E-Paper

Direct Elections, Patronage, and the Failure of Party Cadre-ship: Dynastic Politics in Indonesia

By Dr. Deasy Simandjuntak

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With Indonesia's President Joko Widodo's son and son-in-law winning the December 2020 mayoral elections in Solo, Central Java, and Medan, North Sumatra, respectively, observers are wary of yet another challenge to the country's democratic backsliding: the persistence of dynastic politics. Indonesia's democracy has in the past two years exhibited significant setbacks with the passage of controversial laws, the weakening of the anti-corruption agency and the shrinkage of the oppositional camp which erodes the checks-and-balances mechanisms. Dynastic politics is certainly not a welcomed trait for a country marred with weak political structure and high instances of corruption and patronage.

Author: Dr. Deasy Simandjuntak

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Introduction

With Indonesia's President Joko Widodo's son and son-in-law winning the December 2020 mayoral elections in Solo, Central Java, and Medan, North Sumatra, respectively, observers are wary of yet another challenge to the country's democratic backsliding: the persistence of dynastic politics. Indonesia's democracy has in the past two years exhibited significant setbacks with the passage of controversial laws, the weakening of the anti-corruption agency and the shrinkage of the oppositional camp which erodes the checks-and-balances mechanisms. Dynastic politics is certainly not a welcomed trait for a country marred with weak political structure and high instances of corruption and patronage.

For more than 15 years since it first introduced direct elections for regional heads, Indonesia's politics, like those of India and the Philippines, has accommodated power transfers among family members of elected officials. The 2020 is thus not the first instance that the country witnessed family members of active politicians succeeded in assuming elected office. Yet with the President's own family now involved, Indonesians are cautious of the rampancy of dynastic politics and concerned of what this would imply pertaining to Indonesia's strive towards good governance going forward.

Yoes Kenawas (2020) asserted that there could be more than 100 dynastic politicians competing in the 2020 regional elections, compared to only 52 in 2015. More specifically, the research centre Nagara Institute mentioned that 124 individuals running in the regional head elections were connected to political dynasties: 57 district-heads', 20 deputy district-heads', 20 mayoral, 8 deputy mayoral, 5 gubernatorial and 5 deputy gubernatorial, candidates (Wardah, 2020), with the highest numbers, 13 candidates from the province of South Sulawesi, 11 candidates from Central Java and North Sulawesi, and 8 candidates from East Java and Banten. Of the 124 candidates, 67 are male and 57 are female – 29 of which are wives of the previous regional heads. Nagara Institute also reported that 57 dynastic candidates succeeded in winning the elections.

Although regional elections have become the platform on which dynastic politics are sustained and flourish, national politics are also not impervious to their proliferation. Some of Indonesia's largest political parties, such as the government's main party, the Indonesian

Democratic Party for Struggle (PDIP) and its long-time rival the Democratic Party (PD), are both family-based parties whose leadership succession lines hinge on their founders' family-members.

Seeing its persistence and pervasiveness, some observers are wary of what dynastic politics would mean to Indonesia's democracy going forward, especially whether kin-based political succession would hinder democratic governance and perpetuate patronage/clientelism already rampant in local-level politics. This paper seeks to understand which factors explain the persistence of dynastic politics in Indonesia. Moreover, with the recent trend of oligarchic influence in the national politics, the paper also aims at illustrating how dynastic politics could create a congruence of interests between local and national elites which in turn will extend the oligarchic pull in the local level.

Dynastic politics: how does it persist and what makes it detrimental for democracy?

Not solely a trait of Asian hybrid regimes, dynastic succession also embellishes the politics of some of the most "mature" democracies around the world. It is precisely due to the democratic premise that everyone has the right to run in elections, that Americans, for example, do not object vigorously when Hillary Clinton ran for presidency just because her husband had held that position - similarly for the Bushes, and the more prominent dynasties such as the Kennedys and Roosevelts. Without a doubt, individuals connected to these families have more privilege when pursuing their political endeavors compared to those who are not, and this creates an unleveled playing field that robs the latter of the chance of contributing new ideas and perspectives to policy-making. Nevertheless, when it takes place in established democracies, dynastic politics does not do as much damage to governance than when it does in developing democracies such as in Indonesia. Elizabeth Pisani wrote that this is because the US has other [strong] institutions, for example, independent and credible judiciary, which is able to check the abuse of power both during and after electoral campaigns (Pisani, 2015) – something that Indonesia, and a few other Asian democracies, lacks.

There have been arguments that the advantage of some of these individuals may not have more to do with their families than the fact that they themselves have talents. However, a research by Dal Bó, Dal Bó and Synder (2009) on US politics concludes that political power in the US is self-perpetuating and that the presence of political dynasties does not merely reflect differences in ability across families. This means that when a person holds more power, it is likely that this person will start, or continue, a political dynasty, and talent may

have less to do with this inclination. The researchers also found that dynastic legislators are more likely to represent the same state they were born in, which suggests that dynastic politicians inherit political capital that is useful at the local level, such as local political connections and name recognition as opposed to talent.

In India, dynastic politics have largely been attributed to the Nehru-Gandhi family. It is due to this reason that Prime Minister Narendra Modi's landslide win in 2019 was seen as a signal that the clout of India's most prominent political dynasts might be declining. Not only have the national level elites lost their ground, the local/state level dynasts also bore the brunt of the decline: the Yadavs, Singhs, Scindias, Gehlots, Deoras and Kumaraswamys were among those who failed to secure triumph in their respective states. This is considered exceptional for India's politics, as an observer claimed that "the relationship between political leaders and the electorate was still very much akin to that between a monarch and his or her subjects. This often translated to a certain deification of the ruling class. The ground has fundamentally shifted in today's India, where an aspirational electorate maintains a more transactional relationship with political leaders" (Pandey, 2019).

PM Modi himself recently spoke against dynastic politics, calling it "the biggest enemy of democracy" as it gives rise to a new form of "dictatorship" and burden the country with "incompetence". He was referring to the opposition parties, including the Congress Party, who are run by India's most prominent families. Subsequently Modi called for young voters to "uproot" these dynasts (*The Economic Times*, 2021). Still, some observers also warned against prematurely deeming that the dynastic rule is on its way out: Modi's own party the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) has its own dynasts, and some of the Congress Party's dynasts still succeeded in winning their states' elections.

Especially on India's dynastic politics, Kanchan Chandra (2014) wrote that dynastic representation owes its endurance in part to two persistent features of the country's democracy, firstly, the high returns associated with state office, which ensure that the families of politicians will want to enter politics, and the weak organization of political parties, which makes them more likely to allocate tickets to members of these families; second, that the drop in dynastic representation in Parliament overall is due primarily to the increase in the number of seats captured by the BJP, which is less dynastic than the Congress, but the trend in the BJP too is towards more dynasties, thirdly, that the influx of "young aspirational voters" does not represent a deterrent to dynastic politics, quite the opposite, they intensify the trend towards dynastic politics.

According Rappler's report (Bueza and Castro, 2019) of the result of the Philippines' 2019 election, there were at least 163 political families whose winning members include senators, House representatives or governors. In Congress, 14 out of 24 senators belong to a powerful family, while in the House, 162 out of 300 representatives exhibited similar trait, indicating that more than half of the members are from political families. At the local level, 60 out of 81 governors are from political clans, with a combined of 108 relatives holding local posts such as vice governors, provincial board members, mayors, vice mayors and councilors.

Based on his research on political dynasties in the Philippines, Pablo Querubin (2016) concluded that incumbency has a causal effect on the probability of having relatives in office in the future. He remarked that in the 2010 election, roughly 50% of the elected congressmen and governors were dynastic, and in 35 of the 80 Philippine provinces, the governor and congressman are related. He wrote that "once in power, an incumbent can use the instruments of office to increase the political power of his relatives, for example by using public resources for personal enrichment of to fund patronage and clientelistic practices that are an important driver of electoral success in many developing countries" (p.152). In addition to incumbency as an explanatory factor of electoral success of family members, another factor, namely the relative minor role of parties may explain the persistence of dynastic politics. Parties are often personality based and play a relevant role only during election in order to establish alliances with provincial and local politicians. There are no major programmatic differences between parties, and party switching as well as opportunistic (personal-based) coalitions is a common phenomenon.

Thirdly, politics in the Philippines are exemplified by clientelist practices which focus on contingent political exchanges such as patronage and vote buying. In this manner, access to public office is important because public jobs can be used as a currency for patronage, and public funds and government programs can be used to get the support of other local officials who serve as political brokers and to mobilize voters (p. 156-157).

From the above cases we learn that dynastic politics are sustained by democratic regimes due to the tenet that all citizens have the right to run for elected office. Dynastic politics has less to do with talent than with a form of political capital that is relevant to the local level on which the politicians operate, for example, political connections and name recognition. From the experiences of India and the Philippines, the persistence of dynastic politics have something to do with, firstly, the high returns associated with state office which lure family members of politicians to enter politics; secondly, weak organizations of political parties and the nature of personalized political parties which render them likely to distribute tickets

among prominent families; thirdly, that it owes its pervasiveness to the history of feudalism; and last but not least, that it perpetuates and strengthens clientelist practices such as the usage of public office and funds for personal and family enrichment and to buy votes. To what extent are these characteristics also true for the Indonesian case?

Dynastic politics in Indonesia

An interesting article by Aspinall and As'ad (2016) on dynastic politics in Central Kalimantan, Indonesia, mentions that in order to understand why politicians embark upon dynastic politics, it is necessary to supplement the assumption that people who hold power will likely begin, or continue, a political dynasty (i.e. that politicians embark upon dynastic politics because they can) with a further analysis on the function of dynastic politics. The authors subsequently suggest that dynastic politics can be seen as a strategy: firstly, as a defensive strategy, as political power holders seek ways of building power that also protect them from legal investigation and prosecution. Buehler (2013) writes that "establishing a dynasty is often also a protection strategy: incumbents want to be succeeded by their family members in order to shield themselves and their "nearest and dearest" from being jailed for corruption." Secondly, as a network resource, because key government posts provide the necessary resources that can be used for political mobilization. Thirdly, as identity resource. Clans' or family names can be used for electoral mobilization because the said clans are considered exhibiting attributes which are seen as being inherited and can be beneficial politically, or that it indicates that the related individuals have the backing of the said clans.

Political families are not a new phenomenon in Indonesia. Some family members of the country's first President Sukarno, who ruled in 1945-1966, are currently among the most prominent politicians in Indonesia. His daughter Megawati Sukarnoputri is Indonesia's fifth president and is the leader of the country's ruling party the Indonesian Democratic Party for Struggle (PDIP). Megawati's daughter Puan Maharani, a PDIP cadre, is the country's speaker of the Parliament (DPR) - the youngest ever hold the position in the Parliament's history - and is considered likely to have a chance to run in the 2024 presidential election. The family of Indonesia's fourth president, Abdurrahman Wahid – he himself was the grandson of Hasyim Asy'ari, the founder of Indonesia's largest Islamic organization the Nahdlatul Ulama (NU)- followed his steps to become involved in politics, one of whom is his daughter Yenny Wahid, who is now director of the Wahid Institute, who was also a prominent cadre of the National Awakening Party (PKB), an Islam-based political party which, when it was founded in 1999, had an overlapping membership with the NU. Meanwhile, the family of Indonesia's sixth president, Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono (SBY),

who founded the Democratic Party (PD) followed his steps to become politicians, for example, his son Agus Harimurti Yudhoyono (AHY), who until recently was the elected leader of PD before a splinter group in the party elected a former general, who is President Joko Widodo's Chief of Staff, to be the party's chairman; SBY's other son Edhie Baskoro Yudhoyono is a member of the national parliament, likewise SBY's cousin, his brother-in-law's daughter and his brother-in-law's relative; SBY's brother in-law was also a member of the national parliament; his wife's brother in-law was the Vice Speaker of the national parliament in 2014-2019.

In the 2020 elections of regional heads (pilkada), President Joko Widodo's son, Gibran Rakabuming Raka, and son-in-law, Bobby Nasution, were elected as mayors of Solo, Central Java, and Medan, North Sumatra, respectively. The fact that Solo was the town where Joko Widodo had started his political career as mayor, before he became governor of Jakarta, led to speculations that the President is preparing his son to follow his swift political trajectory which culminated in him assuming the presidential seat in a relatively short time. In addition, the fact that Widodo's family members are now in politics was surprising for some, as the President had in 2018 mentioned that none of his children were interested in politics (*Kumparan*, 2018). Observers now agree that the 2020 regional head election has marked the beginning of Joko Widodo's new role as the head of a political dynasty (Harimurti and Supriatma, 2021; Simandjuntak, 2021).

Not solely propelling the Widodos into politics, the 2020 elections also accommodated other political families. In the mayoral election of South Tangerang, Banten province, for example, there were three pair of candidates that are linked to national elites or local strongmen. The first pair's vice mayoral candidate was the niece of Prabowo Subianto, the current Minister of Defense. The second pair's mayoral candidate was the daughter of Ma'ruf Amin, the current Vice President. The third pair's mayoral candidate had a connection to local political dynasty of Ratu Atut Chosiyah, who was governor of Banten (and Indonesia's first female governor) for several periods from 2007 – 2014 before she was convicted of corruption. The 2020 South Tangerang mayoral election was won by the third pair, exhibiting the triumph of local political families over national level dynasts (Hasyim, 2021).

Local strongman's families form a durable political basis for local dynasties. Ratu Atut's dynasty, which began with her father, Tubagus Chasan Sochib, who was a Golkar politician, is deeply entrenched in Banten's politics (Gunanto, 2020). Her husband was elected member of parliament in 2009-2014; her first son is the elected Vice Governor of Banten in 2017-

2022; her second daughter is Banten's senator in 2019-2024; her son-in-law was Vice District-Head of Pandeglang (a Banten district) in 2015-2020; her daughter-in-law was a local parliament member of Serang (a Banten district) in 2014-2019. Not only her children and in-laws, her siblings were also part of this deeply ensconced dynasty. Her sister, Ratu Tatu Chasanah, was District-Head of Serang in 2015-2020; her step brother became parliament member in 2019-2014; her step sister is both head of Serang's PDIP branch in 2020-2025 and Vice Speaker of Serang Parliament; her sister-in-law was Vice Mayor of South Tangerang in 2016-2021 (now replaced by her kin who was elected in 2020); her other brother-in-law is Banten's member of parliament, and her step mother was local parliament member of Pandeglang. Aside from being entrenched in local politics, this family was also involved in various graft cases. Ratu Atut and her brother was convicted for corruption since 2014 (Halim, 2014), and some of the cases are still being processed. Her step sister was convicted in 2015 (Deslatama,2015).

Bangkalan district, Madura island, had a local strongman named Fuad Amin, whose family is deep-rooted in the local religious politics (Gunanto, 2020). His father, Kyai Amin Imron, was a prominent figure in the local branch of the United Development Party (PPP), an Islamic party well-established since the Soeharto era. Fuad Amin began his political career as the head of PPP local branch, before he was elected as Bangkalan District-Head for 2003-2008. When Abdurrahman Wahid offered him a position as member of the Shura Council of the National Awakening Party (PKB), Amin moved to PKB. In the 2008 election, he again ran for Bangkalan District-Head and had a landslide win of 80.8 percent. His son, at that time twenty-five years old, became the local parliament member of Bangkalan. His son then ran in the subsequent district-head election in 2012 and won by garnering 90 percent of the votes. In 2014, Amin, who had then moved to yet another party, namely the Great Indonesia Movement (Gerindra) ran for a seat in the local parliament. With him in the local branch of Gerindra, the party succeeded in securing 10 out of 45 local parliamentary seats. Amin then became the local parliament speaker, while his son was the District-Head. In 2014, however, he was convicted of corruption and imprisoned, and finally passed away in 2019.

Not solely a trait in Banten or Java island, dynastic politics are also rampant in Eastern Indonesia, particularly in the province of South Sulawesi, where the family of Syahrul Yasin Limpo, who was governor in 2008-2012 and Indonesia's Minister of Agriculture in 2019-2024, succeeded in holding various political positions (Gunanto, 2020). His brother was the District-Head of Gowa (a South Sulawesi district) in 2005-2015; his other brother was local parliament member of Makassar (South Sulawesi capital city) in 2004-2009; yet

another brother was provincial parliament member of South Sulawesi in 2009-2014. His daughter was national parliament member in 2009-2014; and his nephew is District Head of Gowa in 2016-2021.

Other than these large local political families, dynastic succession is also evident in various regions (Gunanto, 2020), albeit involving only to two or more dynasts, for example, where wives of former District-Heads succeeded their husbands (e.g. in Indramayu, West Java; Kendal, Central Java; Kediri, East Java; and Bantul, Yogyakarta), where the daughter or son of a former District-Head succeeded their fathers (e.g. in Kutai Kartanegara, Lampung; Tabanan, Bali; and Cilegon, Banten), and where the son of a governor became a District-Head in the province (e.g. South Lampung). This list is by no means exhaustive, as there are other regions exhibiting similar traits. Some of these dynasts were also involved in corruption, such as the one in Kutai Kartanegara.

Underlying causes of dynastic politics in Indonesia

Kenawas (2015) mentioned several possible explanatory factors contributing to the rampancy of dynasty politics in Indonesia. Firstly, that the change in the mode of political succession, from centralized to decentralized, has led to the rise of political families. Under the centralization era, they had not been able to capture the local government because local leaders were determined by Jakarta, however, the introduction of local elections in the decentralization era has subsequently allowed dynasts to consolidate their power base by democratic means. Secondly, due to their entrenchment in local politics, incumbent politicians have networks and wealth, not to mention access to public funds, that can be used to support their family members' political candidacy, thereby creating an unleveled playing field in politics and discouraging non-dynasts individuals from running. Lastly, that incumbents tend to build dynasties in order to mitigate risks during and after their tenure, for example, legislative opposition, possible defeat in a reelection campaign, as well as prosecution in the aftermath of the tenure.

Aside from these causes, dynastic politics in Indonesia may also be made possible due to the weakness of the central government vis-à-vis national and local oligarchs. Jeffrey Winters (2013) wrote that oligarchy "describes the political processes and arrangements associated with a small number of wealthy individuals who are not only uniquely empowered by their material resources, but set apart in a manner that necessarily places them in conflict with large segments of the community (often including each other)" (p.4) and that "Indonesia after the fall of Suharto represents a complex but stable blend of oligarchy and democracy,

with wealth-power pervading a political arrangement that tolerates and responds to popular participation." (p.6). Dynastic politics thus also exemplifies a congruence of interests between the national and local oligarchs and potentially extends the interests of the national oligarchies to the regions.

The rise of the Widodos seems to illustrate this attribute. In his campaign in Medan, Joko Widodo's son-in-law Bobby Nasution mentioned that he would not hesitate to "call ministers in Jakarta, in order to take care of Medan" (Simandjuntak, 2021). He has thus emphasized his role as a "mediator" between Medan and the government in Jakarta by promising an easy access to the central government's elite and resources. While everyone knows that there are structures and regulations in place to manage central-local governments' relations in Indonesia, the language of patronage that he used during campaign may have resonated with the voters in Medan, who are familiar with clientelist practices, which are rampant in their own local government. His victory in a city where his father-in-law did not win the presidential election in 2019 may have owed to the assumption that he could indeed provide Medan with the direct access to national government's financial capitals.

Another important explanation for the rampancy of dynastic succession is the failure of political parties in promoting a democratic intra-party selection and socialization mechanism. This renders it inevitable that members of strong families within the parties - also renowned in the regions where they originate from- may dominate the decision-making in said parties. Weak cadre-ship also means that the party leaderships would tend to select individuals with higher electability among local voters compared to long-time cadres.

Again, the Widodos exemplify this attribute. The nomination of Joko Widodo's son, Gibran Rakabuming Raka, in Solo, Central Java, was actually not supported by the local branch of PDIP, who had opted for a long-time cadre, Achmad Purnomo, who was also the incumbent deputy mayor. However, Gibran got the upper when the party chairman Megawati Sukarnoputri agreed to his candidacy. In addition, he also had an overwhelming support from five other parties. Achmad Purnomo was then offered a government position at the national level, which he refused (Harimurti and Supriatma, 2021). Meanwhile, Gibran's opposition was a pair consisting of a tailor who works in a local market and a head of a local neighborhood association - a weak independent ticket whose candidacy many speculated was a sham, formed only in order to prevent Gibran from competing against an empty box in the ballot.

Similarly for Bobby Nasution, he registered as PDIP member only as late as March 2020, most likely only so that he could run on the party's ticket. In fact, if cadre-ship had been

important, many Medan voters would presume that the party would back the incumbent mayor, Akhyar Nasution, who was a long-time PDIP cadre. Yet since Indonesia's internal party selection is far from being democratized, this did not happen. The PDIP chairman chose for the individual deemed more popular. Meanwhile, Akhyar was reportedly upset at being sidelined for a newcomer in his candidacy, which led to his dismissal from PDIP. He then chose to run on the ticket of Democrat Party (PD), PDIP's long-time political rival, yet failed to secure reelection. Seeing from the political contestation, the Medan 2020 thus reflects the national level politics, with Bobby representing the government parties, and Akhyar, who was backed by PD and PKS, representing the weak and fragmented opposition camp.

The Democratic Party itself is under crisis. Its "dynastic" leadership, held by the family of Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono (SBY), is challenged by a new splinter faction which has conducted their own "extraordinary" congress and elected Joko Widodo's Chief of Staff, Retired General Moeldoko, as the party's new chairman, thereby rejecting the leadership of SBY's son Agus Harimurti Yudhoyono. The fact that Moeldoko is part of Jokowi's cabinet led to some speculations that the Palace had known about the plan to take over the party, or even had something to do with it in order to further erode the already very weak opposition. Yet others surmise instead that Moeldoko would like to run for Indonesian presidency in 2024 on the party's ticket.

Dynastic politics: detrimental to democracy

Not solely the trait for Indonesia, dynastic succession is evident in many countries, for example India and the Philippines, whose trajectory of feudalism provides a solid basis for the rise of political families, and whose electoral regimes allow for the consolidation of their power through democratic means. Similarly for Indonesia, the introduction of direct elections strengthened the clout of local political families. Not only that, dynastic politics also connects central and local oligarchs as family members of the central elite are now holding power in the regions. This creates a congruence between the interests of central and local oligarchs which potentially perpetuates and aggravates patronage practices.

There are other incentives for dynasts to preserve dynastic politics, in addition to the advantages in relations to patronage practices. For example, there are high returns associated with state office; secondly, there is a weakness in the organizations of political parties, including an undemocratic internal selection process, and the nature of personalized political parties which render them likely to distribute tickets among prominent families,

and thirdly, the tendency for dynasts to build dynasties in order to mitigate risks during and after their tenure, for example, legislative opposition, possible defeat in a reelection campaign, as well as prosecution in the aftermath of the tenure. Dynastic politics is detrimental to democracy because the democratic premise that everyone has the right to run for election has been used to legitimize dynastic succession, in which dynasts, regardless of their merits and qualities win the elections due to their family networks. Dynastic politics has thus created an unleveled playing field which discourages non-dynastic individuals from running in politics, thereby preventing talents from assuming elected positions. Despite its obvious detriment to democracy, dynastic politics is inevitable to the legacy of the decades of patronage and clientelistic practices across the archipelago.

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Author's Profile

Dr. Deasy Simandjuntak is an expert on Indonesian Politics and Southeast Asian Studies. She is an Associate Fellow at the Institute of Southeast Asian Studies (ISEAS)-Yusof Ishak Institute, Singapore and a Visiting Fellow at the Center for Asia-Pacific Area Studies (CAPAS), Academia Sinica, Taipei. She holds PhD in Political Anthropology from University of Amsterdam, The Netherlands.

Contact: deasy_simandjuntak@iseas.edu.sg