

ABUSE OF POWER: UNDERSTANDING THE DYNAMICS OF CORRUPTION BY INDONESIAN GOVERNMENT AUTHORITIES

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Abstract

Corruption remains a highly complex problem in Indonesia, which has significant impacts on governance, economic development, and public trust. This article examines the dynamics of corruption in the Indonesian government through several corruption issues that occur and involve policy makers or government authorities. In addition, it also highlights the complexity of corruption, including the relationship between political influence, institutional weaknesses, and failures in the corruption prevention and handling system. Furthermore, this article further explores anti-corruption efforts in Indonesia, focusing on strategies such as the establishment of the Corruption Eradication Commission (KPK), legal reform, transparency initiatives, and community involvement. By conducting a critical analysis of the challenges in efforts to handle corruption in Indonesia, which are also related to political interference, institutional weaknesses, and cultural acceptance of corruption, as well as opportunities to strengthen anti-corruption measures in handling corruption.

Keywords: Corruption Dynamics, Indonesian Government, Anti-Corruption Actions

Introduction

Corruption is a global problem that continues to pose a significant threat to governance, from economic development to social justice. In Indonesia, abuse of power by government authorities is so deeply rooted that it creates major obstacles to sustainable development. Many developments and movements have occurred in order to seek reform. However, in line with that, corruption also continues to grow and develop in various forms and lines until it is often found in political and bureaucratic structures.

The roots of corruption in Indonesia can be traced back to the Dutch colonial period, where exploitation of resources and population was a central feature of the government. This period laid the foundation for a culture of corruption that persisted into the post-colonial era (Anderson, 1983). After independence in 1945, Indonesia faced the daunting task of nation-building amid widespread poverty and underdevelopment. The Guided Democracy period under President Sukarno (1945-1967) was marked by political instability and economic mismanagement, which further entrenched corruption in government (Ricklefs, 2008).

The New Order regime under President Soeharto (1967-1998) viewed institutional corruption as a tool of government. The Soeharto regime was characterized by a complex patronage system, in which loyalty to the regime was rewarded with economic and political favors, thus creating an environment in which corruption was not only tolerated but also supported (Robison & Hadiz, 2004). The political economy during the New Order era was closely linked to corrupt practices, as government officials, military personnel, and business elites were involved in widespread corruption without accountability (McLeod, 2000).

The fall of Suharto in 1998 marked the beginning of the Reformasi era, a period of significant political liberalization and an attempt to dismantle the authoritarian structures of the past. However, the legacy of corruption has proven difficult to eradicate. Although the Reformasi period brought important changes, such as the decentralization of power and the establishment of the Corruption Eradication Commission (KPK), corruption adapted to the new political terrain, taking root and evolving at various levels. Especially with the expansion and greater authority of local officials over resources, creation, and decision-making (Aspinall & Mietzner, 2010).

Problem Formulation

The prevalence of corruption in Indonesia is a significant challenge to state-building and democratic governance. Abuse of power by government authorities undermines the rule of law, weakens institutions, and fosters a culture of impunity. Corruption distorts economic policy, discourages investment, and exacerbates social inequalities, all of which contribute to a cycle of underdevelopment and disenfranchisement (Transparency International, 2021). This paper seeks to explore the dynamics of corruption in the Indonesian government by examining the structural, cultural, and institutional factors that allow corruption to thrive in Indonesia.

1. What are the dynamics and impacts of corruption in Indonesia?
2. What are the challenges of implementing existing anti-corruption regulations/policies in reducing criminal acts of corruption among regional heads?
3. What are effective strategies to reduce criminal acts of corruption among regional heads?
4. How does the public perceive corruption committed by regional heads?

METHOD

This study uses a qualitative approach to provide a comprehensive analysis of the problem of corruption in Indonesia. This study refers to various sources of literature and studies ranging from historical records to government and media reports. In addition, case studies related to the problem of corruption are carried out by taking examples of several corruption cases in Indonesia carried out by Government Authorities. Thus, this paper describes the dynamics of corruption, including abuse of power and challenges in efforts to eradicate corruption in Indonesia.

Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

Eradicating corruption is critical to Indonesia's future. Corruption not only hampers economic progress but also undermines the legitimacy of democratic institutions and the rule of law. By exploring the dynamics of corruption in Indonesia, this study aims to contribute to a deeper understanding of the challenges facing the country and to offer practical recommendations for policymakers, civil society, and the international community. The findings of this study will be relevant not only to Indonesia but also to other countries grappling with similar issues of governance and abuse of power.

Theoretical Framework

Understanding the dynamics of corruption in Indonesian governance requires a strong theoretical framework to address the diverse patterns of abuse of power and governance. This section explores key theories and concepts that provide a foundation for analyzing corruption, including theories of power, governance, and institutional failure.

1. Theory of Power and Corruption

Corruption can be understood as a form of abuse of power, when individuals or groups use their power for personal gain at the expense of the public interest. Corruption is also defined as

the abuse of public power for personal gain (Theobald, 1990 in Tanzi, 1998). Meanwhile, the concept of power itself as often mentioned in Weber's political theory is related to power as the ability to achieve goals despite very influential resistance (Weber, 1978). In the context of corruption, power is often used in a way that ignores or weakens legal and ethical boundaries, resulting in results that benefit a handful of people and harm the wider community.

Klitgaard argues that corruption is most likely to occur when officials in power experience excessive discretion and little or no accountability. Discretion minus Accountability offers a useful framework for understanding the conditions under which corruption thrives (Klitgaard, 1988).

2. Governance and Accountability

The quality of governance is closely related to the prevalence of corruption. Good governance, which is characterized by transparency, accountability, and the rule of law, is also in line with minimizing the opportunities for corruption. Conversely, poor governance, which is characterized by weak institutions and inadequate systems, is also *checks and balances*, which indirectly creates an environment for corruption to thrive (Kaufmann, Kraay, & Mastruzzi, 2009).

Decentralization of power after the Reformation era in Indonesia was also intended to improve governance which was previously centralized. Then it was done by closing the distance in decision-making to the regional level in order to minimize the occurrence of corruption that previously occurred. However, it turned out that this shift also provided space for the decentralization of corruption caused by regional officials having greater control over resources in the regions without any improvement in the monitoring mechanism (Aspinall & Fealy, 2010). The concept of "*local capture*", which is dominated by local elites in the decision-making process to serve their interests, illustrates how decentralization can also perpetuate corruption, especially if it is not accompanied by strong governance reforms (Bardhan, 2002).

3. Institutional Failure and Corruption

Institutional corruption theory emphasizes the role of weak institutions in facilitating corrupt practices. North (1990) stated that institutions as "rules of the game" highlight how formal and informal rules can shape individual and organizational behavior, especially in contexts where these institutions are weak. At that time, corruption is much more likely to occur, especially when the perpetrators exploit these weaknesses for their own benefit.

The legacy of the New Order regime left institutions that were often involved or unable to eradicate corruption even after the establishment of anti-corruption bodies such as the Corruption Eradication Commission (KPK). However, weaknesses in institutions are still often found, including due to limited resources, political interference, and inconsistent law enforcement patterns, which have hampered the effectiveness of anti-corruption efforts (Butt, 2011).

4. Cultural Perspectives on Corruption

The cultural theory of corruption argues that societal norms and values play a significant role in shaping attitudes toward corruption. In some societies, corruption may be normalized or even considered part of everyday transactions and indirectly become a phenomenon often referred to as "petty corruption" (Huntington, 1968). The concept of "papa" or father, illustrates how hierarchical relationships and patron-client networks can perpetuate corruption in Indonesia. In such a context, loyalty to superiors and the expectation of reciprocity create a pattern of loyalty that results in behavior that ignores legal and ethical considerations, thus causing corrupt practices to continue (Antlov, 2003).

5. Patronage and Clientelism

Patronage and clientelism are forms of social organization in which resources are distributed based on personal relationships rather than on merit or need. These systems often thrive in environments where formal institutions are weak and play a significant role in perpetuating corruption. In Indonesia, patronage networks built during the New Order continue to influence political and economic life, involving elites exchanging resources and favors to maintain power and control (Robison & Hadiz, 2004).

Clientelism, in particular, is evident in electoral politics, where politicians provide material benefits to voters in exchange for their support. This practice not only undermines the existing democratic process. It also reinforces the cycle of corruption, as elected officials prioritize the interests of their supporters over the welfare of the community (Aspinall & Sukmajati, 2016).

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Dynamics of Corruption in Indonesia

Corruption that is currently happening in Indonesia cannot be separated from the context of the Long History related to political, socio-economic and cultural issues in Indonesia. The dynamics of corruption in Indonesia can be analyzed from various perspectives, including political power, weak institutions and institutions, socio-cultural influences, and economic development. In this case, the dynamics of corruption that is happening in Indonesia involve many parts. This section explores these dynamics to provide a comprehensive understanding of how corruption still exists and occurs in the Indonesian government and society.

1. Political Power and Corruption

The centralization of power under President Soeharto's New Order regime (1966-1998) became the basis for the expansion of institutional corruption in Indonesia. During this period, Soeharto's control over the state apparatus allowed for the creation of extensive patronage networks, in which political loyalty was rewarded with access to state resources. These networks were not only tolerated but also actively encouraged as a means of maintaining control and stability. The practice of Corruption, Collusion, and Nepotism (KKN) can even be said to be endemic, ranging from government contracts, business permits, and political positions allocated based on personal connections, not on merit (Robison & Hadiz, 2004).

However, the fall of Soeharto in 1998 did not immediately eliminate the deep-rooted practices of corruption. Instead, it led to the decentralization of corruption itself. This is because in the transition from the New Order to democracy, the implementation of regional autonomy in 2001 was intended to democratize power by advancing regional government. In reality, it indirectly transferred corrupt practices that previously occurred at the central level to the regional level. Supported by the emergence of local elites, who dominate as power brokers at the regional level. These elites also exploit the new autonomy and engage in profit-seeking behavior by utilizing their control over local resources and political institutions to enrich themselves and their allies (Hadiz, 2010).

This decentralization of corruption is also facilitated by the commodification of political power in the era of Indonesian democracy. Elections at the national and regional levels have become increasingly expensive, as candidates rely on money politics to gain votes. This practice involves the distribution of cash, goods, or services to voters in exchange for their support. At the same time, incumbent officials often engage in corrupt practices when finally elected to cover campaign costs that have previously been incurred. Furthermore, it also perpetuates a cycle

of corruption that undermines the integrity of the democratic process (Aspinall & Berenschot, 2019).

2. Institutional Weaknesses and Legal Impunity

The persistence of corruption in Indonesia is closely related to the weakness of the institutional framework, especially in the judiciary and law enforcement. The judiciary, which is intended as a supervisor of corruption, is often controlled by corruption. In other words, corruption that occurs in the judicial system also indirectly weakens the rule of law, because it erodes public trust in the existing legal system. It is not uncommon for corrupt officials to avoid justice without punishment (Butt, 2012). Not only that, judges and court officials are not even free from their ties to corruption that may occur due to bribery to influence the outcome of a case being handled.

The effectiveness of anti-corruption efforts is also often disrupted by the politicization of law enforcement agencies, in this case for example the Indonesian National Police (Polri). The police, who play an important role in investigating and prosecuting corruption cases, are also unknowingly involved in corrupt practices. This includes requests for bribes from suspects in exchange for leniency or withdrawal of charges. Practices such as these not only hinder the investigation of corruption cases but also perpetuate a culture of legal impunity for certain individuals or groups who have extensive connections to escape the legal problems that ensnare them (Mietzner, 2014).

The Corruption Eradication Commission (KPK), established in 2002, is an exception in Indonesia's anti-corruption landscape. It has achieved significant success in prosecuting high-profile corruption cases, including those involving senior government officials and politicians. However, its efforts have met with fierce resistance from other state institutions, especially those whose members have been targeted by the KPK. Legislative efforts to limit the KPK's authority, including attempts to eliminate its authority to wiretap suspects and to prosecute cases independently, reflect an ongoing struggle between reformist interests and entrenched interests in the Indonesian government (Setiyono & McLeod, 2010).

3. Socio-Cultural Dimensions of Corruption

In the socio-cultural context, it also plays an equally important role in perpetuating corruption, especially through the normalization of certain corrupt practices in everyday life. One of the most widespread forms of corruption is the problem of small bribes, commonly referred to as "grease money" or "cigarette money". However, these small bribes are often given to speed up bureaucratic processes or to obtain preferential treatment in public services. Although these practices may seem small, they contribute to a broader culture of corruption that spreads throughout all levels of Indonesian society, thus reinforcing the notion that corruption is an unavoidable part of everyday life (Schütte, 2017).

Traditional patron-client relationships also play a role in perpetuating corruption in Indonesia. These relationships, deeply embedded in the social fabric of society at large, involve the exchange of favors, protection, and resources and reciprocity between patrons (usually powerful individuals or officials) and clients (ordinary citizens or subordinates) based on personal loyalty rather than merit. This patronage system not only exacerbates corruption but also perpetuates social and economic inequalities, as access to resources and opportunities is mediated by connections to individuals or groups rather than ability (Aspinall & Fealy, 2010).

Cultural acceptance of corruption is further reinforced by the perception that Indonesia's bureaucratic system is complex and often opaque. For many in the wider community, paying or

giving something in return is seen as the only way to ensure that government officials or other authorities will process their requests in a timely manner or, in other words, that they will receive the services to which they are entitled. Pragmatic acceptance of corruption as a “necessary evil” undermines efforts to promote transparency and accountability in government, as it discourages citizens from challenging corrupt practices and often encourages them to participate in and perpetuate the system (Antlov & Cederroth, 2004).

4. Economic Consequences and Structural Inequality

Corruption and the economy are two inseparable things, because corruption has far-reaching consequences for the development and welfare of a country. Corruption distorts economic decision-making by diverting public resources from productive investment and enriching a handful of people or groups. This misallocation of resources undermines the effectiveness of government spending, especially in critical areas such as infrastructure, education, and health services. One of them is the cost overrun, the work done is not appropriate or even below standard. This is an example of what is possible in public infrastructure projects, due to corrupt practices. Not being a secret can lead to inefficiency and delays in project implementation, which ultimately hinders economic growth and development (World Bank, 2019).

Corruption also exacerbates economic inequality by disproportionately benefiting the wealthy and well-connected, while harming society at large. The concentration of wealth and power among a small elite, often facilitated by corrupt practices, has led to widening inequality. This inequality is not only a moral issue but also a major obstacle to social and economic stability. As wealth and opportunity become increasingly concentrated in the hands of a few, social cohesion weakens, and the potential for unrest and conflict increases (OECD, 2019).

In addition, corruption has a negative impact on the business environment, thus hindering domestic and foreign investment. This is because the need to engage in corrupt practices, such as paying bribes to obtain contracts or overcome regulatory barriers, increases the cost of doing business and creates uncertainty for investors who will invest. This uncertainty certainly hinders long-term investment and also hinders entrepreneurship. That is why it is important for sustainable economic growth and job creation. As a result, Indonesia's economic development potential is undermined by practices that enrich a few and harm many (Transparency International, 2020).

Impact of Corruption

The impact of corruption is very large and diverse, because it is influenced by political, economic, and social backgrounds. Here are some of the real impacts of corruption in Indonesia, including:

1. **Erosion of Public Trust:** Corruption erodes public trust in government institutions and the political process. Repeated exposure of major corruption cases has created widespread cynicism and disillusionment among the public, weakening the social contract between government and its citizens.
2. **Economic Losses and Inefficiencies:** Corruption causes significant economic losses, as public funds are diverted from essential services and development projects to private pockets. This not only hinders economic growth but also exacerbates inequality, as resources meant for the public good are misused.
3. **Weakening Democratic Institutions:** Corruption weakens democratic institutions by distorting electoral processes, undermining the rule of law, and allowing power to be concentrated in the hands of a few. The patronage networks that underpin corruption also

undermine democratic accountability, as political elites prioritize their own interests over those of voters.

4. **Social and Environmental Degradation:** Corruption can have severe social and environmental impacts, as was the case with the Lapindo mudflow disaster, for example. The diversion of resources and lack of accountability in addressing these crises can result in long-term harm to both society and the environment, with long-term implications for social stability and sustainability.

Corruption Eradication Efforts in Indonesia: Strategies, Challenges, and Opportunities

Indonesia's fight against corruption has been a long and complex journey, marked by many efforts to eradicate corrupt practices in government institutions. Although progress has been made, the fight against corruption is far from over, and many challenges remain to be overcome. However, there are also new opportunities that can strengthen Indonesia's anti-corruption framework.

1. Anti-Corruption Strategy

- a) Formation of the Corruption Eradication Commission (KPK):

The KPK has been at the forefront of efforts to eradicate corruption in Indonesia. As an independent body tasked with investigating, prosecuting, and preventing corruption. The KPK is known for its aggressive stance on corruption, particularly in targeting high-profile cases involving senior government officials, politicians, and business elites (Butt, 2011).

- b) Legal Reform and Anti-Corruption Laws:

Indonesia has implemented various legal reforms to strengthen its anti-corruption framework. The Corruption Eradication Law No. 31/1999, as amended by Law No. 20/2001, provides the legal basis for prosecuting corruption cases. In addition, the enactment of the Public Information Transparency Law in 2008 aims to improve transparency and accountability in government institutions (Butt, 2017).

- c) Public Sector Reform and Bureaucratic Accountability:

Efforts have been made to reform the public sector and increase bureaucratic accountability. This includes the implementation of initiatives in e-Government to reduce direct interaction between officials and the public, thus minimizing the opportunity for bribery or gratuities. Introduction of the system for tax payments, business licensing, and public procurement are examples of such reforms (Mietzner, 2014).

- d) Civil Society and Media Engagement:

Civil society organizations and the media play an important role in anti-corruption efforts in Indonesia. Civil society organizations such as *Transparency International Indonesia* and *Indonesia Corruption Watch (ICW)* actively monitors government activities, advocates for stronger anti-corruption measures, and raises public awareness. The media has played an important role in exposing corruption cases, holding public officials accountable, and fostering a culture of transparency (Hadiz, 2010).

2. Challenges of Eradicating Corruption

- a. Political Intervention:

One of the biggest challenges facing anti-corruption institutions such as the KPK is political interference. Powerful political figures and interest groups often seek to undermine the independence and effectiveness of anti-corruption institutions. This can be seen from efforts to weaken the KPK through changes to laws and regulations, such as the controversial revision of the KPK Law in 2019 which limited the authority of the institution (Butt, 2019).

b. Institutional Weaknesses:

Despite legal and institutional reforms, corruption remains entrenched at all levels of government. Institutional weaknesses, including inadequate resources, lack of coordination among anti-corruption agencies, and inefficient judicial processes, hamper effective prosecution and prevention of corruption (McLeod, 2011).

c. Corruption in Law Enforcement and Justice:

Corruption in law enforcement and judicial institutions is a major obstacle to efforts to eradicate corruption. When law enforcement officers such as police, prosecutors, and judges are involved in corrupt practices. This can of course weaken the rule of law and make it difficult to hold perpetrators accountable. This challenge is compounded by the lack of political will to address corruption in these institutions (Mietzner, 2014).

d. Cultural Norms and Social Acceptance:

In some areas, corruption is socially accepted as something normal in doing business or interacting with government officials. The culture of acceptance of corruption, especially in the form of bribes or “gifts,” makes it difficult to change behavior and enforce anti-corruption laws (Antlov, 2003).

3. Opportunities to Strengthen Anti-Corruption Efforts

a. Leveraging Technology and Innovation:

The use of technology offers great opportunities to increase transparency in reducing and combating corruption. Expanding services e-government, implementing technology blockchain in public procurement, and using analysis to detect irregularities can contribute to reducing opportunities for corruption (OECD, 2019).

b. Strengthening Civil Society and Public Participation:

Empowering civil society and encouraging greater public participation in governance can strengthen anti-corruption efforts. Public reporting programs, whistleblower protection mechanisms, and public awareness campaigns can play a role in creating more accountable and transparent governance (Transparency International, 2020).

c. Regional and International Cooperation:

Indonesia can benefit from greater regional and international cooperation in combating corruption. Sharing best practices, participating in international anti-corruption conventions, and collaborating in cross-border investigations can increase the effectiveness of anti-corruption efforts (UNODC, 2016).

d. Institutional Reform and Capacity Building:

Strengthening the capacity of anti-corruption institutions, improving coordination between law enforcement agencies, and ensuring judicial independence are important steps in eradicating corruption. Sustained reforms aimed at building stronger institutions can help create a more effective and resilient anti-corruption framework (World Bank, 2020).

CONCLUSION

Indonesia’s journey in eradicating corruption has been marked by significant progress and ongoing challenges. The establishment of the Corruption Eradication Commission (KPK) and the implementation of various legal and institutional reforms demonstrate the country’s commitment to eradicating corruption. However, the persistence of corruption in government

institutions, coupled with political interference and cultural acceptance of corrupt practices, continues to hamper progress in combating corruption in Indonesia.

To address these challenges, it is important to enhance the independence and capacity of anti-corruption institutions, leverage technology, encourage public participation, and foster a culture of integrity through anti-corruption education. In addition, strengthening regional and international cooperation will be critical in addressing transnational corruption. By implementing these recommendations, Indonesia can build a more transparent, accountable, and equitable society, where corruption is no longer tolerated, and public trust in government institutions can be restored.

Recommendation

1. Enhancing Institutional Independence and Capacity

To strengthen anti-corruption efforts, it is important to ensure the independence of anti-corruption institutions such as the KPK. This includes protecting these institutions from political interference and providing them with adequate resources and training. In addition, there must be ongoing efforts to build the capacity of law enforcement and judicial institutions to effectively investigate, prosecute, and prosecute corruption cases. Reforms that promote transparency and accountability in these institutions will help restore public trust and improve their effectiveness.

2. Expanding the Use of Technology in Anti-Corruption Efforts

Leveraging technology can play a significant role in reducing corruption. Expansion of services, e-Government should be prioritized to minimize face-to-face interactions that often lead to bribery. Implementation of technology blockchain in public procurement, budgeting and contracting processes can ensure greater transparency and reduce opportunities for fraud. In addition, analysis big data should be used to detect patterns of corruption and irregularities in financial transactions, which can trigger timely investigations.

3. Encouraging Community Participation and Whistleblower Protection

Strengthening citizen participation in governance is essential to combating corruption. Establishing and promoting citizen reporting platforms where individuals can report corruption anonymously and securely will empower citizens to play an active role in anti-corruption efforts. In addition, strong whistleblower protection laws should be enacted and enforced to protect those who provide information on corrupt practices, and ensure they are not subject to retaliation.

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