

Political Dynasties and Legal Loopholes in Regional Elections: a Case Study of Families of Regional Officials in the 2024 Political Year

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Abstract

The phenomenon of political dynasties in regional head elections continues to show an upward trend, especially in the lead-up to the 2024 Simultaneous Regional Elections. In an electoral democracy, the domination of power by incumbent families poses a serious threat to the principles of meritocracy, fair competition, and public accountability. The re-emergence of prominent names from the inner circles of regional political families indicates that power is no longer contested through open mechanisms, but rather inherited structurally through kinship networks and political patronage. This research employs a qualitative approach with a normative-empirical design. Data were obtained through a literature review of legislation, Constitutional Court rulings, as well as research reports and scholarly publications related to political dynasties and regional elections. The primary aim of this research is to examine the relationship between legal loopholes in regional election regulations and the rise of political dynasties, as well as their impact on the quality of democracy and local governance. The findings reveal that the absence of substantive norms limiting the candidacy of incumbent family members creates a legal gap that is exploited to perpetuate power. The annulment of Article 7 letter r of Law No. 8 of 2015 by the Constitutional Court has further legitimized political dynasties within a system that remains democratically unconsolidated. The consequences include declining leadership quality, increased conflicts of interest, weakened oversight, and a growing number of corruption cases in regions dominated by political dynasties. This phenomenon also narrows the space for political competition and strengthens the dominance of local oligarchies in electoral contests.

1. Introduction

Modern democracy is characterized by a shift in political structures that increasingly position the electoral process as the primary manifestation of power legitimacy. In the context of developing countries such as Indonesia, elections are not only seen as a mechanism for leadership transition, but also as a barometer of institutional stability, the political maturity of citizens, and the effectiveness of the legal system in upholding the principles of substantive democracy. Amid a political reality filled with complexity, electoral contests or political competition often become arenas for articulating interests between state and non-state actors, while simultaneously opening space for various practices that, normatively, deviate from the principles of healthy democracy.

The year 2024 marks a significant milestone in Indonesia's national political cycle, as it coincides with the simultaneous elections encompassing three levels of power: the presidential and vice-presidential election, the legislative election, and the regional head elections (Silalahi, 2022). This convergence creates a highly dense and competitive political landscape, where all instruments of power and political resources are mobilized to secure strategic positions within the governmental structure, both at the national and regional levels. In such a context, local political dynamics can no longer be positioned as peripheral to the center of power; on the contrary, they become a vital arena for the reproduction of power, especially for political actors with strong kinship networks and patronage ties.

In this configuration, regional elections are not merely a forum for local electoral democracy, but also serve as a strategic medium for national elites to expand their influence through local power structures (Tjahjoko, 2015). This opens the door to the practice of political dynasties, which often exploit legal loopholes in regional election regulations as a means to maintain the dominance of ruling families. Conceptually, political dynasties refer to the practice of transferring political power within a narrow familial or kinship circle, where blood relations or

family ties become the primary factors in determining access to public office (Hermansyah & Adi, 2017). The main characteristic of political dynasties is the hereditary reproduction of power, which is not necessarily based on individual capability or an open and competitive selection mechanism, but rather driven by the symbolic and structural power attached to the political position of a particular family (Marwiyah et al., 2022). This phenomenon is often accompanied by unequal access to information, control over political and economic resources, and a tendency to weaken democratic institutions that should uphold the principles of meritocracy and substantive representation

The emergence of political dynasties in Indonesia is not a new phenomenon, but it has intensified in the post-reform era along with the decentralization of power through regional autonomy. The 1998 reform, which aimed to open up broad opportunities for political participation, ironically provided space for local actors especially those with significant social and economic capital to establish power dynasties in their respective regions (Putra & Rakhmadi, 2020). In a democratic system that is not yet fully consolidated, regional autonomy has instead given rise to a tendency toward the feudalization of power, where regional heads who succeed in winning elections seek to maintain their influence by encouraging family members to run in subsequent terms or in other administrative areas (Al-Fikri et al., 2023).

This phenomenon can be clearly observed in various regions of Indonesia. For example, in Banten Province, the prominent name of the Ratu Atut Chosiyah family has long been a strong symbol of political dynasty. After serving as Governor of Banten, Atut's influence extended across multiple sectors of local government, including the candidacies of her siblings, children, and relatives for strategic positions such as mayors, regents, and members of the legislature (Tempo.com, 2024a). Another example can be seen in South Sulawesi, particularly in Gowa Regency, where the family of former Regent Ichsan Yasin Limpo has successively held political positions, including his son, Adnan Purichta Ichsan, who

continued the family's hold on power by serving as Regent (PADLI, 2022). A similar phenomenon occurred in Solo, with the candidacy of Gibran Rakabuming Raka for mayor, which sparked public debate regarding the legitimacy of political dynasties under the shadow of President Joko Widodo's prominent name. In fact, during the 2024 presidential election, Gibran ran as a vice-presidential candidate at a very young age, further reinforcing the discourse on political dynasties at the national level (Kompas.id, 2023).

These examples demonstrate that political dynasties are not only developing in peripheral regions with limited oversight but have also penetrated the centers of power and become embedded within the formal structures of democracy. This situation raises concerns about the emergence of local political oligarchies that narrow the space for healthy political competition and ultimately raise serious questions about the quality of electoral democracy in Indonesia (Tjenreng, 2020). In regional head elections, the presence of officials' family members as active political actors is not an anomaly but has formed a recurring and systematic pattern, in which wives, children, siblings, and close relatives of regional leaders are strategically encouraged to run as successors to power (Setyawibawa et al., 2024). This pattern reflects an effort to consolidate power within the family, driven not merely by individual political aspirations but also as a collective strategy to maintain control over local power resources. The motivations behind this practice are generally multidimensional, ranging from the desire to ensure the continuity of government programs, to safeguarding the family's political and economic influence, and avoiding potential legal risks that may arise if power shifts to outside actors (Gedeona, 2011). Political dynasties inherently possess significant electoral advantages, including inherited patronage networks, bureaucratic support, access to political logistics, and symbolic popularity established by their predecessors (PRATAMA, 2021). In many cases, voters' emotional attachment to an incumbent is instantly transferred to family members running for office, creating an uneven electoral playing field and hindering fair competition. This situation highlights how

dynastic politics is not only a consequence of weak regulations but also a reflection of a socio-political structure that still allows significant space for kinship-based power rather than merit-based competence.

The rise of dynastic politics in regional elections cannot be separated from loopholes in the legal regulations governing the election of regional heads, particularly Law No. 10 of 2016 on Regional Elections, which is the second amendment to Law No. 1 of 2015. Although this law normatively outlines the procedures, candidacy requirements, and general conduct of elections, it does not explicitly prohibit or restrict the candidacy of family members of incumbents, as long as they meet administrative requirements and are not currently holding positions that violate neutrality rules. The absence of a clear legal provision prohibiting the candidacy of an incumbent's immediate family members has become a critical weakness frequently exploited to perpetuate hereditary power. This opens wide opportunities for abuse of power, where incumbents may use their authority and state resources to support the candidacy of their relatives—either directly through structural influence or implicitly through control over the bureaucracy, distribution of social aid, and involvement of local government officials (Azzahra & Sukri, 2022). In addition, conflicts of interest become inevitable, given that the incumbent is still in office and holds influence that can undermine the neutrality of election organizers and local government officials. When regulations fail to address practices that ethically contradict the spirit of democracy, regional elections no longer serve as a platform for healthy competition but instead become instruments for legitimizing local oligarchies, disguised under the façade of democratic procedures.

The dominance of officials' families in regional head elections is not merely a political phenomenon, but rather reflects a shift in the power structure that permeates the very foundations of local democracy (Nirahua, 2009). Dynastic politics carried out through the candidacy of an incumbent's wife, children, or relatives has shown how the electoral democratic system is often used as a vehicle

for the reproduction of blood-based power (Hukum et al., 2025). This situation threatens the principles of meritocracy and political fairness, as the process of selecting leaders ideally open to all citizens becomes confined to established power networks. When local elites control not only political resources but also access to election logistics, bureaucratic structures, and local media, broader public political participation is reduced to a mere formality. In such conditions, government accountability and transparency become problematic, as power relations are shaped more by kinship loyalty than by public responsibility.

This phenomenon becomes even more complex when viewed through the lens of existing legal regulations. The laws governing regional head elections such as Law No. 10 of 2016, which is the second amendment to Law No. 1 of 2015 on the Enactment of Government Regulation in Lieu of Law No. 1 of 2014 on the Election of Governors, Regents, and Mayors still lack sufficiently strong normative instruments to curb the dominance of incumbent families in local political contests. The absence of an explicit prohibition against the candidacy of regional leaders' family members creates room for abuse of power that is legitimized by legal procedures. Additionally, there is ambiguity in interpreting the principles of neutrality and electoral fairness, allowing dynastic politics to operate in a legal gray area. This reflects both a normative vacuum and a lack of clarity that need to be thoroughly examined, both in terms of the substance of the regulations and their application within real socio-political contexts. When the law fails to function as an instrument to control power, local democracy becomes vulnerable to being hijacked by actors who use kinship as their main strategy for maintaining political dominance (Susanto & Michael, 2023).

This trend has become increasingly evident in the 2024 Simultaneous Regional Elections. According to research by Indonesia Corruption Watch (ICW), 33 out of the 37 provinces set to hold regional elections on November 27, 2024, are indicated to have candidate pairs affiliated with political dynasties. No less than 26.6%, or 155 out of a total of 582 candidates for regional heads and deputy heads,

have familial ties to previous political officeholders (Tirto.id, 2024). This composition is dominated by parent-child relationships (70 candidates), husband-wife pairs (39 candidates), and sibling pairs (34 candidates), spanning from West Nusa Tenggara to North Sulawesi. Looking back, the number of candidates from political dynasties shows a sharp upward trend compared to the 2017 simultaneous regional elections (37 candidates), 2018 (109 candidates), and 2020 (160 candidates), with a significant surge to 605 candidates in the 2024 elections, according to collaborative research by IFAR, PolGov UGM, and Election Corner UGM (Tempo.com, 2024b). This reinforces concerns about the growing aristocratization of democracy at the local level.

What is even more concerning is the strong correlation between the presence of political dynasties and corruption cases. ICW notes that out of at least 54 mapped political dynasties, the majority have been involved in corrupt practices. The most prominent example is the Ratu Atut Chosiyah dynasty in Banten, where 12 family members hold strategic positions, and several of them, including Ratu Atut herself, have been implicated in corruption cases (Kompas.com, 2013). A similar situation occurred with the dynasties in Kutai Kartanegara (Syaukani Hasan Rais–Rita Widayarsi) and Klaten (Haryanto Wibowo–Sri Hartini). This phenomenon shows that political dynasties are not only an electoral democracy issue but also increase the likelihood of systemic corruption due to weak oversight mechanisms, conflicts of interest, and deep-rooted patronage practices (Hukumonline.com, 2017). Legal loopholes that do not prevent the accumulation of power within families, combined with the absence of adequate ethical and normative limits, reinforce practices of abuse of authority that are legally formal but substantively violate the principles of good governance.

When dynastic politics continue to grow unchecked by adequate legal controls, local democracy faces serious threats such as the shrinking of public political participation, the monopolization of access to power by elite families, and the decline in the quality of regional leaders due to the absence of healthy

competition. The phenomenon of blank ballot options in 37 regions during the 2024 regional elections, dominated by dynasty candidates, further underscores the decline of electoral democracy (BBC News Indonesia, 2024). The mechanism of power circulation, which should provide opportunities for the emergence of alternative leaders, is instead blocked by dynastic structures that form local oligarchies. Studying the patterns, actors, and strategies of political dynasties in the 2024 regional elections becomes increasingly important not merely to map the phenomenon but also to critically reflect on how the law must play a more active role in clarifying the boundary between legitimate power and manipulative power. At this point, the urgency of reformulating regional election laws from regulatory, institutional, to oversight mechanisms can no longer be postponed if we want to save the quality of local democracy from kinship and power co-optation.

2. Research Method

This research uses a qualitative approach with a normative-empirical design. A qualitative approach was chosen because the main focus of this research is to analyze the correlation between the phenomenon of political dynasties in the 2024 regional elections contest and the potential deviations in governance, particularly corruption practices. This approach allows the author to explore more deeply the relationship between the legal norms regulating the candidacy of regional heads and the electoral political realities developing in the field.

The normative study in this research aims to examine the legal framework governing regional elections, including Law No. 10 of 2016 on Regional Head Elections, Law No. 7 of 2017 on Elections, as well as the general principles of democracy and meritocracy in governance. The analysis of legal norms is conducted using legal interpretation techniques, such as grammatical, systematic, and teleological methods (IMADUDDIN, 2025). To examine whether the existence of political dynasties contradicts the democratic spirit mandated by the constitution

and legislation.

Data collection was conducted through a literature study by reviewing books, academic journals, research reports, legal documents, as well as relevant news and scientific publications (Hermawan, 2019). The focus of data collection was directed at issues such as: the conception of electoral democracy, and the influence of kinship politics on governance. The data analysis technique used in this research is descriptive qualitative analysis, where data are categorized based on main themes such as: 1) the distribution map of political dynasties in the 2024 regional elections, 2) the correlation between dynastic politics and corruption practices, and 3) the implications for the weakening of electoral democracy. The data obtained are then interpreted logically and systematically to gain a comprehensive understanding of the issues studied. To maintain the validity and objectivity of the findings, source triangulation was conducted by comparing data from election monitoring agencies, independent media, and academic studies from political and constitutional law experts. This triangulation ensures that the resulting interpretations are unbiased and can be scientifically accounted for (Segena et al., 2023). The primary focus remains on normative analysis, and therefore, the results of this research are expected to serve as an initial foundation for further, more in-depth and methodologically broader research.

3. Results and Discussion

1. The Concept and Reality of Political Dynasties in Indonesia

The phenomenon of political dynasties in Indonesia is a modern form of kinship-based power inheritance within the framework of electoral democracy. Although the democratic system demands openness, healthy competition, and meritocracy in the process of nominating regional heads, in reality, dynastic politics still occur massively and in a structured manner. In Indonesia, political dynasties are not merely an anomaly but have become a dominant pattern in the struggle for

power at both local and national levels (Kurniawan et al., 2019). Dynastic politics is carried out by groups of individuals who have blood relations, marriage ties, or personal affiliations with power elites, who then use that influence to occupy strategic positions in the government or legislative institutions (Salsabila et al., 2025). This practice has grown stronger following decentralization and the direct election of regional heads, as the electoral space is instead exploited by old elites to consolidate power genealogically rather than to expand political access meritocratically.

The absence of strict regulations in the Regional Elections Law has allowed dynastic politics to gain legal legitimacy, even though it substantively contradicts the spirit of constitutional democracy. The Constitutional Court itself, through Decision No. 33/PUU-XIII/2015, annulled the article prohibiting the candidacy of incumbents' family members on the grounds of violating constitutional rights, although in practice this annulment has opened the floodgates for systematic inheritance of positions within a single family circle (Kompas.id, 2024b). This is worsened by the weak cadre development mechanisms within political parties, which are often unselective and pragmatic, prioritizing electability and financial strength over the personal capacity of candidates. In such a climate, parties tend to become vehicles for dynasties rather than democratic institutions. As a result, political dynasties not only appear as a symptom of legal weaknesses but also become a consequence of a political party system co-opted by certain elites.

Dynastic politics not only stifles competition but also narrows the space for public participation and strengthens forms of oligarchic power at the local level (RIAWAN, 2020). The presence of dynastic actors tends to weaken the principle of checks and balances because the concentration of power within a single family is often accompanied by internal loyalty and uncontrolled conflicts of interest. Political dynasties have been proven to contribute to leadership stagnation, corruption, and poor public service performance at the local level. In contrast, regional leaders coming from non-dynastic backgrounds, such as Ridwan Kamil,

Ganjar Pranowo, or Tri Rismaharini, have demonstrated much more progressive achievements because they are free from the burden of family political patronage.

Therefore, the concept of political dynasties in Indonesia cannot be separated from the complex relationship between power, law, and democracy, which is still in transition. This practice clearly shows a contradiction between formal legality and the quality of substantive democracy, posing a serious challenge for the development of a healthy and inclusive democracy at both local and national levels.

Historically, the tendency of kinship-based power inheritance is not new in Indonesia. The feudalistic tradition during the Nusantara kingdoms, hereditary power during colonialism, and authoritarianism during the New Order era all demonstrate that power structures tend to be patrimonial and exclusive. The 1998 reform succeeded in dismantling the centralistic power structure but did not immediately eliminate the patrimonial spirit in local political practices (Fachrudin, 2025). Decentralization and direct elections have actually become new spaces for old elites to reconstruct power in a model that is more "procedurally democratic" but remains substantively oligarchic. In other words, post-reform dynastic politics is a transformation of the old pattern of power inheritance into a loose and permissive legal framework.

Furthermore, the development of political dynasties in Indonesia must also be understood within the framework of the relationship between economic inequality and access to power. Elite families with substantial economic resources are not only able to finance political campaigns more effectively but also control local media, bureaucratic networks, and even public opinion through patronage relationships (Hutabarat et al., 2025). This situation strengthens the structure of political dynasties and makes it difficult for independent or alternative candidates from civil society to emerge. Within this framework, political dynasties are not only a result of legal loopholes but also reflect the state's failure to create a fair and equal field of competition (Azzahra & Sukri, 2022). Therefore, understanding the concept of political dynasties in Indonesia is not enough through normative analysis alone

but also requires a multidimensional reading of how power, economy, law, and culture reinforce each other within the recurring format of political inheritance.

2. Political Dynasties Through Legal Gaps in Regional Election Regulations

The strengthening phenomenon of political dynasties in regional head elections in Indonesia cannot be separated from the inherent legal gaps in election regulations, particularly in Law Number 10 of 2016 concerning Regional Head Elections. This regulation does include administrative and technical requirements for candidacy, but it does not explicitly regulate the limitations on kinship relations between candidates and incumbent officeholders. This gap creates a legal loophole exploited by political actors to reproduce power genealogically within family circles, without significant juridical obstacles (Rahayu, 2007). Not only that, the annulment of the provision prohibiting relatives of incumbents from running, through Constitutional Court Decision No. 33/PUU-XIII/2015, further weakens the legal position that was originally designed to prevent potential conflicts of interest and abuse of power. Under the pretext of protecting political rights, the Court has instead strengthened the legal argument for legitimizing political dynasties within an electoral democracy system that is not yet fully consolidated. As a result, the regional election process, which should serve as an instrument for fair and open circulation of power, has turned into a disguised inheritance of power, legalized by the absence of substantive legal norms.

In an effort to control political dynasties, Article 7 letter r of Law Number 8 of 2015 concerning Regional Head Elections, which regulates the prohibition of candidacy for candidates who have a blood, marital, or direct one-level lineage relationship with the incumbent, was originally intended to break the chain of kinship-based power inheritance. This article explicitly prohibits the candidacy of incumbent family members such as father, mother, parent-in-law, uncle, aunt, elder sibling, younger sibling, in-law, child, or son/daughter-in-law, except if there has been a gap of one term (MUKHLIS, 2024). However, this provision was later

submitted for judicial review to the Constitutional Court on the grounds that it conflicted with several articles in the 1945 Constitution, including Article 27 paragraph (1) concerning the equality of all citizens before the law, Article 28D paragraph (3) regarding the right to obtain equal opportunity in government, Article 28I paragraph (2) prohibiting discriminatory treatment, and Article 28J paragraph (2) regulating the limitation of rights based on the recognition of the freedom rights of others and public order. Based on these considerations, the Court decided to annul the article through Decision Number 33/PUU-XIII/2015, thus rendering the prohibition no longer legally binding (HADY, 2018).

The implications of this ruling are highly significant in the practice of electoral politics in Indonesia. With the annulment of the article that explicitly regulated the prohibition of candidacy for family members of incumbents, the door for the legal and formal inheritance of power is wide open. This means political dynasties gain legal legitimacy to continue operating without meaningful regulatory obstacles. Although the article aimed to prevent the dominance of political dynasties and maintain the quality of democracy, the Constitutional Court's ruling has instead become a turning point that weakens these efforts. In practice, this results in the perpetuation of power within families of officials across various regions, potentially worsening the dynamics of local democracy by prioritizing personal and kinship relationships over the competence and integrity of regional head candidates.

From a democracy perspective, this condition raises a fundamental dilemma. Dynasty politics in regional elections risks transforming the democratic mechanism into an arena for the inheritance of power that is oligarchic and patrimonial in nature (DJATI, 2014). Electoral democracy, which should serve as a means for elite circulation and leadership regeneration, has turned into an instrument for the perpetuation of power within certain families. The negative impact of this phenomenon is not limited to political aspects but also extends to economic and governance realms, where there is potential for policy monopolies, abuse of authority, and corruption practices that are difficult to eradicate due to the

strong family patronage networks. Since 2013, at least 16 regions implementing political dynasties have ended up with corruption cases handled by the Corruption Eradication Commission (KPK), indicating a strong correlation between political dynasties and the widespread misconduct in local governments (Tempo.co, 2021).

Overall, the Constitutional Court's ruling has brought quite serious legal and political consequences. The normalization of power inheritance through legal loopholes and gaps has provided space for political dynasties to thrive within a democracy system that has formally adopted the principle of direct elections. This situation reflects a dilemma inherent in Indonesia's democratic transition, where formal legality sometimes overlooks the essence of substantive democracy, which upholds the principles of openness, healthy competition, and meritocracy in local governance.

Besides the legal gaps that allow for the inheritance of family power, the technical regulations governing regional elections also reveal a blurring of democratic norms, which obscures the implementation of substantive democratic principles. This ambiguity is evident in certain provisions of Law No. 10 of 2016, such as Article 7, which only regulates administrative requirements for regional head candidates—for example, minimum age, no criminal record, and at least a high school education—but does not explicitly include prohibitions or ethical assessment mechanisms regarding kinship relations with incumbents. Even the provision regarding “having no conflict of interest with the incumbent” was removed from the initial version of Article 7 letter r of Law No. 8 of 2015 following the Constitutional Court's Decision No. 33/PUU-XIII/2015, thus no longer having binding legal force. When terms like “conflict of interest” are neither clearly defined nor operationalized further into ethical standards or substantive tests, the legal norms become semantically vague and vulnerable to minimalistic interpretations by election organizers and political parties.

This ambiguity also reveals an inconsistency between the spirit of constitutional democracy, as stated in Article 27 paragraph (1), Article 28D

paragraph (3), and Article 28J paragraph (2) of the 1945 Constitution of the Republic of Indonesia, and the operational norms in the Regional Election Law. The Constitution emphasizes equality, non-discrimination, and fairness in access to public office, yet the technical regulations neglect substantive aspects such as integrity, accountability, and potential conflicts of interest in power relations. Without ethical selection mechanisms, such as public feasibility and propriety tests or restrictions on candidacy based on structural closeness to active officials, the regional election process is at high risk of being reduced to an electoral formality that only benefits those with dynastic power and political capital.

This condition shows that besides revising formal norms, there is also a need for electoral political ethical standards and substantive oversight mechanisms in the nomination of regional heads, so that local democracy does not get trapped in procedures devoid of values of justice and propriety. The absence of substantive norms in the regulations opens opportunities for political dynasties to operate within a legal but unethical space. Therefore, the reform of the Regional Election Law needs to consider the substantive dimension of democracy, not only to guarantee the right to candidacy but also to ensure that power is contested through a fair, open process that avoids kinship domination.

In a representative democracy system, political parties essentially have a central role as agents of cadre formation and guardians of public leadership quality. However, in local politics in Indonesia, this role has become increasingly unclear and ambiguous. Instead of serving as a meritocratic filter that selects candidates based on integrity, capacity, and national vision, political parties often function as pragmatic electoral vehicles that serve the interests of elites and family power networks (MUKHLIS, 2024). The phenomenon of political parties nominating family members of incumbents shows that considerations of electability, popularity, and access to political resources are prioritized over a competency-based cadre formation process. Many parties treat blood ties to incumbent officials as a "political guarantee"

to secure victory, while simultaneously strengthening the party's bargaining position with local actors who hold structural and financial influence.

Data from several regions reinforces this tendency. In Bali, for example, it is recorded that 34 members of the provincial DPRD from four different parties have direct kinship affiliations with regents up to ministers who are still in office. In practice, they utilize this familial relationship status in campaign materials, ranging from placing photos with relatives of officials on billboards to participating in official state events that provide symbolic legitimacy. Parties openly approve the nomination of these dynasty figures, arguing that they have higher electability levels and strong logistical support (BBC News Indonesia, 2023). Ultimately, this pattern not only weakens the function of parties as democratic recruitment institutions but also reinforces the reproduction of power within closed circles, which has the potential to deepen inequalities in access to power and undermine public trust in the political system itself.

Furthermore, this condition has caused structural impacts on the quality of electoral competition, especially at the local level. The lack of mechanisms for limiting and supervising nomination patterns results in an unbalanced contest. Candidates from families of officials have greater access to campaign resources, bureaucratic influence, and almost automatic party support. Meanwhile, alternative candidates, even if potentially more competent, find it difficult to break through the entrenched dominance of local power networks. In the long term, this uneven electoral structure creates a continuous accumulation of power within family circles and opens up significant opportunities for abuse of power in public office. Without comprehensive reform in the nomination system and the role of political parties, local democracy will only become a procedural ritual that perpetuates oligarchy, rather than serving as a means for democratic and accountable leadership renewal.

4. The Political Implications of Dynasties on the Quality of Democracy and Governance

The dominance of political dynasties in regional head elections has serious implications for the quality of democracy and governance. Although elections procedurally continue to take place, the concentration of power within elite families tends to obscure the substance of democracy, which demands open competition, equal participation, and accountability. Political dynasties not only weaken oversight functions and increase conflicts of interest but also negatively impact the quality of public services (PADILAH, 2025). In the long term, this practice creates a pseudo-democracy where power is inherited rather than contested meritocratically, ultimately damaging the government structure that should serve the interests of the people. This condition not only weakens the foundation of local democracy but also opens the door to more serious abuses of power, particularly in the form of corruption practices that often emerge in areas controlled by political dynasties.

The correlation between political dynasties and corruption practices in the regions is one of the most tangible impacts of weak power restrictions within Indonesia's regional election system. According to findings from Indonesia Corruption Watch (ICW), as many as 33 out of 37 provinces scheduled to hold simultaneous regional elections in November 2024 are strongly indicated to have candidate pairs affiliated with political dynasties (Kompas.id, 2024a). This is not just about blood relations in political contests, but also concerns the potential accumulation of unchecked power that creates wide opportunities for abuses. Of the 54 political dynasties mapped by ICW, the majority have a track record of corruption cases within their areas of influence, indicating that political dynasties are not only problematic from a democratic perspective but also have a direct impact on corrupt governance. Cases such as the Ratu Atut dynasty in Banten, Syaukani Hasan Rais and Rita Widyasari in Kutai Kartanegara, as well as Sri Hartini and Haryanto Wibowo in Klaten demonstrate a recurring pattern: inherited power tends to be used

to perpetuate personal and family interests, weaken oversight systems, and create closed patronage networks resistant to transparency (Dio Tv, 2024).

This phenomenon is increasingly evident in the 2024 regional elections, where 155 out of a total of 582 candidates (26.6%) are recorded to have direct affiliations with political dynasties. These affiliations include parent-child, husband-wife, sibling, as well as nephew and son-in-law relationships, with the highest concentrations found in provinces such as West Nusa Tenggara (NTB), Southeast Sulawesi, and South Sulawesi (Metro Tv News, 2024). Although not legally prohibited, if regional elections are understood as a means for the circulation of power and the regeneration of leaders based on capacity, the existence of political dynasties clearly contradicts that purpose. Moreover, in 12 regions where there is only one candidate running against an empty box, most of the candidates come from ruling families, demonstrating how strong the grip of dynasties is on the electoral competition space. When the public sphere is controlled by a single political clan, competition is stifled, public oversight is weakened, and the quality of local democracy is systematically eroded

More than that, the lack of transparency regarding the candidates' track records worsens the situation. The performance of the General Elections Commission (KPU) as the election organizer is considered negligent in providing important data that would allow the public to assess the background and integrity of the candidates. This has prompted Indonesia Corruption Watch (ICW) to launch a special feature on the website rekamjejak.net, which presents information related to dynasty affiliations, wealth, alleged corruption, and business connections of regional head candidates. This initiative is not only aimed at educating voters politically but also serves as a critique of KPU's minimal commitment to information transparency. This lack of openness is dangerous because it leaves the people without a rational basis for choosing, while allowing political dynasties to continue reproducing through seemingly legal channels that, substantively, betray the principles of democratic justice and clean governance.

This condition not only weakens the foundation of local democracy but also creates space for more serious abuses of power, especially in the form of corruption practices that often arise in areas controlled by political dynasties. The dominance of a single family in public office weakens the system of checks and balances, which is one of the crucial pillars of democratic governance. The accumulation of power without strong oversight mechanisms creates a closed political climate where personal loyalty replaces public accountability. When strategic positions are filled by individuals from the same family without competency-based selection, the potential for conflicts of interest sharply increases, and public oversight both by formal institutions and civil society becomes ineffective. This directly impacts poor budget management, stagnation in public services, and the emergence of a bureaucracy that functions more as a tool to protect power than to serve the interests of the people. From the perspective of Constitutional Law, political dynasties clearly undermine the principles of meritocracy and accountability, the two main foundations of modern democracy, because power is no longer granted based on capacity but is inherited genealogically without a fair selection mechanism.

Furthermore, the dominance of social, political, and economic capital by incumbent families makes it difficult for alternative candidates to gain space to compete, let alone win. As a result, the circulation of power stagnates, leadership regeneration is hindered, and the people lose substantively viable choices. As explained by Edward Aspinall, political dynasties create democratic deficits because the actors who fill public offices are determined more by blood relations than by capacity and integrity (Hukum et al., 2025). This causes the people to become increasingly alienated from the democratic process, as election results no longer reflect collective aspirations but rather the compromises of elites within a closed circle of power.

In the long term, this situation risks causing a crisis of substantive democracy and disrupting national political stability. When democracy becomes merely a procedure without equitable content, political exclusivism will grow, widening

social inequality and increasing the chances of economic injustice. Dynasty politics operating within a permissive legal space also contributes to the fragmentation of public trust in state institutions and the representative system. A system that should be open and competitive turns oligarchic, and trust in democracy as a mechanism for pursuing collective welfare drastically declines. Therefore, renewing the democratic and legal systems becomes an urgent necessity. Concrete steps, such as establishing a cooling-off period for incumbent families before they can run for office, as suggested by Buehler, represent a strategy that can be used to break the cycle of hereditary power. Without firm regulatory reforms and strengthening institutional oversight, dynasty politics will continue to hinder the progress of local democracy and worsen the legitimacy crisis of the state in the eyes of the public

4. Conclusion

Dynasty politics in regional head elections reflects the failure of the local democratic system to create a fair and meritocratic competition arena. Power is no longer contested openly based on capacity and integrity but is inherited genealogically through kinship ties with incumbents. This phenomenon shows that procedural democracy does not yet guarantee the presence of political justice, especially when power is used to maintain family dominance in public office.

The absence of clear legal norms and the presence of loopholes in the regional election regulations have become the main entry points for the growth of dynasty politics. The lack of explicit prohibitions in Law Number 10 of 2016, along with the Constitutional Court's annulment of articles related to conflicts of interest, has opened a legal space for the reproduction of power based on kinship. The ambiguity of norms and the weak ethical mechanisms in candidacy worsen the situation by allowing the democratic process to be hijacked by family interests facilitated pragmatically by political parties.

The impact of this condition is not only the hindered regeneration of

leadership but also the increased potential for abuse of power and corruption. The accumulation of power within the family blurs the line between public interests and personal interests. When strategic positions are filled by people connected by blood without an objective selection process, the oversight system becomes weak, loyalty is prioritized over accountability, and public services risk being subordinated to the agenda of the ruling family.

This phenomenon shows that local democracy is facing a serious threat. Without comprehensive legal reforms and strengthening of oversight institutions as well as political parties, dynastic politics will continue to erode the fundamental values of democracy and reinforce power oligarchies at the regional level. Concrete steps are needed to close legal loopholes, build a fairer leadership selection system, and ensure that public power can only be accessed through open, transparent, and capability-based processes not because of lineage.

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