



## **The Political Oligarchy in Indonesian Presidential Election 2024; A Massive Abuse in the Political Participation of Indonesian Citizens**

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# Introduction

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The 2024 Indonesian presidential election took place on February 14, alongside legislative elections. It marked the end of President Joko Widodo's (Jokowi) second and final term. The election was controversial due to the vice-presidential candidacy of Gibran Rakabuming Raka, Jokowi's son and mayor of Surakarta. Despite being under 40, Gibran was allowed to run following a contentious Constitutional Court ruling. Prabowo Subianto won the presidency by securing over 50% of the vote in the first round, avoiding a runoff. His victory was credited to a strong campaign, Jokowi's tacit support, and Gibran's appeal to Jokowi's voter base.

The Prabowo-Gibran ticket is often seen as a representation of oligarchy in Indonesian politics due to several factors, including elite political networks, dynastic influence, and the role of business interests. The 2024 election campaign was characterized by heavy political spending, media control, and the involvement of state institutions, all of which appeared to favor the Prabowo-Gibran ticket. The administration of President Jokowi was accused of leveraging state resources, such as social aid programs, to subtly enhance Prabowo's electability. Additionally, major business groups threw their support behind the Prabowo-Gibran campaign, further consolidating the influence of oligarchic elites.

The Prabowo-Gibran victory is seen as a win for Indonesia's oligarchy because it reinforces the concentration of power among a small elite group, including military figures, business tycoons, and political dynasties. The use of legal loopholes, state resources, and elite networks to secure power raises concerns about Indonesia's democratic future. The opposition struggled due to limited access to resources and media, with mainstream outlets favoring Prabowo-Gibran. Also, the dominance of elite-backed candidates and political maneuvering weakened democratic competition.

This writing aims to describe the practical abuse of political rights during the presidential election and how this violation will weaken the quality of democracy in Indonesia. Several corrective movements have been suggested by young activists in response to this phenomenon.



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## Political Oligarchy as A Systematic Abuse by Elites

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Political oligarchy refers to a system where power is concentrated in the hands of a small, elite group, typically wealthy individuals, influential families, military leaders, or business tycoons, who dominate political decisions and policies. In an oligarchic system, democracy may exist formally, but in practice, political and economic control remains in the hands of a privileged few.

The characteristics of political oligarchy are reflected in several key indicators. Firstly, the political situation is dominated by the elite circle. A small group (business tycoons, military elites, or political dynasties) holds most of the power, where leadership positions often rotate within the same families or networks. Political dynasties emerge as a consequence of this phenomenon, where families maintain control over government positions across generations, such as when the children of presidents rise to top leadership roles. Legal and electoral frameworks are often manipulated to favor the continuation of these dynasties.

Secondly, political oligarchy impacts the aspect of corporate & business influence. Big businesses and tycoons fund political campaigns to secure policies that favor their economic interests. In return, politicians protect corporate monopolies, benefiting from financial and media support. State resources and media control, including government programs like welfare or infrastructure projects, are strategically used to gain public support, with mainstream media shaping public opinion in favor of certain leaders.



Additionally, political oligarchy limits true democracy because decision-making is controlled by a select group rather than the people. While elections may still occur, real power remains concentrated, making it harder for outsiders or grassroots leaders to challenge the system. Opposition parties struggle due to limited resources and legal restrictions. Voter manipulation (such as vote-buying or election interference) helps elites maintain power.

Examples of political oligarchy in Indonesia have experienced several periods of political oligarchy, starting with Suharto's New Order (1966–1998): Power was centralized among military elites and business cronies, then continued in the Post-Reform Era (1998–Present). Despite democratic reforms, many political dynasties (like Jokowi's family, the Suharto family, and others) continue to dominate. The Prabowo-Gibran victory is seen as a win for Indonesia's oligarchy because it reinforces the concentration of power among a small elite group, including military figures, business tycoons, and political dynasties. The use of legal loopholes, state resources, and elite networks to secure power raises concerns about Indonesia's democratic future.

## Why Society Cannot Oppose Political Oligarchy

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Society struggles to oppose political oligarchy due to structural and systemic barriers that reinforce elite control. Key factors include economic dependence on oligarchs, who dominate major industries, businesses, and job opportunities. Many rely on them for employment and access to government programs, such as social aid and subsidies, which are often linked to oligarchic networks. Fear of economic retaliation, like job loss or business closures, further discourages public resistance.

Second, media control & information manipulation. In many oligarchic systems, mainstream media is owned by elites, shaping public opinion to support their interests. Misinformation and propaganda portray oligarchs as national heroes or protectors of stability. Alternative voices are silenced through censorship, lawsuits, or intimidation. The lack of checks and balances in democracy also contributed to the weak & fragmented opposition. Opposition parties lack financial resources compared to oligarch-backed candidates. Divide-and-rule tactics prevent a unified resistance, opposition groups are often infiltrated, co-opted, or turned against each other. Legal barriers (high election costs, strict candidacy rules) make it difficult for grassroots candidates to compete.

Society struggles against voter manipulation and election engineering, where vote-buying (cash, gifts, or social aid) secures public support. Electoral rules often favor elite-backed candidates, and state institutions (police, judiciary, election commissions) may be controlled by oligarchs, ensuring favorable outcomes.

This fosters public apathy and fear, with many feeling powerless to change the system. Fear of political persecution (arrests, lawsuits, violence) deters activism, while a culture of “better the devil you know” makes people prefer stability under oligarchic rule over uncertain change.

Opposing political oligarchy is difficult because power is deeply embedded in economic, media, political, and legal structures. Without strong institutions, independent media, and grassroots mobilization, oligarchs maintain control by limiting opposition and keeping society dependent on their rule. However, history shows that public resistance can still grow when people unite, raise awareness, and demand systemic change.

There is a co-optation of civil society & intellectuals. Activists, academics, and civil society groups are often co-opted through government grants, positions, or business deals. Universities and think tanks may be influenced by oligarchic funding, limiting independent criticism. Some NGOs and labor unions are weakened or infiltrated by elite interests.

## Empowering Youth: Strategies for Combatting Political Oligarchy

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Youth activists are essential in challenging political oligarchy, but their effectiveness hinges on strategic action, unity, and persistence. Youth activists can fight against elite domination by raising political awareness & educate the public, by using social media, podcasts, blogs, and YouTube to educate people about oligarchy and its impact, expose how elite networks control politics, the economy, and media to keep power in their hands, organize political literacy programs in schools, universities, and communities, and counter disinformation and propaganda spread by oligarch-backed media. Youth groups like BEM (Student Executive Bodies) in Indonesia have the potential power to mobilize youth against unjust policies through online campaigns and street protests.

Youth activists must consider this action as a collective movement. Therefore, it is very important to strengthen grassroots movements & mobilization, organize student unions, labor movements, and independent political groups to resist elite control, use peaceful protests, demonstrations, and petitions to demand change, and forming alliances with workers, farmers, and marginalized communities to create a broad resistance movement. One of the most phenomenal movements is The #ReformasiDikorupsi movement (2019) in Indonesia showed how students and activists could unite to challenge elite-driven legal changes.



We must challenge oligarchs in elections & politics by supporting independent, anti-oligarchy candidates who represent the people's interests. Expose and fight against vote-buying and electoral fraud that benefit the elites to push for electoral reforms that reduce the dominance of money in politics, and encourage youth participation in politics, not just as voters but as candidates, volunteers, and campaigners. In countries like Chile and Taiwan, youth movements helped elect progressive, non-elite leaders through grassroots mobilization.

In challenging the domination of mainstream media, it is crucial to build Alternative Media & Digital Resistance, developing independent news platforms to counter mainstream media controlled by oligarchs. Youth activists can utilize TikTok, Instagram, Twitter, and WhatsApp to spread political messages and expose elite corruption, also training people in digital security to avoid cyberattacks and government surveillance. Some of the credible independent media in Indonesia are Narasi TV, and independent journalists in Indonesia challenge government narratives and expose elite corruption through investigative reporting.

## Conclusion

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Fighting political oligarchy requires a combination of education, activism, electoral participation, media resistance, and legal reforms. Youth activists must be strategic, organized, and persistent while ensuring their movement remains independent and focused on systemic change.

Real change takes time, but history shows that persistent youth movements can challenge and weaken oligarchic power structures. We must build a sustained movement, staying independent by rejecting bribes, political positions, or business deals that compromise our cause. Establish long-term institutions (youth councils, independent parties, advocacy groups) to ensure the fight continues beyond protests, and foster critical thinking while training new activists to carry on the struggle.

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