



Oligarchy and Political Dynasties' Impact on Democracy

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Abstract: This study aims to analyze the phenomenon of oligarchy in Indonesian politics, focusing on how political power is concentrated in the hands of economic elites and the resulting implications for democratic governance. It specifically explores the role of political parties and government policy under President Jokowi in reinforcing oligarchic structures. A descriptive qualitative method with a literature review approach is employed in this study. Data is gathered from academic publications, news reports, books, and legal documents to critically assess the patterns and impact of oligarchic dominance in Indonesia's political system. Political parties in Indonesia often operate as tools for oligarchs to maintain their power and influence. Although President Joko Widodo was initially viewed as a reformist leader, his administration has become increasingly aligned with oligarchic interests. Legislative changes, including the revision of the Corruption Eradication Commission Law (KPK Law), the enactment of the Omnibus Law on Job Creation, and the amendments to the Criminal Code (KUHP), have provided legal protection and advantages to political and economic elites. To reduce the influence of oligarchy in politics and ensure that power genuinely lies with the people, Indonesia must adopt several reform strategies. These include strengthening democratic institutions, enhancing transparency in political financing, promoting accountability in governance, and increasing meaningful public participation. The future of democracy in Indonesia will depend on the country's ability to restrain oligarchic power and uphold democratic values rooted in public accountability and civic engagement.

Keywords: Democracy, Oligarchy, Indonesian Politics

Introduction

Oligarchy is a form of governance where power is held by a select group, typically composed of individuals with significant influence, such as wealth, education, or close ties to the government and military. Although not an official system of government, oligarchy is a method employed by elite groups to pursue personal interests. Wealth becomes a key element in oligarchy. These groups strive to reach the pinnacle of power through various means to expand their wealth and influence. As a result, the rights of ordinary citizens are often ignored or even disregarded.

When discussing oligarchy in Indonesia, it is evident that this phenomenon is not new but has been an integral part of the country's political landscape for years. Oligarchy is not just a structure that upholds the power of a few elites but also a system that deepens social inequality and injustice. In the context of democracy, oligarchy often conflicts with the fundamental principle of prioritizing public participation in decision-making. Instead, oligarchy creates a situation where important decisions in the country are determined by the interests of a few individuals who possess power and wealth.

When Mahfud MD speaks about the relationship between oligarchy and transactions, he emphasizes how political transactions, whether material or immaterial, become a means for oligarchs to strengthen their grip on power. These transactions can take the form of political support, financial assistance, or other types of exchanges that benefit both parties (Media, 2021). However, the impact of these transactions is the neglect of broader public interests, as decisions often reflect the interests of a few elites rather than the needs of the general population.

In Joko Widodo's administration, which is often seen as the beginning of a new era in Indonesian politics, many initial hopes were placed on improving the democratic system and reducing the influence of oligarchy. Jokowi, with his background as a businessman and mayor, brought hope that he would introduce a new perspective more aligned with the people's interests. However, over time, increasing criticism has emerged regarding his policies. One of the main criticisms is that although Jokowi came from outside the traditional political elite, he eventually became entangled in the same oligarchic network he sought to reform.

Ultimately, the greatest challenge for democracy in Indonesia is how to dismantle this oligarchic grip and ensure that power truly returns to the hands of the people. This is not an easy task, given how deeply entrenched oligarchy has become in the country's political and economic systems. However, without serious efforts to address this issue, democracy in Indonesia will continue to be overshadowed by oligarchy, and the hope of achieving justice and prosperity for all citizens will remain a distant dream.

Criticism of Jokowi's administration highlights the difficulty of changing long-standing power structures. Despite changes in leadership style, the deeper power structures remain difficult to alter. The oligarchy in Indonesia has demonstrated an extraordinary ability to adapt to political changes, maintaining their power even as new governments attempt to bring about change. The reliance on political and business support from these oligarchs underscores how challenging it is for a leader to truly be free from their influence.

At this point, it is crucial to question what can be done to reduce the influence of oligarchy in Indonesia. Is it through broader political reforms, increased transparency in decision-making, or efforts to strengthen public participation in politics? These are all questions that must be answered if Indonesia is to achieve a true democracy, where power genuinely resides in the hands of the people, not a select few elites.

Methodology

This research employs a descriptive qualitative method with a literature study approach to analyze the phenomenon of oligarchic practices within the context of Indonesian politics. The descriptive qualitative approach was chosen as it allows the researcher to provide an in-depth and detailed understanding of the dynamics of oligarchy, focusing on how political and economic power is concentrated in the hands of a small group of elites. Through a literature review, this study explores various academic sources and secondary data to identify patterns of power, political practices, and their impact on democracy in Indonesia. This method is particularly relevant in uncovering the nuances and

complexities of oligarchic practices that may not be captured through quantitative approaches.

According to Creswell (2013), the descriptive qualitative approach is highly effective in social research as it allows for deep exploration of complex social phenomena. Thus, the use of descriptive qualitative methods in this research is expected to provide a comprehensive insight into the practices of oligarchy in Indonesian politics.

Result and Discussion

Oligarchy as a Power Structure

The influence of oligarchy on democracy in Indonesia has reached a concerning level, given that democracy is supposed to be a system of government by, for, and of the people. In this context, democracy without public participation is an anomaly or even a contradiction, as power should reside with the people, not with officials or political oligarchs. The presence of oligarchy in the political process can diminish citizens' rights to participate and negatively impact societal welfare in the future. Oligarchy in Indonesia can be defined as a power structure in which important decisions in the state are dominated by a small elite group that possesses wealth and influence.

Jeffrey A. Winters, a scholar who has extensively studied oligarchy, argues that oligarchy is not just about wealth but also about how that wealth is translated into political power. In Indonesia, oligarchy is often closely intertwined with political patronage networks, allowing the elite to maintain their influence even amidst changes in political leadership.

"Wealth defense" is a concept introduced by Jeffrey A. Winters to explain how oligarchs protect their wealth and influence the political system. In this context, wealth defense refers to various strategies and mechanisms used by extremely wealthy individuals or groups to shield their assets from redistribution, high taxes, and policy changes that could threaten their wealth (Supriatma et al, 2020).

According to Winters, there are several key methods used for wealth defense; oligarchs often use their wealth to influence politics and public policy. They may fund political campaigns, support candidates who are favorable to their interests, or even suppress policy changes that could harm them.

In Indonesia, the influence of oligarchy is strongly evident in the legislative and executive processes. Additionally, they leverage the legal system to protect their wealth by hiring the best lawyers, influencing the drafting of laws that favor them, or finding legal loopholes to avoid taxes. The influence of oligarchy is also reflected in privatization and deregulation policies, which allow the elite to accumulate more wealth with minimal government intervention, often through their influence on policymakers.

One key element of wealth defense is the use of "dark money," which is difficult to trace and lacks transparency. This money is often used to fund political campaigns or lobby groups that operate under the radar to influence policy. Furthermore, Winters categorizes oligarchies into several types:

1. **Warlord Oligarchy** Warlord oligarchies emerge through direct violence or coercive power. These oligarchs possess armies and weapons that can be used to seize resources from other oligarchs directly. Thus, wealth accumulation in warlord oligarchies occurs by defeating other warlords. Consequently, the threat to wealth is more dominant than income. This type of oligarchy existed in medieval Europe and among feuding families in the Appalachian Mountains.
2. **Collective Ruling Oligarchy** Collective ruling oligarchies hold power collectively through institutions with established norms or rules. Because power is exercised collectively, the rulers in this type of oligarchy work together to protect their wealth. One way they do this is by leading a community. This type of oligarchy is usually found in mafia commissions, was practiced by the Greek-Roman government, and is even found in the political practices in Indonesia after Soeharto's fall.
3. **Sultanistic Oligarchy** Sultanistic oligarchies arise from a monopoly on the means of coercion. Additionally, this oligarchy emerges when there is a relationship between the oligarchs and the ruling oligarchy. This type of oligarchy grants authority and violence only to the main ruler, while other oligarchs depend on this main ruler to protect their wealth. This type of oligarchy occurred in Indonesia during President Soeharto's leadership. In the context of the New Order, Soeharto was the super oligarch or supreme oligarch, while within his circle, Soeharto was among the smaller oligarchs. After the Reform era began, these smaller oligarchs collaborated to protect their wealth and maintain control over power at both the central and regional levels.
4. **Civil Oligarchy** Civil oligarchies do not wield direct power and are not armed. Civil oligarchies only exercise their power through non-personal institutions and strong legal frameworks.

Oligarchy has become a dominant factor in influencing the political economy in Indonesia. This phenomenon first emerged during the New Order era under Soeharto's leadership and has continued even after his downfall. Initially, oligarchy took the form of a sultanistic oligarchy, but it later evolved into a collective ruling oligarchy after Soeharto's regime collapsed. Oligarchy did not disappear; instead, it became more entrenched, demonstrating how oligarchic power continues to influence contemporary Indonesia. Oligarchy has transformed by adapting to the political context in Indonesia, driven by neoliberalism.

Thus, oligarchs are primarily focused on protecting their income by avoiding the state's reach. Oligarchy is not always democratic and does not always involve elections. As seen in the United States and India, oligarchies can be procedurally democratic, while in Malaysia and Singapore, they are more authoritarian (Hadiz, 2011). Oligarchy within democratic institutions, such as political parties in Indonesia, is driven by several key factors: First, the party's central figure, often the chairman, can create oligarchic tendencies. This figure is appointed based on history and emotional ties, leading to excessive loyalty, which strengthens their power and that of their close associates. While this may provide stability, it also creates a centralistic structure, reducing broader participation from

members. Second, parties often rely on financial support from powerful figures. This is particularly severe in parties that are not oriented around values or ideology.

This situation leads to pragmatism, where financial strength determines political influence, creating networks that prioritize material interests. Third, the lack of institutionalization within parties leads to inconsistency in applying rules. Deliberations often become mere formalities, with decisions more frequently made unilaterally by the elite. Fourth, regulations related to political parties and elections also create loopholes for the formation of oligarchy. The lack of clarity in party cadre development and financial arrangements contributes to members' dependence on the elite, while electoral thresholds create coalition dynamics that benefit the elite's power.

Additionally, the lack of critical engagement from civil society leaves parties unmotivated to reform. Overall, these factors contribute to the strengthening of oligarchy within political parties, hindering the development of a healthy democracy. Moreover, the persistence of oligarchic structures in Indonesia raises deep questions about the future of democracy in the country.

If power continues to be concentrated in the hands of a few elites who possess wealth and influence, how can ordinary citizens truly participate in the political process? Democracy without public participation is not true democracy, but rather an illusion that conceals the reality that power is actually in the hands of a few.

Oligarchy and Joko Widodo's Government

When Joko Widodo first emerged as a political figure, many hoped he would bring significant change to Indonesia's political landscape. As someone who did not come from the traditional political elite, Jokowi was seen as a breath of fresh air capable of addressing longstanding issues like corruption and oligarchy. However, over time, much criticism has emerged, suggesting that despite his different background, Jokowi eventually became entangled in the very oligarchic networks he sought to challenge.

The appointment of Prabowo Subianto as Minister of Defense after twice being Jokowi's rival in elections demonstrates how power dynamics in Indonesia can shift drastically. This move reflects a compromise between elite interests that outweigh ideological differences or political competition. With a large coalition supporting his government, Jokowi secured around 80% of the seats in parliament. However, the size of this coalition has raised concerns about the weakening of the opposition. Prabowo's presence in the cabinet, who was once a strong opposition figure, is projected to weaken the oversight and checks and balances within the government. Gerindra Party, initially the largest opposition party, shifted its stance to support the government after Prabowo was appointed as Minister of Defense by Jokowi, leaving a vacuum in the opposition.

During his second term, Jokowi has been increasingly perceived as taking a more repressive approach. Signs of rising authoritarianism are evident from various actions, such as the hacking of activist accounts, worsening agrarian conflicts, internet blackouts in Papua, and the prohibition of civil servants from criticizing the government. Additionally, the increasing number of police and military personnel placed in strategic positions in the

government has further reinforced the impression that Jokowi's administration is moving towards a more hardline and centralized approach.

Jokowi has demonstrated his political acumen by successfully garnering majority support from most political parties. He negotiated with major political forces, securing a super-majority to govern. Jokowi allocated ministerial portfolios desired by his supporting parties and appointed positions like commissioners and deputy ministers to his volunteers, although only one volunteer became a minister, and that was near the end of his term.

Jokowi also tightened control over the masses through stricter policies, such as the implementation of the Information and Electronic Transactions Law (UU ITE) to restrict freedom of speech. Additionally, he utilized online forces such as buzzers and influencers to build a positive narrative about his administration. By revising the Corruption Eradication Commission Law (UU KPK), the Omnibus Law on Job Creation (UU Cipta Kerja), and the Criminal Code (KUHP), Jokowi provided greater protection to the political and economic elite. These revisions essentially created a "repressive infrastructure" that protects the elite and controls the masses.

It is important to note that Jokowi has not acted entirely on his own in managing the government. His decisions have been significantly influenced by the support of the coalition parties backing him. The controversial policies implemented during his administration cannot be separated from the role of these coalition parties, which also have interests in maintaining power and securing their positions within the political structure.

Towards the end of his term, many observed a shift in Jokowi's image, from being known as the "people's leader" to a figure often seen as contradictory throughout his career. Jokowi's image as a leader close to the people began to waver during the 2019 election. At that time, he faced Prabowo again, who championed populism and garnered support from conservative and hardline Islamic groups.

In the 2024 election, Jokowi's eldest son, Gibran Rakabuming Raka, who was serving as Mayor of Solo at the time, was elected as vice president running alongside Prabowo. The nomination of Gibran as vice presidential candidate sparked significant controversy. Many believed that Jokowi interfered in the Constitutional Court's (MK) decision through his brother-in-law, MK Judge Anwar Usman, to change the age limit for presidential candidates in the Election Law, allowing Gibran to run as vice president. Prabowo, who was previously Jokowi's rival and antithesis in two elections, now helped Jokowi build his political dynasty. The presence of the "Jokowi factor" in various political manifestations proved to be a decisive factor in the victory of Prabowo Subianto and Gibran Rakabuming Raka in the 2024 General Election.

According to Ray Rangkuti, Executive Director of Lingkar Madani, the 2024 election is considered the worst in Indonesia's democratic history since the 1998 reform, particularly in terms of its organization. He highlighted various issues involving the election organizers, ranging from serious ethical violations to criminal acts. Moreover, the election process faced severe challenges. Of the four main stages of the election—registration, campaigning, voting, and vote counting—two have already proven to have serious issues involving the election organizers and government apparatus (Kemunduran Demokrasi, 2024).

Additionally, there were three major violations in the election that are unacceptable in a democracy: intimidation and violence, political money mobilization, and vote manipulation. Two of these three violations have already occurred, including the influx of illegal funds for electoral purposes as well as intimidation and violence.



Figure 1. Prabowo-Gibran Campaign. Source: (Abdillah, n.d.)

After the 2024 election, the support of many political parties for Prabowo illustrates the strong influence of oligarchy. The impact of Jokowi's administration is still felt in political contests in several key regions, where many political parties are trying to gain advantages by supporting the president's son for an easy victory. The phrase "L'État, c'est moi" (The State is me) reflects how Jokowi has altered rules to suit his political interests (Jokowi: L'état, C'est Moi | kumparan.com, n.d.). Ironically, instead of providing the public with proper political education, what Jokowi and his supporters have demonstrated is the abuse of power in governing. The leeway enjoyed by Jokowi is almost akin to what Soeharto experienced during the New Order era. However, the difference is that Jokowi did not use military power to achieve his goals. He is very adept at negotiating with elites and building support from the grassroots.

A weak opposition can create an environment that enables corruption and abuse of power. Without effective oversight, leaders may exploit their power for personal gain or the benefit of certain groups, without fear of political or legal consequences. Similar to unchecked power, this creates a loophole for the government to become absolute. Refusing to form coalitions with political opponents can be a difficult and sensitive decision. However, if it is done to create a balanced government and for the benefit of the people, it can be a good thing (Crisis of Prabowo's Coalition: "Embrace the Political Elites" for Absolute Power, n.d.).

Jokowi's case reflects how a leader initially seen as a symbol of change can slip into greater power dynamics, where compromise with oligarchic forces becomes inevitable. When elite and oligarchic interests begin to dominate, democratic functions such as oversight and opposition become marginalized. This raises critical questions about the future of democracy in Indonesia and how the country can balance oligarchic power with the need to maintain genuine accountability and public participation. The following are the names of ministers in Jokowi's administration who are also businesspersons:

Table 1. Business-owning Ministers in Jokowi's Cabinet Source: Researcher

No	Nama	Partai	Jabatan	Perusahaan
1	Airlangga Hartarto	Golkar (Ketua Umum)	Menko Perekonomian	PT. Graha Curah Niaga (pupuk) PT. Jakarta Prime Crane PT. Bisma Narendra
2	Prabowo Subianto	Gerindra (Ketua umum)	Menteri Pertahanan	PT Kertas Nusantara PT Nusantara Energy PT Tanjung Redeb Hutani PT Tusam Hutani Lestari PT Kiani Hutani Lestari PT Jaladri Swadesi Nusantara Nusantara Kaltim Coal PT Belantara Pusaka
3	Zulkifli Hasan	PAN (Ketua Umum)	Menteri Perdagangan	PT Batin Eka Perkasa PT Panamas Mitra Inti PT Sarana Bina Insani
4	Agus Harimurti Yudhoyono	Demokrat (Ketua Umum)	Menteri Atr/Bpn	PT Exquisite Indonesia
5	Luhut Binsar Panjaitan	Golkar (Penasihat)	Meko Marves	Toba Coal and Mining Toba Oil and Gas Toba Power Toba Perkebunan dan Kehutanan Toba Industry Toba Property & Infrastrucure
6	Sandiaga Uno	PPP (Anggota)	Menparekraf	PT Saratoga Investama Sedaya PT Mitra Pinasthika Mustika PT Provident Agro Tbk PT Adaro Energy PT Medco Power Indonesia PT Tower Bersama Infrastructure
7	Erick Thohir	Non Parpol	Menteri BUMN	PT Avabanindo Perkasa (Mahaka Advertising) PT Mahaka Radio Integra PT Republika Media Mandiri PT Danapati Abinaya Ivestama (JakTV) PT Kalyanamitra Adhara Mahardhika (Alive! Indonesia) PT Trinugraha Thohor (TNT) Oxford United

No	Nama	Partai	Jabatan	Perusahaan
8	Agus Gumiwang	Golkar (Ketua DPP)	Menteri Perindustrian	PT Asiana Lintas Development
9	Bahlil Lahadalia	Golkar (Anggota)	Menteri Investasi	PT Rifa Capital PT Bersama Papua Unggul PT Dwijati Sukses
10	Amran Sulaiman	Non Partai	Menteri Pertanian	Tiran Group
11	Sakti Wahyu Trenggono	PAN	Menteri Kelautan dan Perikanan	PT Solusindo Kreasi Pratama
12	Nadiem Makarim	Non Partai	Mendikbud-Ristek	Gojek

Table 2. LHKPN Based on Years in Office Source: Processed by Researcher

No	Nama	Tahun		
		2021	2022	2023
1	Airlangga Hartarto	260.611.928.764	425.600.875.203	454.390.229.404
2	Prabowo Subianto	2.029.478.722.760	2.032.478.722.760	2.042.682.732.691
3	Zulkifli Hasan	-	-	27.730.354.340
4	Agus Harimurti Yudhoyono	-	-	116.530.289.450
5	Luhut Binsar Panjaitan	716.314.993.267	897.656.844.079	1.043.460.709.886
6	Sandiaga Uno	10.617.085.468.830	10.997.085.468.830	7.977.146.639.632
7	Erick Thohir	2.312.938.263.854	2.319.242.458.655	2.303.835.823.202
8	Agus Gumiwang		197.466.000.000	197.538.748.706
9	Bahlil Lahadalia	300.445.709.773	302.467.616.354	310.420.076.693
10	Amran Sulaiman	-	-	1.191.638.824.88
11	Sakti Wahyu Trenggono	2.428.060.960.920	2.948.060.960.920	2.660.060.960.920
12	Nadiem Makarim	1.192.006.640.485	1.301.421.294.168	5.590.317.273.184

With their wealth, oligarchs can influence the appointment of public officials, manipulate election outcomes, and even dictate the direction of national policies. These political transactions are often hidden from the public eye, but their impact is profoundly real. Officials who are elected or appointed due to oligarchic support tend to be more loyal to their backers than to the people. This creates a cycle of dependency, where public officials feel compelled to continually serve the interests of the oligarchs to maintain their positions, thereby strengthening the oligarchs' grip on power.

In addition to being surrounded by ministers who are also business owners, Jokowi is closely aligned with powerful financiers, often referred to as the "9 Naga" (Nine Dragons). Jokowi even granted them exclusive rights in the new capital (IKN) for up to 190 years, as stipulated in Presidential Regulation No. 75 of 2024. The following are the names of the national businessmen known as the "9 Naga" or those affiliated with them:

Table 3. National Businessmen in Jokowi's Inner Circle

No	Nama	Perusahaan	Jumlah Kekayaan (Triliun Rupiah)
1	Sugianto Kusuma alias Aguan	Agung Sedayu Group	14
2	Erward Soeryadjaya	Astra Group	15
3	Tommy Winata	Artha Graha Group	37
4	Kuncoro Wibowo	Kawan Lama Group	16
5	Djoko Susanto	Alfamart Group	60,6
6	Boy Thohir	Adaro Group	22,4
7	Eka Tjandranegara	Mulia Group	18,8
8	Anthony Salim	Salim Group	118,5
9	Pui Sudarto	Pulau Intan	15,96
10	Prajogo Pangestu	Barito Pacific	973
11	Franky Wijaya	Sinar Mas	170,6
12	Samsudin Andi Arsyad (Hj.Isam)	Jhonlin Group	10
13	Hary Tanoesoedibjo	MNC Group	15
14	Hashim Djojohadikusumo	Arsari Group	20,5
15	Sofjan Wanandi	Gemala Group	8,78
16	Dato' Sri Tahir	Mayapada Group	69,5
17	Rusdi Kirana	Lion Air Group	15
18	Robert Budi Hartono	Djarum Group	401,3
19	Chairul Tanjung	CT Corp	85,07
20	Low Tuck Kwong	Bayan Resources	426,93
Total Jumlah Kekayaan			2513,94

Source: (<https://www.forbes.com/lists/indonesia-billionaires/>)

Much of the wealth of the names mentioned above remains undisclosed to the public, as they have created numerous subsidiary companies affiliated with their parent corporations. Imagine, around 20 individuals are capable of managing Indonesia's national finances. In an investigative journalism report conducted by projectmultatuli.org in 2022, the business flows and connectivity between coal mining enterprises—which serve as one of the oligarchs' primary sources of wealth—were clearly outlined. This wealth is shared among those within government structures, political parties, or pure businessmen. The privileges they receive are facilitated by those in power, as part of Jokowi's inner circle, benefiting only a select few, in stark contrast to Indonesia's 270 million citizens. The wealth sources of Jokowi's financiers also come from coal mining companies that have been granted special privileges by those in power, as illustrated in the following infographic:



Figure 2. Infographic of the Largest Coal Producers in Indonesia.

Source: (<https://projectmultatuli.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/Infografik-batubara-scaled-2048x1500.jpg>)

The influence of the oligarchy left by Jokowi poses long-term risks to democracy in Indonesia. A democracy distorted by oligarchic power risks becoming a system that serves only a few wealthy individuals, while the majority of the populace becomes mere spectators in the political process. The oligarchy's dominance over natural resources in Indonesia refers to the power controlled by a small group of individuals or entities with strong control over the country's natural resources. In Indonesia, abundant natural resources such as oil, natural gas, coal, and gold mines have become primary sources of wealth for oligarchs, especially during Jokowi's administration. The centralization of control and dominance over these sectors is a hallmark of the oligarchy in Indonesia. For example, the Sinar Mas Group placed influential figures in various strategic positions within its companies. Gandi Sulistiyanto, who had close ties with Gibran Rakabuming Raka and Kaesang Pangarep two sons of President Joko Widodowas once the managing director of the Sinar Mas Group and the commissioner of PT Berau Coal Energy. He was eventually appointed by Jokowi as the Indonesian Ambassador to South Korea.

This situation not only undermines the legitimacy of the government but also risks widespread dissatisfaction among the public, who may feel that their voices are no longer valued. In the long term, if no efforts are made to curtail the power of the oligarchy, democracy in Indonesia could continue to weaken, evolving into a concealed oligarchy that serves only the interests of the elite.



Figure 3. “9 Naga” at the Independence Day Ceremony in IKN. Source: (BangkaPos.com)

Oligarchy and Political Dynasties' Impact on Democracy

The presence of oligarchy and political dynasties in Indonesia poses serious and damaging consequences for the quality of democracy. Ideally, democracy functions as a system where every citizen has equal rights and opportunities to participate in the political process, both as voters and as potential leaders. However, in reality, oligarchy and political dynasties often hinder this idealism, creating a situation where power and political influence are concentrated in the hands of a few individuals or families with substantial resources.

Oligarchy and political dynasties can impede equality in democracy. In the context of Indonesia, oligarchy is defined as the power held by a small group of wealthy individuals who are able to influence and control the political process for their own benefit. Jeffrey Winters, in his book *Oligarchy*, explains that oligarchs have the ability to exploit democratic systems for personal gain, often by securing key positions in government through political dynasties. Winters emphasizes that oligarchy not only persists but actually thrives within democratic systems that are supposed to guarantee equality and justice.

The dominance of oligarchy in Indonesian politics is often seen through their influence on campaign financing, media control, and access to extensive networks of power. Oligarchs can control public discourse through the media they own or influence, ensuring that candidates from the political dynasties they support receive positive attention and coverage. This situation creates unfairness in the political process, where candidates from ordinary backgrounds, lacking financial support or elite networks, struggle to compete fairly.

Additionally, oligarchic support for political dynasties exacerbates this unfairness. Political dynasties, defined as political power that is inherited or continued within a single family, tend to maintain the status quo that benefits them. In Indonesia, a concrete example of this phenomenon is the appointment of Gibran Rakabuming Raka, President Joko Widodo's son, as a vice-presidential candidate in the 2024 election. Gibran's political career, which began with his position as Mayor of Solo and led to his candidacy for vice president, demonstrates how political dynasties can quickly and easily dominate the political stage with the support of oligarchs. According to George & Ponattu (Khairi, 2022), the Indonesian Constitution does not prohibit citizens from participating in local and national political

contests, but political dynasties weaken democracy by disregarding track records and competence.

The existence of oligarchy and political dynasties not only undermines political competition but also affects public policy-making. When power is concentrated in the hands of a few elites, policies are more likely to favor their interests rather than the broader public. In many cases, policies tend to prioritize economic gains for oligarchs and strengthen the position of political dynasties, while the needs and aspirations of the general public are often ignored.

This is evident in various economic and social policies in Indonesia that often benefit sectors controlled by oligarchs. For instance, the massive infrastructure development policies during Joko Widodo's presidency, while providing economic benefits, also brought significant advantages to major construction companies owned by oligarchs. This situation creates growing inequality, where only a few people directly benefit from development while the majority of the population remains marginalized.

Furthermore, the phenomenon of political dynasties supported by oligarchs also has the potential to obstruct genuine political reform. When political power revolves around the same groups, opportunities for significant changes in policy and governance direction become very limited. This creates a cycle of power that perpetually maintains the interests of the elite and leaves no room for more inclusive and responsive policy innovation.

The phenomenon of oligarchy and political dynasties poses a significant challenge to democracy in Indonesia. Political dynasties also occur in many other countries, such as India and the United States. However, those countries do not practice hereditary power to the extent seen in Indonesia, where Jokowi's presidency is followed by his son's candidacy in the next election (Novilia et al., 2024). When power is concentrated in the hands of a few families and elites, the essence of democracy as an inclusive and participatory system becomes eroded. The main issue in Indonesian democracy is the high cost of politics, which acts as a barrier for many competent individuals to participate in elections, both at the legislative and executive levels. The high cost of politics includes various aspects, from campaign expenses and advertising to mass mobilization and funds required to gain political party support. This condition results in capable and high-integrity individuals being excluded from the political arena due to lack of access to sufficient resources. Consequently, the political space is occupied by those with significant capital, often connected to oligarchic networks.

Every election cycle, this issue recurs, raising concerns that Indonesian democracy is drifting further from its essence. Democracy, ideally a system of government by the people, for the people, is becoming an arena for a few elite with substantial resources to vie for power. In this context, the public is merely used as a tool to achieve the interests of oligarchs through transactional politics. Transactional politics refers to practices where votes are traded for political promises or even cash, illustrating the substantial influence of money in Indonesia's democratic process.

A democracy without its people—a democracy without the demos—is an anomaly that contradicts the fundamental principles of democracy itself. Power that should be in the

hands of the people instead becomes a tool for officials and political oligarchs to maintain their control. This creates a paradox where democracy, which should be inclusive and participatory, becomes exclusive and limited to those with access to substantial resources. Addressing this challenge requires serious reform to lower political costs and ensure that Indonesian democracy truly reflects the will of the people, rather than merely serving as a tool for elites to preserve the status quo.

To tackle these challenges, concerted efforts from various segments of society are needed to promote political reform that can limit the influence of oligarchy and political dynasties. Limiting campaign funds, strengthening the role of independent media, and increasing political participation from diverse groups are some steps that can be taken to bolster democracy in Indonesia. Additionally, public awareness about the importance of maintaining a healthy and inclusive democracy needs to be continuously raised so that the public is not trapped in the detrimental cycle of oligarchy and political dynasties.

Conclusion

The biggest challenge for democracy in Indonesia is how to dismantle the grip of oligarchy and ensure that power genuinely resides with the people. Political reform, transparency in decision-making, and efforts to strengthen public participation are crucial steps that need to be taken. Without significant structural changes, Indonesian democracy will continue to be overshadowed by oligarchy, ultimately hindering the achievement of justice and welfare for all citizens. The presence of oligarchy reinforces political dynasties, further narrowing political participation for the people. The appointment of Gibran as a vice-presidential candidate is a clear example of how political dynasties develop in a system influenced by oligarchy.

With financial support, media, and strong political networks, political dynasties can consolidate power, reducing opportunities for new figures who wish to compete fairly in politics. The combination of oligarchy and political dynasties raises significant concerns about the future of democracy in Indonesia. True democracy, where power rests with the people, becomes increasingly difficult to achieve if oligarchic and dynastic forces continue to dominate. Therefore, the struggle to maintain and strengthen democracy in Indonesia must continue. Democracy must be continually defended to remain a fair, open system that offers equal opportunities for all citizens, without exception. This research paper is still far from perfect, and it is hoped that it can be developed more deeply and comprehensively both in terms of data sources and analysis.

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