

POLITICAL DYNASTIES AND THE EROSION OF THE QUALITY OF DEMOCRACY IN INDONESIA

Darwis^{1*}, Rina Rizky Amalia²

¹Fakultas Ilmu Sosial dan Ilmu Politik Universitas Tadulako

²Prodi Hubungan Internasional Fakultas Ilmu Sosial dan Ilmu Politik Universitas Muhammadiyah Yogyakarta

darwisuntad@gmail.com^{1*}
rinaryanaamalia@gmail.com²

Abstract

The conceptualization, theory, and practice of political dynasties are the things that result in the low quality of democracy in Indonesia. This research discusses political dynasties and democracy in Indonesia. The research method in this study uses qualitative methods. Qualitative research methods are a method of research that emphasizes more on analysis and description. The results of the study show that the presence of political dynasties in democracy in Indonesia poses problems at the local level. The main problem is the stagnation of leadership and the lack of public participation because everything is controlled by the elite. Political dynasties also make it difficult to create a good and clean democratic state, which has an impact on the emergence of power distortions and can give birth to corruption, collusion, and nepotism. One example of several cases of political dynasties in the region is the involvement of President Jokowi's son-in-law and son in politics, who took positions as Mayor of Solo and Mayor of Medan. Getting involved in politics is not a violation of human rights. But with the nomination of two members of President Jokowi's family in his second term of government, it is not impossible for political ethics violations by the two family members to occur. The legality of the practice of political dynasties in Indonesia has been legal due to the birth of the Constitutional Court Decision No: 33/PUU-XIII/2015 concerning the material test of Law No. 8 of 2015 concerning Regional Elections, confirming the legality of political dynasties in the Indonesian constitutional law system. The Constitutional Court stated that the article was not in accordance with Article 28 I paragraph 2 of the 1945 Constitution. With the decision of the Constitutional Court, it increases the fertility in the growth of political dynasties and can reduce or even eliminate qualified figures from the position.

Keywords: Political Dynasty, Political Elite, Political Parties, and Democracy.

INTRODUCTION

Political dynasties have long been a feature of democratic systems and often spark concerns about unequal distribution of political power. This condition reflects the flaws in democratic representation, illustrating the notion that “power begets power.” It echoes Mosca’s view that social classes tend to become hereditary, where even if political positions are theoretically open to all ruling families enjoy structural advantages that secure their dominance.

Politics plays a decisive role in shaping the direction of a nation. Constructive and positive political dynamics can foster progress, while negative and destructive ones may weaken the state and push it backward. The political sphere influences nearly every aspect of national life, even to the extent of reshaping state systems and governance structures. As Harold Lasswell emphasized, politics is essentially the study of power its formation, distribution, and exercise within the state.

In democracies, political dynasties not only persist but also restrict the openness of the political process. Ideally, democratic systems should allow broad and active public participation, ensuring that citizens at every level can compete fairly in political contests. In practice, however, the presence of entrenched dynasties limits this participation, as their privileged status and social networks create barriers for ordinary citizens. This dominance undermines the very essence of democracy government of the people, by the people, and for

the people. Furthermore, dynastic politics often fosters pragmatism, encouraging rulers to extend power within their own families by placing relatives in positions of authority.

The existence of political dynasties, manifested through power struggles at both regional and national levels, complicates the understanding of democracy. Their growth—particularly in the regions—cannot be separated from the role of political parties and the regulatory framework governing local elections. Oligarchic practices within political parties distort the candidacy process, as candidate selection often reflects the preferences of party elites rather than democratic mechanisms that prioritize competence and integrity. At the same time, dynastic actors strengthen their networks to preserve influence both at the local and national levels, demonstrating how dynasties can dominate and even undermine democracy within political parties.

At the community level, political dynasties often work to maintain the status quo by promoting family members or close associates of incumbents as successors. While dynasties are generally associated with the abuse of power, some argue that prohibiting ruling families from participating in elections infringes upon their human and constitutional rights as citizens.

In Indonesia, legislative efforts have sought to regulate dynastic politics. However, the Constitutional Court ruled that such restrictions contradict Article 28I paragraph 2 of the 1945 Constitution. Paradoxically, allowing dynasties to flourish may itself constitute a violation of political rights, as power resources remain concentrated in incumbent hands. This dynamic is evident in the recurring electoral victories of dynastic candidates, largely supported by financial dominance. The Constitutional Court's decision has further facilitated the expansion of political dynasties, potentially sidelining capable leaders from political competition. Consequently, it is necessary to examine more deeply the legality of dynastic practices in Indonesia, their manifestations at regional and party levels, and their broader implications for the quality of democracy.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study employs a qualitative research method with data collected through documentation techniques. The documentation process involves gathering a variety of relevant written materials, including books, journal articles, previous research findings, statutory regulations, reports from official institutions, and mass media coverage related to the practice of political dynasties and their implications for democracy. The data sources consist of both primary and secondary materials. Primary data are derived from official documents, such as the Election Law, the Regional Government Law, regulations issued by the General Elections Commission (KPU), and Constitutional Court rulings concerning political dynasties. Meanwhile, secondary data was obtained from various literature, including books, scientific journal articles, research reports, survey agency reports, and mass media news that discussed the practices of political dynasties and their implications for the quality of democracy in Indonesia. All data collected were analyzed descriptively to identify patterns, tendencies, and impacts of the sustainability of political dynasties on democracy, so as to obtain a more comprehensive picture of the phenomenon being studied.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Legality of the Practice of Political Dynasties in Indonesia

Political dynasties or political dynasties are a phenomenon that not only occurs in developing countries, but also in developed countries. These political dynasties are quite troubling because with the existence of a developing political dynasty, it is able to freeze the

existing democratic system. The formation of a democratic system must be able to protect election candidates, but if this democratic system has been injured by political dynasties, it is unlikely to provide an equal space for every election candidate. The phenomenon in this political dynasty in election candidacy is only controlled by a certain group of people with an interest in power. Political dynasties tend to perpetuate themselves by prioritizing family members in political positions even if they are incompetent, while competent leaders who do not have family ties to the ruling elite are excluded from politics.

Political dynasties are considered a significant constitutional issue in Indonesia, as they are often linked to the proliferation of corruption. The practice of dynastic politics is seen as detrimental to society because it tends to foster corruption, undermine democratic principles, and prioritize political interests over the welfare of the people. To address this, the state has attempted to regulate and limit the influence of political dynasties. Specifically, Article 7 letter r of Law Number 8 of 2015, which amends Law Number 1 of 2015 regarding the Implementation of Government Regulations in Lieu of Law Number 1 of 2014 on Regional Elections ("Law 8/2015"), stipulates that prospective candidates for Governor, Deputy Governor, Regent, Deputy Regent, Mayor, and Deputy Mayor must meet certain criteria, including the absence of a conflict of interest with incumbents. This provision effectively prohibits candidates from having blood relations, marital ties, or family lineage with the current officeholder, aiming to prevent the emergence of political dynasties.

However, the Constitutional Court's Decision Number 33/PUU-XIII/2015, which reviewed the material aspects of Law No. 8 of 2015, affirmed the constitutionality of political dynasties under Indonesian law. Previously, Article 7 letter r had restricted candidates with family ties to incumbents, intending to suppress or limit the influence of political dynasties. The Constitutional Court, however, ruled that this provision violated human rights principles enshrined in the 1945 Constitution, rendering it legally invalid. Consequently, the practice of political dynasties now has legal recognition and protection. Although Article 7 letter r originally aimed to prevent dynastic politics, the court found it inconsistent with Articles 27(1), 28D(3), 28I(2), and 28J(2) of the 1945 Constitution, effectively legalizing the continuation of political dynasties in Indonesia.

The Constitutional Court ruled that the restrictions in Article 7 letter r are discriminatory, violating Article 28J(2) of the 1945 Constitution, which guarantees equal freedom and opportunity for all citizens before the law and government. Additionally, it contradicts Article 27(1), which ensures citizens' rights to participate as candidates for regional leadership, and Article 28D(3), which guarantees equal access to government affairs. The Court further noted that having family ties with an incumbent does not infringe upon the rights of others, nor does it conflict with religious values, morality, public order, or security. Consequently, the Court concluded that Article 7 letter r is unconstitutional.

The Court emphasized that Article 7 letter r discriminates by preventing individuals from participating in elections based solely on blood relations and lineage, which violates Article 28I(2) prohibiting discrimination. While the Court acknowledged that not all distinctions constitute discrimination, in this case, the restriction intentionally excluded certain groups from competing in regional elections, thereby limiting their constitutional rights. In conclusion, the Constitutional Court invalidated Article 7 letter r of the Election Law, stating that it conflicts with the 1945 Constitution, particularly provisions on human rights, including Articles 27(1), 28D(3), 28I(2), and 28J(2), and thus has no binding legal force.

Thus, the position and legality of political dynasties in the Indonesian constitutional law system have been legally valid since the decision of the Constitutional Court No. 33/PUUXIII/2015 which expressly canceled Article 7 letter r of Law No. 8 of 2015

concerning the Election of Regional Heads. It should be noted that article 7 letter r of the Election Law, before being annulled by the Constitutional Court, prohibits a person from participating in the general election of regional heads if they have a relationship with the incumbent or the government. However, the legality and legal position of the political dynasty does not necessarily justify let alone affirm that the political dynasty is good, clean and does not damage the democratic and bureaucratic order, so that its existence must still be fought with constitutional means and efforts so as not to violate the constitutional rights of citizens.

The Phenomenon of Political Dynastic Practices in the Regions and Internal Political Parties

Government politics in a country has an important value for the progress of society, in a country there must be an arrangement of government structures with applicable legal procedures. However, not a few also commit fraud in the government system. According to Johan Kaspar, politics has the meaning or function of making the main plans of a state, determining power, making decisions, dividing and allocating resources. In this regulation, it means that the government has rights in the government system and can use a power directly or indirectly. From ancient times or in the present day, not a few have committed a disease of power, namely nepotism and political dynasties. It does not mean that nepotism and political dynasties must have an intention to use power to do so, it can also unconsciously carry out nepotism and political dynasties that can invite many pros and cons in the world of politics. Political dynasties in Indonesia have a pass to overcome the occurrence of political dynasties. However, according to the panel of constitutional judges, the article is not in accordance with article 28 I paragraph 2 of the 1945 Constitution. With the decision of the Constitutional Court, it increases the fertility in the growth of political dynasties and can reduce or even eliminate qualified figures in the position.

Political dynasties share similarities with nepotism and represent a primitive form of power reproduction, as they rely primarily on family lineage and the descendants of a select few, often referred to as elite groups. In Indonesia, such elite groups consist of highly capable individuals who possess the ability to influence political decision-making, making it relatively easy for them to acquire or maintain power. Political dynasties are also inconsistent with the second precept of Pancasila, as they can obstruct the proper functioning of government. Moreover, family members or relatives of elite individuals may not necessarily possess the same competencies to perform political duties effectively.

The presence of both support and opposition toward political dynasties is closely linked to the political culture within society. Political culture encompasses the population's power preferences, shaped by both public acceptance and the construction of political regimes. Consequently, an important question in studying political dynasties is how these cultural and political preferences evolve during the formation of dynastic practices. Voter preferences, in turn, strongly influence voting behavior, often reflecting both rational and traditional responses to available information. Political dynasties can be viewed as a negative byproduct of regional autonomy, wherein democracy is effectively captured by cycles of genealogical networks, whether based on kinship or extended family interests, aimed at maintaining family power. This dynamic has led to a conceptual shift from focusing on kinship to viewing elites as central to understanding the operation of political dynasties in local government.

The momentum of the transition from authoritarianism to democracy followed by a policy of regional autonomy is widely used by two elite groups to seize full power in their regions, both those who struggle to become a victorious elite group and synergize with each other which is usually agreed upon through marriage. It is therefore not surprising that

regional autonomy led to the existence of petty kings in the area. The rise of political dynasties at the local level can be seen as a form of “local cendanaization.” The term “Cendana” refers to the influential Soeharto family during his 32-year presidency, which dominated Indonesia’s political economy. Key government positions were often occupied by his children, daughters-in-law, grandchildren, and other relatives, allowing the family to maintain power for three decades. This model has since been adopted and replicated by local elite families, who can manipulate local democratic processes by positioning relatives in strategic roles within regional governance.

Political dynasties have become a great influence in society and increase public concern about inequality in politics. Political dynasties have a major impact on the democratic system such as the practice of manipulation to win over family members, another bad impact is the rampant regeneration of the government that triggers damage to a government, which starts with climbing the family tree that does not have a leadership spirit and is very incompetent in a government. According to Zulkieflimansyah, the negative impact of political dynasties can make the party a political machine based on wealth and fame, as well as kill qualified and competent people in their fields from those who hold power who rely on the interests of the elite, making it difficult to create a good and clean democratic state, this can cause power distortions and can give birth to corruption, collusion and nepotism.

Political Dynasties in the Control of Economic Resources

Political dynasties are one of the main introductions to the concentration of all political access and the destruction of corruption. This condition makes it difficult for potential political resources to compete in the political process in a healthy manner. Economically, political dynasties also allow for the concentration of economic resources, including the use of regional financing for the benefit of the dynasty. Overall, political dynasties do not benefit society at all but only benefit one family of political dynasties. Several cases of political dynasties that have succeeded in developing their regions, not a few cases of political dynasties have even caused the regions they lead to be relatively behind. This can be seen from the still high rates of poverty and unemployment, low educational participation, and lack of health services. Political dynasties also cause closed access to potential political resources to enter the realm of government bureaucracy

The Constitutional Court’s decision to legalize political dynasties in Indonesia warrants caution, as dynasties may create economic disincentives. Rather than fostering accountable and anti-corruption governance, political dynasties often perpetuate policies controlled by a small inner circle of the ruling family. This can lead to practices akin to what Barbara Harris-White described as the informal economy, which in her research in India prioritizes kinship networks and often operates in an intimidating manner. Such dynamics can hinder economic growth, exacerbate poverty, and encourage corruption. Similarly, Mendoza’s studies in the Philippines identified a link between political dynasties and persistent poverty in several provinces, showing that weak political competition and lack of accountability under dynastic rule contribute to sustained poverty. Notably, the poorest segments of the population are often the largest supporters of dynastic candidates.

In Indonesia, economic power is often concentrated in parties or coalitions, allowing influential actors to shape social behavior and political outcomes. Large corporations with significant economic resources can engage in political lobbying that affects regional political dynamics. Access to regional resources is therefore restricted, as the allocation of goods and services is controlled by those in power. Leaders with such authority also influence which industries and services are developed, demonstrating how political forces directly shape the functioning of the regional economic system.

The factor that causes political dynasties to commit corruption is the motivation to control and perpetuate political positions in the regions. As an official in the region, it will certainly be easier to access, control and use economic resources. Access to this economic resource often leads to corrupt practices. For example, the game in budget preparation, where the budget that is prepared does not reflect the interests of the community but the interests of certain groups. In addition, political dynasties need large funds to maintain their power and networks both in parties and community organizations. This fund will certainly not come out of the personal pockets of political dynasties, but from the regional budget. For example, in the case of corruption, social assistance funds are often not given to community groups that support political dynasties rather than people who should have received them. In Robert Putnam's terms, this is the so-called "shadow actor" in the political process in the region that locks the role of regional leaders and becomes the embryo of the source of corruption.

Implications of Political Dynastic Practices on Democracy

Political dynasties demonstrate that close relatives or family members can serve as effective instruments for consolidating power. In Indonesia, political power extends beyond mere political activity; it has evolved into a political culture that continues to develop across regions. This culture encompasses political behavior, strategy, and orientation, forming a recurring pattern within Indonesian society. Political dynasties operate as mechanisms of reproduction and competition for power, often relying on blood relations, marriage ties, or membership in extended family networks.

This dynamic creates obstacles for citizens who wish to participate actively in the political process, which contrasts sharply with the principles of genuine democracy, where all citizens should have equal opportunities to compete for positions at both regional and national levels according to legal frameworks. Political dynasties also raise concerns about inequality in the distribution of political power, reflecting imperfections in democratic representation—a phenomenon often described as “power begets power.”

At both regional and national levels, dynastic struggles hinder the consolidation of democracy in Indonesia, impacting the development of political democracy in the country. The proliferation of political dynasties is closely tied to the role of political parties and electoral regulations, further weakening the quality of democracy. Oversight and limitations on dynastic practices largely rely on moral principles of fairness and rationality; without strict supervision, political dynasties continue to thrive, undermining political life and compromising the overall quality of Indonesia’s democratic system.

Politics plays a critical role in shaping the trajectory of a nation and state. Political dynasties represent systems constructed by local elites who exploit decentralized democracy through regional head elections. Direct elections for regional leaders are a practical consequence of regional autonomy, providing citizens the opportunity to select leaders of their choice. However, this opportunity is often leveraged by ruling families or incumbents—such as spouses, children, and relatives—to secure positions in regional governance.

From a formal democratic perspective, regional autonomy is intended to expand citizen participation in governance. Substantively, it aims to achieve prosperity in line with the principles of a welfare state and a decentralized distribution of state power. Given the close link between regional autonomy and democracy, the existence of proper institutions and procedures is essential for implementing democratic governance in Indonesia.

The rise of political dynasties, particularly at the regional level, is closely tied to the role of political parties and election regulations. Oligarchic tendencies within parties undermine the proper functioning of candidate selection, as nominations often reflect the preferences of party elites rather than democratic evaluation of candidates’ competence and

integrity. Meanwhile, dynastic actors build strong power networks to maintain influence within parties at both regional and national levels, effectively allowing political dynasties to dominate and weaken democracy within party structures. At the community level, such practices often aim to preserve the status quo by promoting family members or close associates of regional heads as successors to incumbents.

Although democracy faces challenges due to the presence of political dynasties, the ideal concept of a political dynasty is not merely about the concentration of power within families that inherit and reproduce authority. It also represents a sociological issue reflected in social practice. A pressing concern is that the power maintained by political dynasties often fails to bring meaningful socio-economic improvements for the broader society. Instead, power serves primarily as a shield to safeguard the economic and political interests of the ruling family. Mendoza notes that high poverty levels and weak media oversight can reinforce the dominance of political dynasties in a region. Political dynasties, therefore, do not only fail to serve the collective welfare of local communities but can also become a national concern, reflecting patterns of hegemony and resource control that perpetuate collusion and corruption, undermining democratization and equitable regional development in Indonesia.

Political dynasties are sustained by extensive and influential networks within a region. When these networks consolidate around a ruling dynasty, they can facilitate the emergence of near-absolute power, which logically increases the potential for abuse. Networks built on family and kinship ties often close off political recruitment to outsiders, restricting broader participation. Democracy requires the consolidation of political processes within a conducive environment, yet political dynasties threaten this transition toward integrated democracy. Democratic consolidation involves aligning multiple elements of democracy to collectively facilitate political democratization. Key factors in this process include political institutions such as parties, elites, interest groups, and civil society, as well as a shared agreement on accessible political values that unites these diverse actors into a cohesive force advancing democratic development.

CONCLUSION

The presence of political dynasties in the framework of regional autonomy and democratization raises various serious problems, especially leadership stagnation, weakening public participation, and increased vulnerability to corrupt practices due to overlapping elite kinship relations. The practices of clientelist capitalism and cronyism further narrow the space for economic freedom, while democratization that is supposed to empower the people is instead co-opted by local oligarchic regimes. The Constitutional Court Decision No. 33/PUU-XIII/2015 which legalized political dynasties further nourished its growth, thus narrowing the chances of the emergence of competent alternative figures. In practice, regional autonomy provides space for the rise of traditional power and strengthens the dominance of local elites, while political parties fail to foster cadres that encourage oligarchy, political pragmatism, and the passivity of the people in the democratic process. Political dynasties are increasingly rooted in the patterns of familism, clientelism, and patrimonialism that place the elite above society and consolidate power to maintain the status quo.

REFERENCE

- Aji, T. S. W., & Pratolo, S. (2018). Pengaruh Politik Dinasti dan Sistem Pengendalian Internal Terhadap Kinerja Pemerintah Daerah dengan Akuntabilitas Pelaporan Sebagai Variabel Pemeditasi: Studi Empiris Pada Pemerintah Daerah Di Indonesia Tahun 2012-2015. *Reviu Akuntansi Dan Bisnis Indonesia*, 2(2), 153-170.

- El-Guyanie, G. (2013). Politik Dinasti dan Konstitusionalisme. Artikel
- Gunanto, D. (2020). Tinjauan kritis politik dinasti di Indonesia. *Sawala: Jurnal Administrasi Negara*, 8(2), 177-191.
- Hady, N. (2019). Implikasi Putusan Mahkamah Konstitusi Nomor: 33/PUU-XIII/2015 Dalam Upaya Memutus Dinasti Politik Dan Antisipasi Pada Pilkada Mendatang. *Arena Hukum*, 11(3), 484-499. Hal. 451.
- Hidayati, N. (2014). Dinasti Politik dan Demokrasi Indonesia. *Orbith: Majalah Ilmiah Pengembangan Rekayasa dan Sosial*, 10(1).
- Kristiyanto, E. N. (2017). Pelaksanaan Pemilihan Kepala Daerah Serentak Di Indonesia: Studi Di Batam. *Jurnal Penelitian Hukum De Jure*, 17(1), 48-56.
- Mendoza, R. U., Beja Jr, E. L., Venida, V. S., & Yap, D. B. (2016). Political dynasties and poverty: measurement and evidence of linkages in the Philippines. *Oxford Development Studies*, 44(2), 189-201.
- Mendoza, R., Beja Jr, E., Venida, V., & Yap, D. (2013). Political dynasties and poverty: evidence from the Philippines. In *12th National Convention on Statistics* (pp. 1-2). Philippines.
- Rahma, A. A., Oktaviani, A. A., Hofifah, A., Ahda, T. Z., & Nugraha, R. G. (2022). Pengaruh Dinasti Politik Terhadap Perkembangan Demokrasi Pancasila di Indonesia. *Jurnal Kewarganegaraan*, 6(1), 2-3.
- Sari, Y. R. (2022). Dinasti Politik Pada Pilkada 2020 Di Jawa Timur Dari Perspektif Rational Choice. *Madani*, 14(1).
- Susanti, M. H. (2017). Dinasti Politik dalam Pilkada di Indonesia. *Journal of Government and Civil Society*, 1(2), 111-119