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Cross-Party Presidential Dynasticism in Indonesia: Evidence from the 2024 Presidential Elections

ABSTRACT

Dynasticism is a persistent feature of global politics, and the political role of elite families and their client networks continues to evolve in Indonesia, the Philippines, Thailand and elsewhere in Southeast Asia. In Indonesia, former president Jokowi's political dynasty consisting of family members and clientelistic elites is causing a number of contortions to the constitutional and presidential system. This article analyses the strategy used by Jokowi to outmanoeuvre the leading party in his coalition, the Indonesian Democratic Party of Struggle (PDI-P), while forming pragmatic big-tent coalitions through the co-optation of opposition parties and leaders. Indonesia's post-1998 democratic system has structural flaws and legal ambiguities that enable the president to expand constitutional powers and influence key institutions. This article contends that a novel form of cross-party presidential dynasticism is reshaping elite power and electoral coalition building in Indonesia. Our analysis is based on interviews with political party elites and campaign managers who were closely involved in the 2024 Indonesian presidential elections, supplemented by a review of Indonesian language scholarship and reporting. Our findings contribute to theories of promiscuous power-sharing and coalition presidentialism. The rise of electoral manipulation and cross-party dealmaking raises questions about the integrity of the world's third largest democracy.

Keywords: presidential dynasticism, elections, clientelism, democracy, Indonesia

Introduction

In March 2024 the Indonesian Election Commission confirmed that Prabowo Subianto won the presidential election with an absolute majority of 58%. Prabowo, who lost in the previous two presidential elections, succeeded in 2024 largely because of the endorsement of his predecessor Joko Widodo (hereafter Jokowi). The turning point in the election campaign came in October 2023 when Jokowi's eldest son Gibran Rakabuming Raka was nominated as Prabowo's vice presidential running mate. This article finds that an emerging form of cross-party presidential dynasticism is reshaping elite power and electoral coalitions in Indonesia. Our argument is based on interviews with political party elites and campaign managers closely involved in the 2024 Indonesian presidential elections, supplemented by a review of Indonesian language scholarship and reporting. Our findings contribute to theories of promiscuous power-sharing and coalition presidentialism in Southeast Asia.

Dynasticism is a persistent feature of global politics, and the political role of elite families and their client networks continues to evolve in Indonesia and elsewhere in Southeast Asia (Bland 2024). In Indonesia, former president Jokowi's efforts to establish a political dynasty consisting of family members and clientelistic elites is causing a number of contortions to the constitutional and presidential system. This article analyses the strategy used by Jokowi to outmanoeuvre the leading party in his coalition, the Indonesian Democratic Party of Struggle (PDI-P), while forming pragmatic big-tent coalitions through the co-optation of opposition parties and leaders. Indonesia's post-1998 democratic system has structural weaknesses and legal ambiguities that enable the president to expand constitutional powers and influence key institutions. Complex forms of electoral manipulation and cross-party dealmaking raise questions about the integrity of the world's third largest democracy.

The global democratic erosion that started circa 2006 has been caused in part by declining public commitments to democracy and by institutional ruptures (Cohen et al. 2023).

Institutional ruptures can occur when leaders prioritize the interests of their political dynasties. For example, clientelism as a method of contingent exchange (Hicken 2011) helps determine candidate nominations, promotions and the distribution of power and resources in political coalitions. This supports the proposition that many Indonesian elites embrace democracy for pragmatic rather than principled reasons (Slater 2023). Our study adds nuance by exploring distinctive aspects of Jokowi's presidential dynasticism that operate outside of the formal political system. Jokowi's post-tenure dynastic ambitions mirror his political style as president, where for the last decade he sought to transcend party politics. The cross-party presidential dynasticism that we observe in Indonesia challenges conventional understandings of how political power is captured and transferred in democratic systems. The dynastic strategy involves parcelling out influential positions and appointments in key institutions while maintaining a veneer of adherence to democratic constitutional norms.

Democracy, Dynasty and Elections

Our study of presidential dynasticism contributes to debates about promiscuous power-sharing and coalitional presidentialism. In presidential systems, strong and popular leaders can shape the system to serve their personal interests and expand their power, for instance using non-legislative authorities to weaken checks and balances, or using political appointments to extend their influence while in office and in the post-tenure period (Berlucchi and Kellam 2023). Power-sharing is promiscuous when elites from different political parties collude to capture state patronage and influence elections (Muhtadi 2015). This type of power-sharing blurs distinctions between authoritarians and reformers, giving rise to toxic alliances that preach the common good while surreptitiously striking deals that advance the interests of their members (McCargo and Wadipalapa 2024). In highly competitive political environments, dynasticism involves members of a network who have entangled family histories and business alliances that

are built on degrees of trust and long-term relationships, usually held together by leaders with personal charisma and authority (Ruud and Nielsen 2018). Interlock between elites in Southeast Asia can extend across formal organizations, driven by “mutually beneficial exchanges of political and corporate resources” as well as affective relationships involving family and friends (Case 2003, 249).

Despite the controversy surrounding toxic alliances and political paramours, there is a measure of stability in the Indonesian presidential system. Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono served as president for two terms from 2004 to 2014, and Jokowi did the same from 2014 to 2024, with no signs of a coup and limited procedural efforts to overturn the election results through the courts. Part of the explanation is that Indonesia’s “coalitional presidency” requires leaders to build functioning coalitions by means of co-optation and exchange (Mietzner 2023). One new feature of Indonesia’s coalition-based elections has been Jokowi’s construction of cross-party alliances to serve his post-tenure ambition, including the nurturing of a nascent presidential dynasty that consists of kin and client. Jokowi’s cross-party presidential dynasticism appears to benefit from relatively de-centered and weak party organizations, as well as floating voter affiliations. There are elements of “transactional clientelism” in Indonesian elections, in which actors and brokers with weak partisan attachments seek immediate rewards, although the nature of dynasties and toxic alliances suggest that longer-term, more personalized “relational clientelism” is also a feature of Indonesian politics (Aspinall and Hicken 2020).

The dynasty that Jokowi is attempting to establish is connected to electoral politics, part of a negotiation process that involves candidate nominations and power-sharing in coalitions. Evidence from Southeast Asia supports the view that the relationship between democracy and elections is constitutive rather than causal, with elections representing the endpoint rather than the start of democratisation (Morgenbesser and Pepinski 2019). Elections are important signal

events in democracies, representing moments of “maximum political conflict, information spread, mobilization, and activation of political identities and predispositions” (Hernández et al. 2021, 2). Like any competitive activity, elections are fraught with ambiguity and subject to a multitude of manipulations (Schedler 2002). In Southeast Asia, a region with 11 countries and a combined population exceeding 680 million people,¹ there is the paradox of persistent authoritarianism in countries that have regular competitive elections (Morgenbesser and Pepinski 2019, 4). Current research in the field of electoral studies and democratization converges on the fact that democracy is under threat “from within” (Schnaudt 2023). Dan Slater (2023, 100) contends that an “inside job” involving political elites could be the gradual undoing of Indonesian democracy, for example if street protests are criminalized, if direct elections are retracted, or if the Corruption Eradication Commission is proscribed. Three related threats from within are the narrowing of electoral competitiveness, weaponized identity politics, and the illiberal use of executive power (Mietzner 2020). The “threat from within” thesis is validated by the fact that the 2023 election results in Thailand were brazenly overridden by elites through closed-door dealmaking (McCargo 2024), while the 2024 election results in Indonesia were largely pre-determined by elites colluding in a similar manner.

The ability to manage a peaceful transfer of power from one leader to the next is a litmus test of the strength and legitimacy of electoral systems. A global dataset complied by Mila Versteeg et al. (2020) shows that it is common for incumbent presidents worldwide to attempt to evade term limits and exceed their original mandates through constitutional amendments. Only in rare cases such as China can a leader succeed in removing term limits via constitutional amendment without any visible political opposition or public debate. Xi Jinping achieved this feat in 2018, and on the surface the Chinese Communist Party continues to consolidate one

¹ The countries with imperfect but competitive elections are Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, and Timor-Leste. Elsewhere, Thailand remains prone to coups and electoral interference. Cambodia is beholden to the Hun Sen family and democracy continues to decline. Myanmar is run by a military junta and is beset by conflict. Communist Vietnam is a one party state, as is neighbouring Laos. Brunei is a petroleum rich sultanate.

party rule, or “partocracy” as Baogang Guo (2020) calls it. In 2020 the Russian parliament ratified a package of constitutional amendments enabling President Vladimir Putin to run for re-election until 2036 (Frye 2022, 51). In 2023 there was a short-lived attempt to extend presidential term limits in Indonesia to keep Jokowi in power, but this had little support from lawmakers or the public.

Part of Jokowi’s post-tenure strategy is to stretch his original mandate by endorsing a successor and placing his eldest son in the vice presidential office. Jokowi enabled Prabowo’s presidential election victory through the use of state resources and regulatory powers. For example, the introduction of simultaneous elections in 2019 required the short-term appointment of local leaders who were loyal to the president and central government (Mujani and Liddle 2021). Some of the village and district heads appointed since 2022 are believed to have been pressured or bribed to generate votes for Prabowo (Adyatama 2024). In addition, Jokowi is reported to have ordered the Minister of Finance to increase the allocation of social assistance funds (*bansos*) and other forms of state largess to key constituencies during the election campaign period, boosting his popularity among voters who were then inclined to support the Prabowo-Gibran campaign (Tempo 2024).

Nancy Bermeo portrays strategic election manipulation as a set of targeted actions that tilt the field in favour of incumbents with enough subtlety to avoid appearing fraudulent (Bermeo 2016). Popular leaders such as Jokowi can deploy a set of strategic actions that are legally ambiguous to promote their preferred candidates and enhance their toxic alliances, thereby fragmenting and weakening party organizations to influence electoral outcomes. General patterns show that elites seek to skew electoral competition between candidates with varying degrees of success (Koskimaa et al. 2023). Data modelling by Leonardo Arriola et al. (2021) demonstrates that incumbents can induce opposition fragmentation using subversive but legally permissible co-optation strategies. The model explains elite behaviour in electoral

regimes “where informal patronage relationships continue to shape the jockeying for power despite the adoption of formal democratic institutions” (Arriola et al. 2021, 1358). Elite rotation forms the backbone of co-optation in democracies and autocracies alike, influencing access to power, resource distribution and political loyalty (Nadporozhskii 2023). Our analysis of Indonesia’s 2024 election shows that the lines between legal co-optation and illicit political tactics are blurred, and that Jokowi’s involvement in elite brokerage and reciprocity fits the broad pattern of toxic alliances in Southeast Asia (McCargo and Wadipalapa 2024).

Jokowi’s strategy during the 2024 election campaign served the interests of his family members and patron-client network. Greg Fealy (2020) identified the early signs of a new presidential dynasticism in Indonesia when, at the start of his second term in office in 2019, Jokowi encouraged his eldest son Gibran and his son-in-law Bobby Nasution to launch their political careers. For comparison, dynasties persist in the Philippines because of their “formidable political and socio-economic foundations”, as well as the lack of constitutional provisions and countervailing political forces that can challenge these elites (Tadem and Tadem 2016, 329). Since taking office in 2022, President Ferdinand (Bongbong) Marcos Jr. formed an uneasy alliance with his predecessor Rodrigo Duterte in the Philippines (Dulay et al. 2023). In 2023, former Cambodian prime minister Hun Sen appointed his eldest son Hun Manet as his successor after nearly four decades in power, extending the mandate of the ruling Cambodian People’s Party in an increasingly authoritarian setting. The outcome of the 2023 Thai elections included a deal that enabled Thaksin Shinawatra to return from exile before his daughter Paetongtarn Shinawatra was sworn in as Thailand’s thirty-first prime minister (McCargo 2024). In many Southeast Asian countries, the electoral effect of promiscuous power-sharing and dynastic coalition building is most prominent where party organization and voter affiliation is weak.

Presidents and Party Coalitions in the Indonesian Context

The history of modern Indonesia has been shaped by three transitions. The first transition was anti-colonial. In 1945 nationalist leaders proclaimed independence from the Dutch. The second transition was anti-communist. In 1965 a bloody purge and national crisis ushered in an era of developmental authoritarianism. The third transition was anti-authoritarian. In 1998 President Suharto resigned and a new system of competitive multi-party elections emerged. Indonesia, a vast archipelago with over 17,000 islands and 280 million people, became the world's largest Muslim-majority democracy. A turbulent transition to a fragile democracy ensured that voters had new parties to choose from, but the majority of new parties lacked credibility and there was little ideological differentiation between them (Muhtadi 2020, 2). The neopatrimonial bureaucratic state under Suharto, where power was maintained for three decades through a network of personal patronage, was replaced by a more competitive patronage democracy in the post-1998 reform era (Aspinall and Hicken 2020).

For historical context, Indonesia's first president Sukarno formed a coalition in 1956 called Nasakom, a portmanteau of the words nationalism, religion and communism, to accommodate the four major political parties in a system known as guided democracy (Adam 2004). Political coalitions are relatively stable when endowments such as seats, policy platforms and resources are first being distributed and traded, but coalition stability can breakdown over time (Müller et al. 2024). The purge of the communist party during the Cold War gave rise to President Suharto's authoritarian regime in 1966. During this era, known as the New Order, only three political parties were active. The dominant player was Golkar, a secular party of military leaders and bureaucrats. Then there was the secular nationalist Indonesian Democratic Party (PDI) and the religious United Development Party (PPP) that formed the opposition in five rigged elections that kept Suharto in power between 1977 and 1997 (Said 2016).

After Suharto resigned in May 1998, Indonesia embarked on a complex transition to democracy, passing election laws allowing for multiparty competition. Promiscuous power-sharing led to the appointment by parliament of President Abdurrahman Wahid (better known as Gus Dur) in 1999, and President Megawati Sukarnoputri, Sukarno's daughter, in 2001. Gus Dur and his political supporters formed a middle axis coalition (*koalisi poros tengah*) to oppose Megawati and her PDI-P party. A deal was brokered that persuaded Megawati to accept the temporary position of vice president (Cipto 2000). Gus Dur's impeachment in 2001 elevated Megawati to the presidency, and the ruling party coalition shifted its allegiance to Megawati and the PDI-P until 2004 (Zulhidayat 2017).

Constitutional amendments passed in 2001 led to the first direct presidential elections being held in 2004. The president was no longer appointed by parliamentary votes, and large coalitions emerged. 24 political parties and five presidential candidate pairs competed during the 2004 elections, resulting in victory for Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono and his vice president Jusuf Kalla. In the 2009 elections, a staggering 44 political parties were registered, forming coalitions in support of three presidential candidate pairs. President Yudhoyono won a second term with a strong 61% majority. Nine political parties met the threshold for parliamentary representation, resulting in a “variegated ruling coalition” where voters struggle to identify with any particular party (Fealy 2011, 340).

In the 2014 presidential election, Jokowi emerged as a political outsider with a relatively clean track record and a reputation for efficient if somewhat hardnosed leadership. His lack of experience was resolved by the selection of veteran politician Jusuf Kalla to serve as vice president. They won a tight race against Prabowo Subianto and Hatta Rajasa, who formed a five-party opposition coalition (Republika 2014). Jokowi's ruling coalition consisted of four parties, the largest being the Indonesian Democratic Party of Struggle (PDI-P), but commanded only 37% of the parliamentary seats. Repeating his success in 2014, Jokowi won the 2019

presidential elections with an 11% lead over rival candidate Prabowo, securing a 55% majority vote in the second round (KPU 2019). After careful negotiation and private dealmaking, opposition parties Gerindra and the National Mandate Party (PAN) joined Jokowi's governing alliance, creating a grand coalition that controlled 471 out of 575 parliamentary seats (or 82%) in the House of Representatives for the 2019–2024 period.

In the wake of Indonesia's three major transitions since 1945, the political system has evolved in particular ways. For example, there is relatively weak party institutionalization and thin party ideology, allowing political elites to build pragmatic networks and leverage their influence across generations of voters from diverse socio-economic backgrounds.

Research Methods

This study examines the emergence of a presidential dynasty in Indonesia. This is a contentious topic, and data is not readily available. To overcome these limitations, the authors elicit key information from elite interviews.² The standard definition of an elite is “an individual who holds or has held some powerful position that has afforded the individual unique knowledge or information from a privileged perspective” (Natow 2020, 160). Elite perspectives help provide a more complete picture of the phenomena that we are studying, but these views need to be corroborated using a variety of techniques. We consulted respected academics in the field as well as Indonesian language reports to validate our findings and reduce inaccuracies caused by subterfuge or factual misrepresentation by interviewees.

Our interviews offer rare insights into the 2024 presidential elections. We have testimony from key figures who were directly involved in the closed-door bargaining between Jokowi and Prabowo. Senior figures from the PDI-P help explain the internal conflicts and factionalism

² University of Leeds ethical approval AREA 19-153 was granted for this research. All interview sources are kept anonymous by mutual agreement.

within the party at critical stages in the election campaign from 2023 to 2024. Likewise, senior figures from the Gerindra party reveal how members of the opposition sought to capitalize on, and even exacerbate, Jokowi's rivalry with PDI-P Chair Megawati. There is compelling evidence that Jokowi acted as an outsider president with the ability to mobilize a cross-party coalition to undermine the PDI-P while building a political dynasty that combines kinship and clientelism.

Findings: Constructing a Cross-Party Presidential Dynasty

The construction of Jokowi's presidential dynasty in Indonesia relies on key factors such as electoral manipulation, the weakening of the PDI-P party, the building of coalitions by co-opting opposition, and the strategic distribution of state largess. Jokowi is adept at dealmaking and has formed strategic coalitions across a political broad spectrum, enabling the post-tenure president to expand his personal power while party organizations experience varying degrees of fragmentation.

The early years of Jokowi's presidency were unstable, with protracted political conflicts and delays in the legislative (Admojo 2016; Prayudi 2014). Facing an organized and obstructive opposition coalition led by Prabowo's Gerindra Party, Jokowi's ruling coalition, with the PDI-P at the helm, had to strike deals behind the scenes to allow the legislative agenda to run more efficiently. Jokowi's first term in office was a careful balancing act as political parties sought to serve the interests of their respective constituencies, while Jokowi developed his popular base of large-scale volunteer groups and supporters. Jokowi and the PDI-P managed to gain support from some opposition factions while resolving some of the disputes within the ruling coalition.

Jokowi's Political Gambit

President Jokowi and Yasonna Laoly, the Minister of Justice and Human Rights and a senior PDI-P figure, played a pivotal role in dealing with internal leadership conflicts and divisions within major parties such as the United Development Party and the Golkar Party.³ Jokowi and his allies set about brokering deals to expand their ruling coalition, first gaining support from the United Development Party (PPP) on 7 October 2014. This was followed by an alliance with the National Mandate Party (PAN) on 2 September 2015. The most significant deal was then secured on 1 November 2015 with the Suharto-era Golkar Party led by tycoon Aburizal Bakrie. Golkar held 91 parliamentary seats, followed by the PAN with 49 seats and the PPP with 39 seats. The expansion of Jokowi's diverse, non-ideological ruling coalition ended when negotiations broke down with Prabowo's Gerindra Party, the leading party in the opposition coalition that held 73 seats.⁴

According to members of Jokowi's political coalition, Prabowo's Gerindra party posed a significant risk to their ability to govern, and had the capacity to seriously challenge Jokowi again in the forthcoming 2019 presidential election.⁵ The loss of Jokowi's political ally Basuki Tjahaja Purnama (better known as Ahok) in the 2017 Jakarta gubernatorial election reinforced the need for strategic recalibration within Jokowi's ruling coalition.⁶ One priority was to secure a deal with Gerindra, and this caused a rupture within the PDI-P. In preparation for the 2019 elections, leading PDI-P cadres such as Puan Maharani and Aria Bima⁷ allegedly held meetings with top Gerindra executives such as Secretary General Ahmad Muzani to negotiate the potential allocation of coalition endowments such as seats, policy platforms and resources.

³ Interview with PDI-P executives, online, 18 September 2023.

⁴ Interview with Gerindra Party executives, online, 2 December 2023.

⁵ Interview with PDI-P executives, online, 18 September 2023.

⁶ Ahok was found guilty on blasphemy charges and sentenced to two years in prison (Peterson 2020; Tyson 2021).

⁷ Puan Maharani, who currently serves as Speaker of the House, is the daughter of former President Megawati and granddaughter of Indonesia's first president Sukarno. Aria Bima is senior politician and PDI-P member.

President Jokowi was said to be in direct contact with his main opponent Prabowo Subianto at this time.⁸ Naturally, these promiscuous arrangements did not satisfy all of the senior figures within the PDI-P. Some were reluctant to include any political party in the ruling coalition that had not originally supported Jokowi in the 2014 election campaign.⁹ Some senior figures were concerned about the direct threat to PDI-P ministerial seats, which could be reduced and allocated to new members within the cabinet.¹⁰ PDI-P executives were aware of the risk of bringing the Gerindra Party into the coalition, and as some feared, the process of negotiation created opportunities for Jokowi and Prabowo to join forces in the 2019 presidential election.

A formal Jokowi-Prabowo alliance did not materialize in time, and in a re-run of the 2014 presidential elections, Jokowi and Prabowo were the main contenders in 2019 even when their toxic alliance was taking shape. Jokowi won a resounding victory in 2019, but the rift between the president and the PDI-P grew wider. Prabowo kept up appearances at first by contesting the 2019 election result, alleging fraud and bringing a performative legal challenge to the Constitutional Court. In July 2019, just two months after Jokowi's victory, our sources suggest that a private agreement was reached between Jokowi and Prabowo that would shape the future of Indonesian politics. The rivalry essentially ended in October 2019 when Prabowo joined Jokowi's cabinet as the Minister of Defence, setting the stage for a new alliance in the 2024 presidential election.¹¹

To avoid direct confrontation between the PDI-P and Gerindra after the 2019 elections, Jokowi approved six ministerial seats for the PDI-P and refrained from conducting any cabinet

⁸ Interview with PDI-P executives, online, 18 September 2023. This testimony from PDI-P executives is consistent with an earlier interview with a Gerindra Party leader from West Java Province, conducted in Jakarta on 5 July 2023.

⁹ Interview with a senior PDI-P campaign manager, online, 26 October 2023.

¹⁰ Interview with a senior PDI-P campaign manager, online, 26 October 2023.

¹¹ Prabowo comes from a family of Javanese aristocrats that have held key positions of institutional power for four generations (Purdey 2016). The former army general stands accused of human rights violations in Indonesia and unlawful counter-insurgency operations in Timor-Leste dating back to the early 1980s (van Klinken 2014). Prabowo is the former son-in-law of Suharto and maintains links with Suharto family members and their political networks (Tyson and Nawawi 2022).

reshuffles that would replace PDI-P ministers. Jokowi maintained the impression that he still considered the PDI-P an ally, and he remained a party member. Some PDI-P elites criticized the Jokowi-Prabowo deal, but given that their coalition was at risk of unravelling because of a rift with other parties such as the National Democratic Party (NasDem), it made sense to use Gerindra to rebalance power within the coalition (Tempo 2019). This pragmatic pact ended Jokowi's formal political rivalry with Prabowo and reinforced the coalition's parliamentary control, but the PDI-P is now counting their losses. In his second term, President Jokowi took steps to break free from the constraints of the PDI-P, in particular the control that Party Chair Megawati — as a former president herself and member of a rival political dynasty — exerted over his coalition-based administration (Kuipers et al. 2024). Longstanding tensions between PDI-P Chair Megawati and Jokowi erupted into open conflict during the 2024 presidential candidate nominations, and by April 2023 Jokowi officially turned against the PDI-P.

Strategically Undermining the PDI-P

Jokowi's second term presidency was significantly strengthened by the inclusion of Prabowo's Gerindra Party as part of a dominant big tent coalition that featured a wide spectrum of political and religious views. The 2019 coalition consisted of the PDI-P, Golkar, PPP, PAN, PKB and the non-parliamentary party PSI. The president accumulated considerable personal power and his popularity ratings continued to climb, and so he proceeded to place family members and elite political clients in senior government and institutional positions. The PDI-P adopted a hedging strategy at this stage, for example supporting, with some reluctance, the nomination of Jokowi's eldest son Gibran in the 2020 Solo mayoral election. Gibran ran several businesses in the catering and culinary sector before abruptly turning to politics and capitalising on his father's popularity. The ruling coalition then supported Jokowi's son-in-law, Bobby Nasution, in the 2020 Medan mayoral election. The PDI-P strategically endorsed the nomination of

Gibran and Bobby, but a reconfiguration was already underway so that Jokowi could outgrow his reliance on the PDI-P and expand his cross-party alliances and clientelist networks.

Provincial PDI-P elites in Solo and Medan are responsible for nominating candidates in their respective jurisdictions. Some PDI-P elites were opposed to the arrival of Jokowi's family members because they already had their own preferred candidates and patronage networks (Abrori 2020; Detik 2020). Moreover, Gibran and Bobby were considered new cadres who lacked the experience and to run in elections. It is possible that PDI-P elites at the national level took a calculated risk, overruling their provincial members and endorsing Jokowi's candidates because of pressure from other coalition members. For instance, according to one Golkar Party executive, political insiders noticed the growing rift between Jokowi and the PDI-P after the 2020 Solo mayoral election, and by 2023 Golkar made it known that the party was "very ready to nominate brother Gibran [for vice president], in case the PDI-P declined him."¹² One of the Gerindra Party leaders in Central Java also confirmed that Prabowo's party was "willing to nominate Gibran, if Mr President wants it."¹³ Only the PAN and the PKB rejected this dynastic form of toxic alliance within their coalition, and opted not to endorse Gibran as Prabowo's vice president. Instead, the PAN declared their support for the Minister of State Owned Enterprises, Erick Thohir, while the PKB backed Muhaimin Iskandar as Prabowo's running mate.

The PDI-P was in a precarious position even though they held a significant portion of ministerial posts at the start of Jokowi's second term in 2019. The PDI-P's pragmatic support for inexperienced candidates such as Gibran in the 2020 Solo mayoral election and Bobby Nasution in the 2020 Medan mayoral election is evidence of the strength of Jokowi's emerging political dynasty. Some PDI-P elites rejected this move, arguing that the party betrayed its principles and regulations by endorsing newcomers who lacked the requisite training and

¹² Interview with the Golkar Party executive, Jakarta, 10 June 2023.

¹³ Interview with the Gerindra Party executive, online, 2 December 2023.

credentials.¹⁴ Other PDI-P elites reluctantly accepted the fact that the party needed to secure Jokowi's loyalty for the 2024 presidential election.¹⁵ By bestowing electoral nominations upon two of Jokowi's family members, the PDI-P hoped to maintain Jokowi's allegiance to the party. However, there were well-founded concerns within the PDI-P hierarchy about Jokowi's political promiscuity. Table 1 lists the key figures in Jokowi's political dynasty by kinship. Table 2 lists key figures in Jokowi's political dynasty by clientelism, starting from 2005 when he was first elected Mayor of Solo in Central Java province.

¹⁴ Interview with a former PDI-P leader in East Java, Surabaya, 30 June 2023.

¹⁵ Interview with a former PDI-P leader in East Java, Surabaya, 30 June 2023.

Table 1: Members of the Jokowi Dynasty — by Kinship

Name and Relation	Current Role	Political Party	Access to Power
Gibran Rakabuming Raka <i>Jokowi's eldest son</i>	Vice President of the Republic of Indonesia as of 20 October 2024.	Expelled from the Indonesian Democratic Party of Struggle (PDI-P) in 2024. No current party affiliation.	Ineligible to run for vice president until rules about minimum age restrictions were changed by his uncle Anwar Usman, former Chief Justice of the Constitutional Court.
Kaesang Pangarep <i>Jokowi's youngest son</i>	Chairman of the Indonesian Solidarity Party (PSI) as of September 2023.	Indonesian Solidarity Party (PSI).	Party Chair at 29 years old, with limited political experience. The PSI failed to meet the legislative threshold of 4% in 2024 (no seats).
Erina Gudono <i>Jokowi's daughter-in-law, married to Kaesang Pangarep</i>	Postgraduate student at the University of Pennsylvania.	No party affiliation.	Nominated by the Gerindra Party to run for mayor of Sleman 2024, but cancelled because of major controversy and public outrage.
Bobby Nasution <i>Jokowi's son-in-law, married to Kahiyang Ayu</i>	Mayor of Medan since 2021, and candidate for governor of North Sumatra 2024.	Expelled from the Indonesian Democratic Party of Struggle (PDI-P) in 2024. Now a member of Prabowo's Gerindra Party.	Bobby and Kahiyang (Jokowi's daughter) facing corruption allegations related to mining permits in North Maluku. There is a rumour that Kahiyang will run for mayor of Medan in 2024.
Anwar Usman <i>Jokowi's brother-in-law, married to Idayati</i>	A Justice in the Constitutional Court.	No party affiliation.	In October 2023, Anwar cast the deciding vote (5 to 4) in favour of a petition to alter the requirements for vice presidential candidates, enabling Gibran to run alongside Prabowo.
Arif Budi Sulistyo <i>Jokowi's brother-in-law, married to Titik Relawati</i>	Director of Rakabu Sejahtera, a Jokowi family company.	No party affiliation.	Arif has managed investments for Toba Bara Sejahtera, a coal company owned by former minister Luhut Binsar Panjaitan. Arif's corporate tax dealings have been investigated by the Corruption Eradication Commission (KPK).
Bagaskara Ikhlasulla Arif <i>Jokowi's nephew, son of Titik Relawati</i>	External Relations Manager at Pertamina as of March 2024.	No party affiliation.	Potential case of nepotism.
Joko Priyambodo <i>Married to Jokowi's niece Septiara Silvani Putri</i>	Marketing and Operations Director of PT Patra Logistik.	No party affiliation.	PT Patra Logistik is a subsidiary of PT Pertamina, Indonesia's state-owned energy company. Potential case of nepotism.
Sigit Widyan <i>Married to Jokowi's cousin Nining Roni Widyaningsih</i>	Independent Commissioner at Bank Negara Indonesia.	No party affiliation.	Potential case of nepotism.

Sources: Indonesian language news clippings compiled by the authors from *Antara News*, *Berita Satu*, *Detik*, *Katadata*, *Tirto*, and *Tribun News*.

Table 2: Members of the Jokowi Dynasty — by Clientelism

Name	Local Roles in Solo / Surakarta	National Roles	Access to Power
Hadi Tjahjanto	Served as the Commander of Adi Soemarmo Airbase in 2010, holding the rank of colonel.	Minister of Agrarian Affairs and Spatial Planning / National Land Agency (ATR/BPN) from 2022 to 2024, and then promoted to Coordinating Minister of Politics, Law and Security.	Hadi's career surged after Jokowi became president, leading to his appointment as Air Force Chief of Staff in 2017 and Commander of the National Armed Forces (TNI) in 2018. After retiring from the military in 2021, Hadi continued serving Jokowi in ministerial roles.
Widi Prasetyono	Served as the Commander of the 0735 Surakarta Military District from 2011 to 2012.	Served as a senior presidential aide during Jokowi's first term in office.	Widi's career has flourished under Jokowi, holding key positions including Commander of Special Forces (Kopassus) and Commander of the Fourth Diponegoro Military Region.
Agus Subiyanto	Served as the Commander of the 0735 Surakarta Military District from 2009 to 2011.	Served as Commander of the Presidential Security Force, Commander of the Siliwangi Military Region, and Deputy Chief of Staff for the Armed Forces.	Agus was appointed Commander of the National Armed Forces (TNI) by Jokowi in 2023 and continues in this senior role. The personal relationship with Jokowi has been instrumental in his career advancement.
Listyo Sigit Prabowo	Served as the Police Chief of Surakarta in 2011.	Served as a presidential aide during Jokowi's first term in office, and was the Head of the Criminal Investigation Agency.	Listyo was appointed National Police Chief in 2021 and continues to serve in this high profile role.
Ahmad Lutfi	Served as the Deputy Police Chief of Surakarta in 2011. He was promoted to Surakarta Police Chief in 2015.	Held various provincial positions before becoming Police Chief of Central Java Province in 2020.	Inspector General Ahmad Lutfi currently serves as the Chief of Police in the Central Java. He is running for governor of Central Java in the 2024 regional elections.
Nana Sudjana	Served as the Police Chief of Surakarta in 2010.	Held strategic roles in the police, including Police Chief of West Java Province, Greater Jakarta Metropolitan Area, North Sulawesi Province, and South Sulawesi Province.	Nana, a retired three-star police general, was appointed as Acting Governor of Central Java Province by Jokowi in 2023.

Sources: Pebrianto (2024) and Yahya (2023)

Table 1 and Table 2 show that Jokowi prioritizes close personal connections and loyalties when deciding upon access-to-power and promotion opportunities for his subordinates and peers. The tables reveal a pattern of nepotism that has been conducted for the most part in plain

view, indicating the level of political influence Jokowi has and his ability to act with relative impunity with little fear of a public backlash. Jokowi has positioned family members with minimal qualifications in strategic political roles and party leadership positions. The Jokowi dynasty is also built on a network of military and police officials he first worked with in Surakarta, many of whom have been appointed to prominent national positions in the armed forces, the police and government ministries. The loyalty and influence of Jokowi's personal connections will be tested in the early years of the Prabowo administration. It is too early to pass judgement, but one significant development from October 2024 is Prabowo's retention of 17 ministers from Jokowi's cabinet in his newly formed cabinet of accommodation.

Political Endgame

Jokowi's ambitious plans in his second presidential term faced challenges from rival political factions. For example, former president Megawati tried in vain to obstruct Jokowi's efforts to establish a cross-party presidential dynasty, expressing her public disapproval of Jokowi's political manoeuvres. Megawati referred to Jokowi as a subordinate "party officer" during his second term, indicating that she expected the president to maintain a bond with the PDI-P party and consult party elites prior to making any political move.¹⁶ According to our sources, Jokowi was eager to form a new political alliance without PDI-P involvement, but he was biding his time and took precautions to avoid direct conflict with Megawati and her supporters.¹⁷

In mid-2022 Jokowi appeared to support the PDI-P by endorsing Ganjar Pranowo, former governor of Central Java province, as the party's next presidential candidate. This endorsement exacerbated tensions within the PDI-P, a party that was split between Ganjar and Megawati's daughter Puan Maharani. For some in the party, Ganjar was an elitist figure lacking grassroots

¹⁶ Interview with a Golkar Party officer, online, 19 January 2024.

¹⁷ Interview with a Golkar Party officer, online, 19 January 2024. This point is corroborated by a campaign manager for Prabowo-Gibran, interviewed online, 19 January 2024.

appeal who rarely visited PDI-P local branches and failed to establish strong communication networks.¹⁸ Moreover, Jokowi's pre-emptive support for Ganjar created tensions with the traditionalist factions in the PDI-P who felt that Puan had more credibility, more commitment to the party's ideological roots, and indeed had the benefit of her direct lineage as Megawati's heir.¹⁹ There is evidence of Puan's use of dynastic connections to capture votes for her party in the 2019 legislative elections, although since then she has become an unpopular figurehead (Wardani and Subekti 2021). Despite Puan's lack of popularity ahead of the 2024 presidential election (Dirgantara and Setuningsih 2022), traditional factions within the PDI-P still believed that Puan could mobilize significant grassroots electoral support.

In an effort to counter the cartel grip that Megawati and Puan held over the PDI-P-led coalition, Jokowi explored the possibility in early 2023 of pairing Ganjar with Prabowo for the 2024 elections. After meeting these two figures in private, Jokowi went public and arranged media appearances, for example appearing alongside Ganjar and Prabowo in March 2023 during a rice harvest festival in Central Java (Tempo 2023). One strategic reason for Jokowi's promotion of this pairing was the need to counter the challenge posed by the Governor of Jakarta Anies Baswedan. Anies had the support of opposition parties, and he made clear his intention to revise or even abolish large infrastructure projects and priority policy areas set by Jokowi's government. Plans for the creation of a new capital city called Nusantara in East Kalimantan province would be jeopardized if Anies became president. A final reason was to streamline the election process; it is easier to win an absolute majority in the first round with only two pairs of candidates running.

Jokowi's promiscuous manoeuvres led to speculation among political elites and election observers. According to our sources, PDI-P Chair Megawati was offended by Jokowi's public

¹⁸ Interview with PDI-P executives, online, 18 September 2023.

¹⁹ Interview with PDI-P executives, online, 18 September 2023.

endorsement of Ganjar.²⁰ One reason for Megawati's irritation is that, for some time, the PDI-P had a highly centralized structure with authority concentrated around her family. Moreover, convention holds that the party chairperson has the prerogative to announce the presidential and vice-presidential candidates. The consequence of Jokowi's unsanctioned endorsement of Ganjar was apparent during the PDI-P's anniversary celebration in January 2023. Megawati ignored Ganjar and took punitive measures by placing his seat in a less prominent position compared to other top party cadres at the PDI-P event (Kompas 2023). Jokowi continued to undermine Megawati's leadership of the PDI-P and the ruling coalition, for example supporting his Chief of Staff Moeldoko to assume the leadership of the Partai Demokrat, a key coalition member, without consulting Megawati.²¹ Political party strategists within the coalition and from the opposition competed for Jokowi's endorsement ahead of the 2024 presidential elections. In sum, Jokowi's emerging dynasty is linked to pragmatic coalition building from 2019 to 2024, in particular his ability to manipulate the party system by forming new toxic alliances.

Discussion: The Consequences of Presidential Dynasticism

A decade of conservative leadership under Jokowi has seen the quality of democracy gradually decline in Indonesia, with priority given to economic growth (Mujani and Liddle 2021). Our findings show that the pact between Jokowi and Prabowo involves electoral manipulation and cross-party brokerage. There are parallels with the 2023 election outcome in Thailand, where political elites engaged in private deal-making to share power and protect specific interests (McCargo 2024). Jokowi's cross-party presidential dynasticism derives from his high level of post-tenure popularity. Jokowi inherited the presidency from Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono, a

²⁰ Interview with PDI-P executives, online, 18 September 2023.

²¹ Interview with PDI-P executives, online, 18 September 2023. Jokowi subsequently shifted his support from Moeldoko to Agus Harimurti Yudhoyono, the Chair of the Partai Demokrat and son of former president Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono.

former military general whose leadership style has been characterized as aloof and regal (Fealy 2011). What sets Jokowi apart is his high level of influence at the end of his second term, and his status as a political outsider who never officially held a top executive position in a political party.

Jokowi's political allegiance is not bound to the PDI-P or any political party. From 2019 to 2024, he operated at the centre of a complex and diverse political alliance. This dynamic form of presidentialism allowed Jokowi to gamble ahead of the 2024 election, interpreting his membership with the PDI-P as a liability, and turning his political outsider status into an advantage. Jokowi's promiscuous courting of multiple political parties, military factions and organisations is a pivotal factor in the emergence of his political dynasty. In 2023 the Indonesian Solidarity Party (PSI) spearheaded a massive pro-Jokowi campaign and initiated the controversial move to nominate Gibran by filing judicial review petitions to reduce the minimum age from 40 to 35 for presidential and vice presidential nominations. This was a blatant move to change the rules of the game to ensure that Gibran, then aged 35, was eligible to run for office in 2024. Gibran's vice presidential candidacy was supported by at least twelve pro-Jokowi political organisations and pressure groups (Subyandono 2023). For example, the Pro Jokowi (ProJo) volunteer organization, with a membership base of seven million, rallied behind the Prabowo-Gibran campaign as soon as it was formalized in October 2023.

The PSI submitted legal petitions on 9 March 2023 to secure Gibran's eligibility to compete in the 2024 election. In a related move, Jokowi's youngest son Kaesang Pangarep was confirmed as the PSI's newly elected leader on 26 September 2023. Kaesang's leadership of the PSI was an affront to Megawati's authority as well as a violation of the PDI-P's ordinances concerning party loyalty and membership.²² On 16 October 2023, Anwar Usman, the Chairman

²² One of the PDI-P's regulations is that members of the same family must support the same party, meaning that Jokowi and his children must all choose the PDI-P or face expulsion.

of the Constitutional Court and Jokowi's brother-in-law, cast the decisive vote to enable Gibran to run in the 2024 elections, and six days later Gibran was confirmed as Prabowo's running mate.

Jokowi's electoral influence is further evidenced by events on 2 April 2023. Five parties from his coalition (Gerindra, Golkar, PAN, PPP, and PKB) committed to forming a new alliance, with Prabowo stating that "we are part of Jokowi's team, led by Mr Jokowi, and we have a similar understanding" (Rahmawati 2023). Prabowo's reference to being part of "team Jokowi" is a recognition of Jokowi's residual political power and the growing influence of his dynasty. The fractious PDI-P leadership was outmanoeuvred by this "team Jokowi," raising questions about the future of the Sukarno-Megawati-Puan political dynasty. The type of dynasty that Jokowi is creating requires pragmatic partnership formation with opposition parties and political elites, most notably Prabowo Subianto and Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono via his son Agus. The Partai Democrat, led by Agus Yudhoyono, initially opposed Jokowi's coalition and sought to align with Anies Baswedan in the 2024 elections. When this plan failed to materialize, Agus and his party pivoted to the Prabowo-Gibran camp. As a reward, Agus was included in Jokowi's final cabinet reshuffle in February 2024, being appointed Minister of Agrarian and Spatial Planning.

According to research from the Indonesian Survey Institute in April 2023, Jokowi's approval rating was estimated to be a staggering 82% based on sample of 1,220 respondents (Dirgantara and Asril 2023). The Indonesian presidential elections in 2024 demonstrate how leadership mandates can be extended, how electoral fields are tilted or stacked, and how opposition fragmentation can be exploited. Prabowo won the 2024 presidential election in the first round with a 58% absolute majority, sweeping aside his two rivals, former governor of Jakarta Anies Baswedan and the PDI-P nominee Ganjar Pranowo. Jokowi leveraged his high public approval rating to help defeat his former party, the PDI-P, and plans to extend his

influence via his dynastic network and his partnership with Prabowo, Agus and other interlocking elites. Former president Jokowi “implemented a raft of anti-democratic policies” during his tenure, and observers expect newly inaugurated President Prabowo to accelerate this trajectory, although it is recognized that Prabowo has more of a global outlook and may even be called a “cosmopolitan nationalist” (Chaplin 2024).

As indicated in Table 1, Jokowi’s family members have become increasingly involved in Indonesian politics and business, with his sons, son-in-law, and other close relatives holding or running for political office and managing companies. This involvement extends to positions in state-owned enterprises, with some allegations of corruption and nepotism.

As indicated in Table 2, the Solo network represents a crucial element in Jokowi’s dynastic power structure, leveraging his extensive influence in the military and police. This close-knit group is comprised of high-ranking military and police officials who worked with Jokowi during his tenure as Mayor of Solo from 2005 to 2012 and subsequently achieved career advancements throughout the Jokowi presidency. Members of the Solo network have risen to prominent positions in the military, police and government, demonstrating Jokowi’s strategy of elevating trusted allies to key national roles and then using them as effective political tools to influence policy and elections by working against Jokowi’s opponents (Pebrianto 2024).

The political strategy behind Jokowi’s final cabinet reshuffle in February 2024 serves as a further indicator of the salience of presidential dynasticism. For instance, Prabowo’s October 2024 continuity cabinet includes 17 ministers from Jokowi’s February cabinet, the largest transfer of incumbent ministers to a new government since Indonesia’s democratic transition in 1998. This was only possible because of legislative changes in September 2024 that removed the cap on ministerial posts and granted presidents extended discretionary powers over cabinet appointments. Following Jokowi’s lead, Prabowo promoted Agus Yudhoyono to the powerful position of Coordinating Minister for Infrastructure and Regional Development. Our research

shows that the outcome of the 2024 presidential election was determined, to a large extent, by private dealmaking between elites resulting in the weakening of the party-president relationship and the rise of a new pattern of presidential dynasticism.

Conclusion

This article analysed the opportunity structures and political strategies used by former president Jokowi to establish a cross-party presidential dynasty. Our argument is based on evidence of promiscuous power-sharing between Jokowi and his former rival Prabowo dating back to 2019. Jokowi's political dealmaking via toxic alliances has weakened the party-president relationship in Indonesia. We explained how Jokowi, the PDI-P and other key actors prepared for the 2024 elections, and why Jokowi moved against his own party, concluding that party marginalisation and the rise of popular political outsiders such as Jokowi are changing the nature of Indonesia's democratic institutions and processes.

Jokowi struck deals with political elites before the end of his tenure that enabled him to place family members and clients in positions of power, representing a significant shift from the previous administration of Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono. Jokowi's gradual expansion of executive power is de-linked from political party allegiance and is based instead on dynastic clientelist politics. Jokowi outmanoeuvred PDI-P Chair Megawati and rejected her preferred candidates during the 2024 presidential election campaign, endorsing instead his controversial Defence Minister Prabowo for president and his eldest son Gibran for vice president. This increasingly personalized presidential system is reshaping access to power and influence over appointments, casting doubt upon the integrity of the world's third largest democracy.

Jokowi's success as a political outsider capable of building cross-party alliances while maintaining a degree of independence has redefined the role of the presidency in Indonesia. Jokowi has been unique in his ability to navigate around established political party leadership

structures and conventions, leveraging his popularity and pragmatic deal-making to consolidate personal power. At the same time, the extension of Jokowi's influence through kinship and clientelist networks is disrupting the post-1998 electoral formula, where parties were supposed to play the central role in the electoral process and determine appointments to key positions of power. With the inauguration of Prabowo Subianto as Indonesia's eighth president on 20 October, and the swearing in of a new cabinet the next day, there are signs that Prabowo is honouring his agreement with Jokowi by retaining 17 ministers from Jokowi's February 2024 cabinet. Jokowi's cross-party presidential dynasticism is circumventing traditional political constraints and challenging the system, and is already inspiring similar practices in the current Prabowo government.

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