup>b</sup>				
2	Political cynicism	3.87 <sup>a</sup>	0.66 <sup>a</sup>	.34** <sup>a</sup>			
		3.72 <sup>b</sup>	0.79 <sup>b</sup>	.42** <sup>b</sup>			
3	Procedural fairness	2.43 <sup>a</sup>	0.77 <sup>a</sup>	-.08 <sup>ns</sup> <sup>a</sup>	-.49** <sup>a</sup>		
		2.49 <sup>b</sup>	0.64 <sup>b</sup>	-.15 <sup>b</sup>	-.48** <sup>b</sup>		
4	Political participation	3.11 <sup>a</sup>	0.98 <sup>a</sup>	.07 <sup>ns</sup> <sup>a</sup>	-.08 <sup>ns</sup> <sup>a</sup>	.31** <sup>a</sup>	
		2.76 <sup>b</sup>	0.80 <sup>b</sup>	-.06 <sup>ns</sup> <sup>b</sup>	-.23* <sup>b</sup>	.39** <sup>b</sup>	
5	Political participation	2.43 <sup>b</sup>	1.13 <sup>b</sup>	.03 <sup>ns</sup> <sup>b</sup>	.13 <sup>ns</sup> <sup>b</sup>	-.18* <sup>b</sup>	.20* <sup>b</sup>

Note: <sup>a</sup> = Study 3, <sup>b</sup> = Study 4, \* =  $p < .05$ , \*\* =  $p < .001$ , <sup>ns</sup> = not significant

### Political Cynicism

There was also support for Hypothesis 2. A higher perception of nepotism predicted greater political cynicism,  $B = 0.30$ ,  $SE = 0.06$ ,  $z = 4.67$ ,  $p < .001$ , 95%CI: 0.175, 0.429. As in the previous studies, the indirect effect of the explicit nepotism condition on political cynicism via perceived nepotism was significant,  $B = 0.15$ ,  $SE = 0.05$ ,  $z = 2.94$ ,  $p = .003$ , 95%CI: 0.050, 0.249. Similarly, the indirect effect of the implicit nepotism condition was also significant,  $B = 0.12$ ,  $SE = 0.04$ ,  $z = 2.58$ ,  $p = .010$ , 95%CI: 0.030, 0.218. This means that increased perceptions of nepotism due to the explicit or implicit presentation of the prominence of family ties in politics made participants more politically cynical.

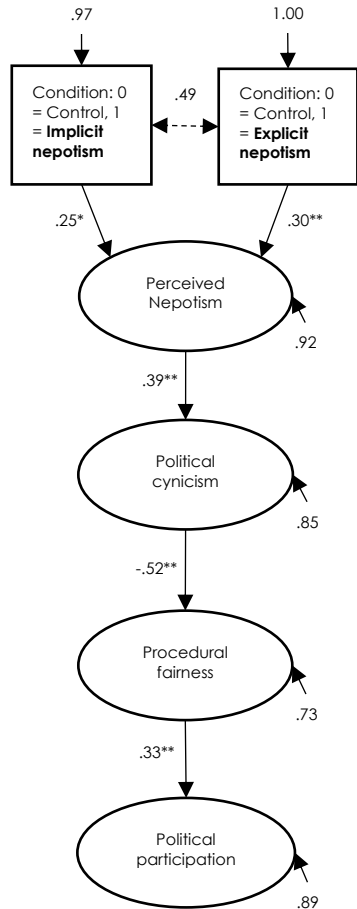


*Procedural fairness*

A higher political cynicism was associated with lower perceptions of procedural fairness,  $B = -0.70$ ,  $SE = 0.10$ ,  $z = -6.96$ ,  $p < .001$ , 95% CI: -0.893, -0.501, supporting Hypothesis 3. The indirect effect of the explicit nepotism condition on procedural fairness via perceived nepotism and political cynicism was significant,  $B = -0.10$ ,  $SE = 0.04$ ,  $z = -2.77$ ,  $p = .006$ , 95% CI: -0.178, -0.030. Similarly, the indirect effect of the implicit nepotism condition was also significant,  $B = -0.09$ ,  $SE = 0.03$ ,  $z = -2.46$ ,  $p = .014$ , 95% CI: -0.155, -0.017. These results suggest that both the explicit and implicit nepotism condition indirectly reduced participants' perceptions of procedural fairness.

*Political participation*

Supporting Hypothesis 4, political participation was predicted by the perception of procedural fairness,  $B = 0.40$ ,  $SE = 0.09$ ,  $z = 4.56$ ,  $p < .001$ , 95% CI: 0.229, 0.573. The indirect effect of the explicit nepotism condition on political participation was also significant,  $B = -0.04$ ,  $SE = 0.02$ ,  $z = -2.38$ ,  $p = -0.076$ ,  $-0.007$ . Similarly, the indirect effect of the implicit nepotism condition on political participation was also significant,



**Figure 3.3.** Structural equation model in Study 3

Note: Coefficients are standardized. \* =  $p < .05$ , \*\* =  $p < .01$

$B = -0.03$ ,  $SE = 0.02$ ,  $z = -2.18$ ,  $p = .030$ , 95% CI:  $-0.066$ ,  $-0.003$ . These results provided support for the notion that the prominence of family ties in politics affected people's political participation via its relationships with perceived nepotism, political cynicism and the perception of procedural fairness.

## Discussion

The results of Study 3 replicate those of the previous studies by showing that the prominence of family ties in politics and the subsequent perception of nepotism can have a detrimental impact on participants' political attitudes and behaviors. This study also showed that exposure to random facts about political figures who are known to have family ties to other politicians (i.e., implicit nepotism) has a similar effect as exposure to explicit information about family ties among politicians. Overall, Study 3 provided stronger evidence for the detrimental consequences of the prominence of family ties in politics.

### 3.3 Study 4

The previous studies showed clear evidence of the negative impact of perceived nepotism on political attitudes and participation. It should be noted, however, that these studies were conducted among a Western sample. Nepotism in Western societies may be less prevalent, and considered less acceptable, than nepotism in some other societies. The aim of the fourth study was to investigate how awareness of the prominence of family ties in politics affects the political attitudes and behaviors of people in a society in which nepotism is so prevalent that it is considered normal. Therefore, Study 4 was conducted in the Republic of Indonesia.

Prioritizing family members, relatives, and friends is a deeply-rooted cultural value in Latin America, the Arab world, and East Asia, including Indonesia (Khatri & Tsang, 2003; Wated & Sanchez, 2015). Family ties in Indonesian politics are so prevalent that it is not uncommon for a single family to occupy various political positions in any political term (Robertson-Snape, 1999; Syatiri, 2013). Moreover, a survey among high-school students showed that more than half of Indonesian students find it acceptable for public officials to give preference to family and friends when hiring people for public office

(Ainley et al., 2012). Although other research among a more general and mature population showed that the majority of Indonesians regarded nepotism as unethical or even criminal, still about 43 percent viewed it normal or necessary in certain circumstances (Indonesia Corruption Watch, 2017). These surveys suggest that Indonesians' attitude toward the prominence of family ties in politics may not be as negative as that of people from Western societies, including the U.S.A. This makes Indonesia a suitable context for a (more conservative) test of the proposition that the prominence of family ties in politics can negatively affect people's political attitudes and behaviors.

A second aim with Study 4 was to examine in more detail how nepotism impacts political protest. In the previous studies, we focused on a general, "supportive" form of political participation (e.g., supporting a political candidate, attending a political debate). However, if nepotism is deemed unethical, morally wrong, and unjust, nepotism in politics may also motivate people to retaliate by engaging in political protest, which is known to be an effective way to drive changes in politics (Madestam et al., 2013). Research has shown that unfair procedural treatment can increase negative affect (e.g., anger) and the motivation to protest (Vermunt et al., 1996). We thus hypothesized that a perception of low procedural fairness due to the prominence of family ties in politics can lead people to endorse political protest (Hypothesis 5).

## Method

### *Participants*

Participants were 200 Indonesians from the city of Medan, in the Indonesian province of Sumatera Utara. They were approached in public places (e.g., main streets, shopping centers, restaurants) and participated for a lunch meal worth approximately 2 Euro as compensation. Thirty-eight participants did not complete the questionnaire, and their data were not included in further analysis. The final sample included in the analysis consisted of 162 participants (80 men, 82 women;  $M_{age} = 31.98$ ,  $SD_{age} = 10.44$ ). The study used a between-subjects design in which participants were randomly assigned to either the *control* or *prominent family ties* condition.

### Procedure

After obtaining consent, participants in the *prominent family ties* condition read a description before completing the study's questionnaire. The description was ostensibly taken from a reputable national newspaper. The text described the prominence of families in politics throughout Indonesia, mentioning names and kinships between politicians. At the end of the description one of the candidates who was competing for the vice-governor position in the province of Sumatera Utara was mentioned. This person also has kinship ties with influential politicians in the province. Participants in the *control* condition completed the questionnaire without first reading a text. On completion, participants were thanked, debriefed, and given their compensation.

### Measures

Unless otherwise indicated, all measures were made using 5-points scales (1 = *not at all* to 5 = *very much*). We measured perceived nepotism ( $\alpha = .73$ ), political cynicism ( $\alpha = .89$ ), and procedural fairness ( $\alpha = .94$ ) using the same items as in Study 3. To measure political participation, we used the same items as in Study 3 but added two new items ("How much do you value vote in election?", and "I will vote in the upcoming election";  $\alpha = .88$ ). We measured political protest with three items that asked participants to indicate the extent to which they were likely to engage in certain actions (e.g., "Sign a petition as means of protest", "Participate in peaceful demonstration";  $\alpha = .84$ ).

## Results

Descriptive statistics are presented in Table 3.2. We analyzed the data through structural equation modeling. We created parcels to measure political cynicism, procedural fairness, and political participation as latent constructs. The model is described in Figure 3.4 and had acceptable fit indices, CFI = .95, RMSEA = .07, SRMR = .07.

### Perceived Nepotism

As shown in Figure 3.4, consistent with the previous studies, Condition (coded 0 = control, 1 = prominent family ties) had a significant effect on perceived nepotism,  $B = 0.22$ ,  $SE = 0.11$ ,  $z = 2.08$ ,  $p = .037$ , 95% CI: 0.13, 0.427. Supporting Hypothesis 1, participants in the prominent

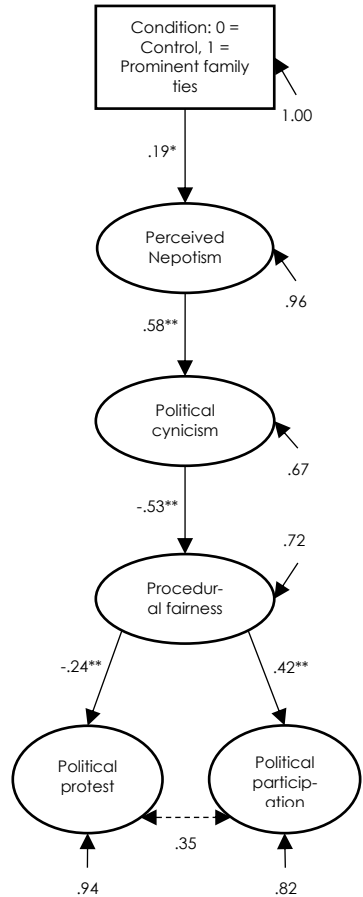
family ties condition perceived more nepotism ( $M = 3.92$ ,  $SD = 0.85$ ) than participants in the control condition ( $M = 3.60$ ,  $SD = 0.88$ ).

*Political cynicism*

Supporting Hypothesis 2, higher perceived nepotism predicted higher political cynicism,  $B = 0.76$ ,  $SE = 0.16$ ,  $z = 4.84$ ,  $p < .001$ , 95% CI: 0.452, 1.068. The indirect effect of the Condition on political cynicism was also significant,  $B = 0.17$ ,  $SE = 0.08$ ,  $z = 2.10$ ,  $p = .036$ , 95% CI: 0.011, 0.323. Thus, perceived nepotism due to the prominence of family ties in politics indirectly affected political cynicism.

*Procedural fairness*

Consistent with Hypothesis 3, political cynicism predicted the perception of procedural fairness,  $B = -0.38$ ,  $SE = 0.06$ ,  $z = -6.60$ ,  $p < .001$ , 95% CI: -0.487, -0.264. The indirect effect of Condition on perceived procedural fairness was also significant,  $B = -0.06$ ,  $SE = 0.03$ ,  $z = -2.02$ ,  $p = .044$ , 95% CI: -0.124, -0.002. This supports the notion that the prominence of family ties in politics can indirectly (via perceived nepotism and political cynicism) reduce people's perception of procedural fairness.



**Figure 3.4.** Structural equation model in Study 4

Note: Coefficients are standardized.  $*$  =  $p < .05$ ,  $**$  =  $p < .01$

### *Political Participation and Protest*

In line with Hypothesis 4, procedural fairness was associated with the motivation for political participation,  $B = 0.64$ ,  $SE = 0.12$ ,  $z = 5.10$ ,  $p < .001$ , 95% CI: 0.393, .884. Specifically, lower procedural fairness was associated with more political protest,  $B = -0.47$ ,  $SE = 0.18$ ,  $z = -2.72$ ,  $p = .006$ , 95% CI: -0.836, -0.136. However, the indirect effect of Condition on political participation was only marginally-significant,  $B = -0.04$ ,  $SE = 0.02$ ,  $z = -1.89$ ,  $p = .058$ , 95% CI: -0.082, 0.001. The indirect effect of Condition on political protest was not significant,  $B = 0.03$ ,  $SE = 0.02$ ,  $z = 1.63$ ,  $p = .102$ , 95% CI: -0.006, 0.067. These results provide only weak support for the notion that the prominence of family ties in politics reduces political participation and increases political protest (Hypothesis 5).

## **Discussion**

The salience of family ties in politics led Indonesian participants in Study 4 to have firmer beliefs that nepotism plays an intricate part in their nation's politics. The perception of nepotism increased political cynicism, and political cynicism made participants more likely to think that politicians were treating them in procedurally unjust ways. Finally, procedural fairness affected participants' preferences for political participation and political protest, such that lower levels of procedural fairness were associated with lower levels of political participation and higher levels of political protest. These findings are important because they show that the prominence of family ties in politics can have a detrimental impact on people's political attitudes and behaviors, even in a society where nepotism is considered relatively normal.

## **3.4 General Discussion**

In the current research we examined how the prominence of family ties in politics shapes people's perceptions of nepotism, as well as the impact of these perceptions on political attitudes and behaviors. Four studies consistently showed that: (1) The prominence of family ties in politics increases people's belief that nepotism plays an intricate part in their nation's politics, (2) the perception of nepotism makes people more politically cynical, (3) political cynicism due to nepotism shapes

people's perception that they are being treated in procedurally unfair ways, and (4) a lack of procedural fairness reduces people's preference for political participation but increases their preference for political protest. All in all, the present research suggests that the prominence of family ties and the perception of nepotism associated with it can be detrimental in the political arena.

The findings of the current research are consistent with previous work on nepotism in the context of organizations. For example, research by Burhan and colleagues (see Chapter 2) showed that employees tend to infer nepotism merely on the basis of family ties, without taking competence or qualification into account. Moreover, Spranger and colleagues (2012) found that a higher density of family ties in organizations correlated with a higher perception of nepotism by employees who do not have family ties within the organization. The findings from the current research are important because they show that information about a familial relationship is sufficient to trigger a sequence of inferences and actions (or lack thereof), even in the explicit absence of any evidence supporting the abuse of this familial link in the form of favoritism.

It is important to note that the prominence of family ties in politics does not necessarily mean that nepotism is at play. For instance, it has been argued that children can learn and develop interests in their parents' occupation in early stages of their lives (Jones et al., 2008). This means that children of politicians are sometimes more motivated to pursue and successfully attain political power than others. The problem, however, lies in the fact that observers still infer nepotism in such cases, because observers rely primarily on information about kinship. This makes the management of perceptions of nepotism a challenge. For instance, transparent information about the competence and qualification of politicians with family ties would not be sufficient to reduce suspicions of nepotism. Another plausible approach would be to communicate and explicitly endorse transparent electoral procedures, which is known to promote people's acceptance of an election outcome (Nadeau & Blais, 1993). However, the effectiveness of this approach to alleviate people's suspicion of nepotism in politics is still an empirical question that needs to be tested in future work.

The current research corroborates the relational model of authority which emphasizes the importance of authorities' trustworthiness as a determinant of how people perceive the enforcement of procedural fairness (Lind & Tyler, 1988; Tyler, 1994; Tyler & Lind, 1992). Specifically, political cynicism or the extent to which political authorities are seen as distrustful, immoral, dishonest, incompetent, and self-interested shapes how people evaluate the fairness of the procedures by which their political authorities treat them. The relational model of authority also predicts that the enforcement of procedural fairness determines people's attitudes and behaviors toward their authorities. In line with this notion, we found that participants who felt they were being treated in procedurally unfair ways by their authorities showed less signs of political participation and stronger intentions towards political protest.

There is a general assumption that political cynicism is detrimental to political participation (Erber & Lau, 1990; Fu et al., 2011; Pinkleton & Weintraub Austin, 2004). However, some researchers have found little support for this notion (De Vreese & Semetko, 2002; Leshner & Thorson, 2000; Vreese, 2005). In the present research, political cynicism per se was not enough to make participants more politically apathetic. However, since political cynicism led to the expectation of being treated in procedurally unfair ways, political cynicism indirectly increased political apathy and protest via its relationship with procedural fairness.

Prioritizing the interests of one's family is more common in certain non-Western societies than in Western societies (Trask, 2010). If nepotism is considered a realization of family prioritization, people from non-Western cultures should be more likely to tolerate nepotism (Wated & Sanchez, 2015). Contrary to this reasoning, the results of Study 4 showed that high perceived nepotism was associated with more negative political attitudes among Indonesian participants. This may have happened because prioritizing one's family is a social norm for most non-Westerners. For this reason, it becomes natural for them to think that the prominence of family ties in politics is a result of political elites' prioritization of their familial interests rather than the public's.

Whether they come from an influential family or not, presidents, governors, or parliament members in democratic societies are elected to



their offices. This means that the prominence of family ties in politics can at least partly be attributed to the fact that some voters support politicians who have family ties to other politicians. If people view the prominence of family ties in politics as nepotism, and nepotism is considered undesirable, then what makes people vote for these politicians with family ties? One possibility is that people believe that a family member of a successful politician would most likely make a good politician too. This type of thinking is reflected in expressions such as “like father, like son”, or “An apple does not fall far from its tree”. Future research should attend to the possible positive associations to nepotism, as they may explain why people sometimes support the appointment of related politicians, despite the negative connotation attached to it.