

[ADRN Issue Briefing]

Quo Vadis Indonesian Democracy? A Closer Look at Dynastic Politics

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Re-emergence of Dynastic Politics in Indonesia

While being recognized as a “reluctant global statesman” (Wee 2022), President Joko Widodo is known for his pace in advancing Indonesia’s infrastructure development and his popularity ratings have been high. However, the stability of Indonesian democracy recently faces a threat from the growing symptom of political dynasties, a recurring political feature in Southeast Asia including Indonesia.

Political dynasty in Indonesia refers to the phenomenon where political power or political positions are passed down from generation to generation within one family or lineage. Establishing a political dynasty is often considered a political strategy to gain and maintain power. By using family power and influence, politicians can build strong support networks. In theory, political dynasty has both positive and negative connotations. Positive connotations can occur if the generation holding power is proven competent; however, this may happen when the institutional structure, for instance, a political party, is weak. On the other hand, negative connotations arise when the dynastic system is used to maintain power within a family without paying attention to leadership quality. Nevertheless, the case in Indonesia involving President Jokowi’s son in the 2024 election as a Vice President candidate has yielded more negative responses.

Several fundamental variables could lead to the establishment of political dynasties. One of these reasons is the desire for personal or family power. Furthermore, there are structured collectives formed by mutual consensus and a feeling of cohesion, leading to the emergence of group leaders and participants. This is made possible by a multi-party democratic system. Moreover, the collaboration between leaders and businesses requires certain conditions to combine the power of financial resources with the power of political personalities. Ultimately, there is a propensity to “assign onuses” between the government and influential individuals with money, which often results in corruption.

Political dynasties in Indonesia are often a source of criticism because they can hinder meritocracy, where leaders are selected based on qualifications and achievements, not family relationships. In Indonesia, political dynasties and political oligarchy potentially obstruct the renewal of political leadership. This environment concentrates power within families, limiting opportunities for other parties and undermining bureaucracy and government accountability due to corruption and misconduct.

Despite the intense debate and criticism, political dynasties have increasingly been recognized in Indonesia since the post-Soeharto period (Aspinall and As’ad 2016). The political legacy of the first President Sukarno has been passed down to his daughter, Megawati Sukarnoputri, who became

the fifth President and is currently the leader of the incumbent party. Sukarno's granddaughter, Puan Maharani, serves as the speaker of the House of Representatives (DPR). Similarly, descendants of other former presidents, Soeharto and Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono, have also been involved in political activities, building upon their ancestors' legacies.

Political dynasties can emerge in various political systems, including autocratic and monarchical ones, where power is often inherited within royal families (Ved 2013). This phenomenon is not exclusive to Indonesia; it is prevalent in Western civilizations and cultures. Similar trends are observable in European nations and, notably, in American politics (Hess 2016). In addition, political dynasties, also known in South and Southeast Asia, play a part in Indonesia and the Philippines' politics (Teng 2023).

In Indonesia, dynastic politics remains a pervasive issue, with family members of regional leaders occupying positions of power at various levels. Several tribes in Indonesia have a tradition of dynastic leadership, where certain families or lineages hold leadership. Leadership or certain positions can be inherited based on genealogical ties.

Political dynasties are not limited to the central level of national government. This phenomenon also extends to the regional level, where regional heads, governors or regents are often filled by family members closely related to the previous official.

Thanks to the massive use of the internet, the public has become more aware that the practice has become somewhat a "standard feature" since the political reforms in 1998, particularly with the release of Law Number 32 of 2004 concerning Regional Government, which regulates the first regional elections for the Governor, Deputy Governor, Regent, and Mayor have been conducted (Simandjuntak 2021). Notable instances include Ratu Atut Chosiyah in Banten Province, Muhammad Ma'mun Ibnu Fuad in Bangkalan, East Java Province, and Mohammad Yasin Limpo in South Sulawesi, where family members assumed vital positions (Simandjuntak 2021; Ulum 2013; Kenawas 2015; *Vice* June/28/2018). The influence of dynastic politics extends to legislative elections, limiting opportunities for other parties to secure regional representative positions.

During Jokowi's presidency, the recent involvement of his sons, Kaesang Pangarep- recently appointed as the Chief of the Partai Solidaritas Indonesia (PSI), and Gibran Rakabuming Raka, drew attention to the issue (*The Jakarta Post* February/06/2023; Wahyu 2023). Kaesang's sudden rise in the political party, added to Gibran's endorsement as a vice-presidential running mate for the 2024 election, raised concerns among intellectuals and activists supporting a fair democratization and an independent court system (Suhenda 2023; *The Jakarta Post* n.d.).

Politicization of the Constitutional Court

Accessing the Constitutional Court portal led to the discovery of an insightful article shedding light on this issue. The most egregious feature of the notorious case involving the first son of the Indonesian President was the blatant politicization of the legal system in the Constitutional Court, established in 2003. Historically, within the context of Indonesia's "Reformasi", the Constitutional Court of Indonesia was founded to uphold the supremacy of the 1945 Constitution. It is a judicial body responsible for organizing court procedures to ensure law enforcement and order. The Constitutional Court of Indonesia has four powers and one duty as stipulated by Article 24C (1) and (2) of the 1945 Constitution. Four authorities of the Constitutional Court of Indonesia are conducting examinations

at the first and appellate levels. The Court's rulings are conclusive in reviewing the legislation for its conformity with the Constitution, resolving conflicts regarding the jurisdiction of state institutions established by the Constitution, determining the dissolution of political parties, and settling disputes arising from the outcome of general elections. The primary responsibility of the Constitutional Court of Indonesia is to provide decisions based on the Constitution, taking precedence over the opinions of the House of People's Representatives in cases involving allegations of misconduct by the President and/or Vice President (Butt 2018). Jimly Asshiddiqie claims that the Indonesian Constitutional Court is responsible for enforcing the four powers mentioned earlier and one responsibility stated in the Constitution.

Following the Constitutional Court's approval of lawsuit No. 90/PUU-XXI/2023 challenging Article 169 letter q of Law No. 7 of 2017 concerning General Elections, Gibran participated in the General Election for President and Vice President. The amended provision reads: "Enter into or hold regional head elections or be at least 40 years old (forty years) after that" (Iqrimah 2023).

Gibran's potential to run as a vice presidential candidate in the 2024 presidential election is widely perceived to have been facilitated by the decision rendered by the Constitutional Court. Gibran was widely speculated to be a vice presidential candidate before the Constitutional Court's decision. Gibran was formally declared a vice presidential candidate on the evening of October 22, 2023, after the consensus reached by the general chairmen of the political parties affiliated with the Advanced Indonesia Coalition (KIM) in Jakarta.

The Honorary Council of the Constitutional Court (MKMK) convened a preliminary examination hearing to scrutinize complaints of purported infringements of the code of ethics and behavioral norms for constitutional judges. The hearing was conducted in two parts, with the first session including the Indonesian Advocate Movement (Perekat Nusantara) and the Independent Election Monitoring Committee (KIPP). Perekat Nusantara and KIPP disclosed that Chief Constitutional Court Justice Anwar Usman had a familial connection with the President of the Republic of Indonesia. The Petitioner in Case Number 90/PUU-XXI/2023 sought to guarantee Gibran Rakabuming Raka's eligibility to compete in the presidential/vice-presidential election. The Reporting Party alleges that the Reported Party has breached the standards of independence, impartiality, and integrity as outlined in the code of ethics governing the conduct of constitutional judges. The Independent Election Monitoring Committee (KIPP) has asserted that the Reported Party had vested interests and ethical responsibilities about the election, and there were compelling accusations of interference in the poll organizers and administration (Salam 2023). During the second session, the MKMK received evidence from many individuals and organisations, such as the Election Concern Advocacy Team, Legal Aid Institute, "Barisan Volunteers on the Road to Change", Roynal Christian Pasaribu, R. Jourda, and Marthen Y. Siwab (Pujianti 2023).

The dissatisfaction with using the Constitutional Court as a platform for unfair politics led to responses such as the "Juanda Declaration 2023: Reform Returns to Zero Point." (Priyasmoro 2023) This declaration, endorsed by 326 prominent Indonesian personalities, including academics, religious leaders, former ministers, and cultural icons, voiced concerns about the prevalence of political dynasties during the Jokowi period. These individuals represent various fields, encompassing education, human rights, the environment, and health, highlighting the widespread discontent with Indonesian politics.

Conclusion

Political dynasties will foster political oligarchies and a climate that could be more conducive to efforts to regenerate political leadership, where power is only held or controlled by people who are related or come from the same family, without providing opportunities for other parties to participate. Also, dynastic politics will harm bureaucratic and government accountability because they tend to be greedy and prone to corruption and corruption practices.

The politicization of the Constitutional Court for the acquirement of power is deemed to be opposed by Indonesian society. The historical need for change primarily drove the establishment of the Constitutional Court. In a democratic nation, the judicial system upholds the Constitution's integrity, ensuring law enforcement authorities' independent and impartial conduct. Before the 2024 General Election, the state of national political practice is becoming more concerning, as shown in the present situation. On the one hand, there are indications of legal manipulation that disregards conscientious politics. Conversely, there are signs of a profound dilemma over principles and moral standards inside society and governmental officials.

Jokowi is Indonesia's first president, not from a political or military elite family. This was regarded as a positive sign of the country's democratization. Unfortunately, his family is now considered to be reversing Indonesia's democratic course. ■

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