



RESEARCH ARTICLE

Corruption Cases in the 2024 Head Region Elections: A Challenge to the Integrity of Local Democracy

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The manuscript aims to analyze Indonesia Corruption Watch ICW's findings related to the involvement of regional head candidates in corruption cases and their implications for the integrity of local democracy, so the data used is secondary data that is relevant to the focus of the problem, such as Indonesia Corruption Watch (ICW). The results show that political dominance reflects deep problems in the integrity of local democracy in Indonesia. Many regional head candidates are involved in corruption cases, indicating the weakness of the existing supervision and selection system. Political dynasties not only hinder healthy political competition, but also prolong corrupt practices that hinder regional development and progress. There needs to be a transparent, honest and efficient regional head selection mechanism.

INTRODUCTION

Democracy is a system of government preferred by most countries in the world since it is based on the doctrine of people power. In Indonesia, democracy is also applied to the local government system, where the head of the local government (governor and/or regent or mayor) is directly elected by the people. It aims to create a representative and accountable government. However, this can lead to other problems, namely Corruption, Saranjam BAIG and Yi FENG expressed that democracy could create corruption if it is not supported by effective governance and efficiency of the state. Thus, policies must be made not to create opportunities for corruption. (FENG, Special Issue 2016), although corruption has a positive economic impact, namely facilitating economic growth as a lubricating wheel for purchasing power because the people receive money from the contestants. (Bayraktar, 2024).

The phenomenon of democracy that creates corruption is that the regional head elections process often faces serious challenges, one of which is the rise of corruption cases involving regional head candidates. Indonesia Corruption Watch (ICW) noted that in the previous regional head elections, many regional head candidates were involved in various forms of corruption, such as misuse of regional budgets, bribery, and money politics. This condition creates a serious problem for the future of local democracy in Indonesia if this problem is not resolved immediately (Rahmawati et al., 2023).

Furthermore, the corruption in the regional head elections is closely related to the high political costs incurred by regional head candidates; from the nomination process to the campaign, the funds required are so significant that they force the candidates to look for non-transparent sources of funding. ICW reports show that many regional head candidates use funds from corruption or receive donations from interested parties to smooth their path to power (Setiyawan, Sumarto, Abdilah, Angkoso, & Khunaefi, 2024). This phenomenon also shows the weakness of the supervisory system in the regional head elections process, both from supervisory institutions such as Bawaslu and the

political parties themselves. The weakness of supervision allows various illegal practices to continue without adequate sanctions. As a result, Corruption in regional head elections (*Pilkada*) has become a recurring pattern in every local political contestation.

The impact of corruption in the regional head elections on local democracy is significant and destructive. First, corruption reduces public trust in the regional head elections process as a mechanism for selecting leaders with integrity. Transparency International (TI) Indonesia reports that most Indonesians consider money politics and corruption the main threats in every regional head election. Second, the corruption impacts the quality of leadership at the local level. Regional heads involved in corruption tend to focus more on personal or group interests than on the welfare of the people. It hampers development and creates social inequality (Setiyawan, Sumarto, Abdilah, Angkoso, & Khunaefi, 2024).

In addition, the involvement of regional head candidates in corruption also weakens the effectiveness of local government. According to ICW, regional heads involved in corruption often build corrupt government systems, from appointing officials to managing regional budgets (Rahmawati et al., 2023). A system like this slows development and creates dependence on corrupt practices in various government sectors. In the long term, corruption can create an unhealthy political culture at the local level. The people who lose trust in local government also tend to become apathetic towards democracy.

Inefficient regulations are also one of the leading reasons why regional head candidates with a track record of corruption can still run in the regional head elections. Law Number 10 of 2016 on the regional head elections should effectively prevent problematic candidates from running (Kasenda, 2020). However, the implementation of this regulation is often suboptimal due to weak verification and supervision. Some legal loopholes utilized by candidates also allow them to participate in the regional head elections despite having ongoing legal cases (Zai, 2023). This situation shows that revising regulations and strengthening oversight mechanisms are urgent steps to ensure the integrity of the regional head election process.

Political parties, as the primary institution in the nomination of regional heads, also have a significant role in preventing or even strengthening the problem of corruption. Political parties should have strict and transparent selection mechanisms to ensure that only candidates with high integrity gain support. However, the ICW report shows that, in practice, many political parties prioritize the electability of candidates over their track records (Rahmawati et al., 2023). Parties often ignore candidates with a history of corruption or other legal cases as long as the candidate is considered to have a high chance of winning.

II. RESEARCH METHODS

This research is literature research (Zed, 2014). This legal research is called normative legal research (Suyanto, 2022). The data used is secondary data in the form of literature, journals, and regulations relevant to the focus of the problem, in addition to various written sources relevant to the topic of corruption cases in the 2024 elections published by anti-corruption organizations such as Indonesia Corruption Watch (ICW) (Surya & Bayu, 2024). Through this study, researchers will explore previous findings related to corrupt practices in local elections in Indonesia, identify causal factors that influence the occurrence of corruption, and analyze the role and effectiveness of existing regulations in preventing it. In addition, this literature study also aims to obtain an overview of the efforts made by the government and related institutions in combating corruption at the local level and its impact on the quality of democracy.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

1. Involvement of Regional Head Candidates in Corruption Cases

The findings of Indonesia Corruption Watch (ICW) revealed that 138 candidates in the 2024 simultaneous regional head elections were involved in corruption cases, showing a worrying picture of the integrity of regional head candidates (Abdurrahman, 2024). Candidates involved in various stages of legal cases, whether as suspects, defendants, convicts, witnesses, reported, or named in the trial, show how poor the track records of most candidates running in these elections are. The corruption that involves the regional head candidates can lead to abuse of power if they are elected.

Indeed, this condition is very detrimental to local democracy because the community must face the choice of leaders who are not clean from legal cases, which can ultimately damage the election process (Basyari, 2024).

Furthermore, the long history of corruption cases involving the regional heads has further worsened the image of Indonesian local politics. In the last two decades, at least 196 regional heads have been arrested by the Corruption Eradication Commission (KPK) (Yulika, 2024). This figure shows how vulnerable the local government system is to corrupt practices. If candidates involved in corruption cases are successfully elected, they can repeat the same practices they did before. Thus, the involvement of regional head candidates in corruption cases seriously threatens the integrity of the regional head elections and can potentially damage the quality of democracy.

In addition, the involvement of regional head candidates in corruption cases also reflects weaknesses in the selection and supervision process of prospective regional leaders. In a healthy democratic system, candidates for regional heads who run in regional elections should have a clean track record and proven ability to carry out public mandates well. However, the number of candidates involved in corruption cases shows that the supervision of prospective regional leaders is still weak. Although oversight institutions such as the General Elections Commission (KPU) and the Corruption Eradication Commission (KPK) are trying to address this, the lack of transparency and community involvement in overseeing regional head candidates are factors that exacerbate the situation (BBC News Indonesia, 2023). Reforms in the electoral system, including strengthening candidate background check mechanisms, are important to ensure that local elections produce trustworthy leaders with integrity.

Besides to the involvement of regional head candidates in corruption cases, one of the main problems that worsen the quality of regional head elections is the lack of transparency in the election process. A non-transparent selection process for regional head candidates allows candidates with a bad track record, including involvement in corruption, to follow the competition. This condition leads to public distrust of the electoral process, as they feel there is no guarantee that the elected candidates can genuinely be trusted to carry out the public mandate (BBC News Indonesia, 2023). Transparency in the electoral process is essential to ensure that the public can see who the candidates are, their track records, and the mechanisms used to select them. Without adequate transparency, the elections potentially cannot reflect the valid will of the people and, ultimately, harm the integrity of local democracy.

Also, involvement in corruption and the practice of money politics also worsens the quality of regional head elections. Regional head candidates often use money politics to influence voters by giving rewards for money or goods. It creates unfair competition because the candidates with more excellent resources can more easily gain support even though they may not have good leadership qualities. Money politics damages the integrity of elections and creates dependency between voters and candidates, leading to an electoral process that does not honestly reflect the wishes and aspirations of the people. This phenomenon further reinforces the dominance of political power that focuses on materials rather than on the quality of prospective leaders who can provide significant change for their regions. For this reason, there needs to be stricter supervision of the practice of money politics, as well as efforts to educate voters to understand the adverse effects of money politics on the sustainability of democracy and regional development.

2. The Influence of Political Dynasties in the 2024 head Regional Elections

The phenomenon of political dynasties involving regional head candidates in the 2024 head regional elections is increasingly worrying, with 33 of the 37 provinces holding the head regional elections identified as having candidates associated with political dynasties. These political dynasties often represent the inheritance of power within one family, which damages the principles of democracy that should give opportunities to every individual based on their capacity, not blood or family relations. This practice is also detrimental to the quality of local governance because powerful families often use the power to maintain their position rather than the people's interests (Oktavia, 2024).

The involvement of political dynasties in local elections also exacerbates the potential for corruption. Political dynasties are closely associated with corruption cases involving local officials in many

regions. ICW notes at least 70 corruption cases involving political dynasties, which shows how lousy influence the governance is (Dhanya, 2024). Political dynasties hamper healthy political competition and extend corrupt practices that hinder regional development and progress. This phenomenon can create an unaccountable government and reduce the quality of public services that should be provided to the community.

The existence of political dynasties in the 2024 regional head elections also has the potential to exacerbate social injustice and reduce the quality of public services. This dependence on the power of dominant political families prevents the emergence of leadership candidates with the capacity and vision to advance the region somewhat and equitably (Prakusya&Sabiq, 2024). Political dynasties often focus on their group interests, which creates more significant disparities between different segments of society. It can create policies that do not reflect the needs of the people and lead to discrimination against disadvantaged or marginalized groups (Eldo, Abdurochman, Fahrulrozi, &Meilina, 2023). For instance, development funds and local government projects may be utilized for personal and family interests, while other sectors that need more attention are neglected.

Finally, with the growing influence of political dynasties in the 2024 elections, serious structural reform efforts are needed in Indonesia's political system. These reforms include not only stricter nomination rules but also stricter law enforcement against corrupt practices and abuse of power by members of political dynasties. The government must ensure that candidates for regional heads are not only measured by family background or blood relations but also by their ability and track record. In addition, supervisory institutions such as the General Election Commission (KPU) and the Election Supervisory Agency (Bawaslu) must be strengthened to conduct more effective supervision of the election process and prevent unhealthy political practices. The role of the community is also important in championing these changes.

3. Political Dynasties and the Deterioration of the Head Regional Competition

Political dynasties damage the fair competition in local elections because they often prioritize family closeness or power over individual qualities and abilities. It limits voters' choices, giving only options between candidates from the same family. The head region election should provide equal opportunities for each candidate to lead based on their competence and vision, but political dynasties make this competition unbalanced (Hantoro& Sari, 2024). Even in some cases, certain regions experience empty boxes in the head region election, further illustrating the community's distrust of candidates, primarily due to the attachment to political dynasties.

The dominance of political dynasties also creates a stagnant political atmosphere, where the power remains in specific groups or families who can control the entire electoral process and local government. The continuation of power in one family minimizes the opportunity for other, more competent individuals to emerge as leaders. Therefore, a healthy democratic process is disrupted, and voters tend to vote based on loyalty or personal attachment rather than on the quality or vision of the candidate's development. This phenomenon certainly has the potential to worsen the quality of local democracy and extend social injustice in the regions (Amara, 2024).

Political dynasties in the 2024 elections also affected the voters' quality in the democratic process. When potential leaders are chosen based on family ties rather than ability or vision, voters are often denied the opportunity to select individuals with the best competencies. Limited choices trap voters in loyalty to big names or families rather than candidates' track records or work programs (BBC News Indonesia, 2024). This condition causes voters to not optimally use their voting rights to choose candidates who can provide real change for their regions. As a result, the head region electing should be an arena to determine leaders who can advance the region; instead, it serves as a stage for political families to maintain their power. It creates an imbalance in the democratic process that reduces voters' awareness of the importance of the quality and integrity of prospective leaders (Irham, 2024).

Political dynasties also hinder the creation of more inclusive and diverse local politics. When political power is concentrated in one particular family or group, the opportunities for new individuals with fresh ideas and thoughts to enter politics become extremely limited. Political dynasties often create

an exclusive political system where only people with certain family connections can access political channels (Irham, 2024). It narrows regional political horizons and hinders the creation of diversity in leadership choices. As a result, the developing political dynamics do not reflect the needs or aspirations of diverse community groups but only accommodate the ruling family's interests. As such, this lack of diversity in local politics will result in a lack of policies focusing on the progress and welfare of all levels of society.

Political dynasties undermine the quality of local democracy by creating unfairness in the distribution of opportunities to lead. Instead, political families with significant regional influence control the local election process, which should provide space for individuals to compete pretty. It leaves voters with limited choices, as they are often only given two options between candidates from a particular family or group. Although the head region election is designed to encourage healthy competition, the dominance of political dynasties creates a situation where power is inherited rather than chosen based on ability and vision for development. This practice reduces the quality of democracy by sidelining the potential of new, more competent candidates who should have an equal opportunity to contribute to the region's progress.

4. The Implications for the Integrity of Local Democracy.

The involvement of regional head candidates in corruption cases and the dominance of political dynasties have a massive impact on the integrity of local democracy. People who vote for candidates with lousy track records risk getting leaders who cannot eradicate corrupt practices and instead perpetuate social injustice (Corruption Eradication Commission, 2024). The Local democracy, which should function to improve the quality of governance and public services, is disrupted by these harmful practices. This condition creates public distrust of candidates running in local elections, which in turn affects the level of political participation. If people feel that unfit candidates limit their choices, they will lose interest in the electoral process.

Moreover, corruption and political dynasties in the head region election can also damage Indonesia's image as a country with a clean and fair democratic system. If this phenomenon is not addressed, international trust in Indonesia's political system could suffer. For a long time, this damage to the integrity of local democracy can reduce the quality of governance and public services at the regional level, ultimately detrimental to the community's welfare (Ernes, 2024). Therefore, there is a need for reforms in the electoral system and local politics to ensure that democracy can run more healthily.

The involvement of regional head candidates in corruption cases and the existence of political dynasties can also exacerbate social and economic disparities at the local level. When local leaders prioritize the interests of their family or group over those of the community, development priorities are often uneven. For example, budget allocations and resources may be shared more for personal or group interests rather than for the needs of the general public (Taufik, 2024). This condition can create inequities in the distribution of development that should be more equitable and increase regional disparities within the region itself. Ultimately, the people who need fair and equitable public services the most will be the victims of these bad practices (BBC News Indonesia, 2024).

Besides, this phenomenon also can undermine public political education. People who do not have access to adequate information about candidates' track records may be more easily influenced by money politics, empty promises, or even loyalty to political dynasties. If this condition continues, local politics will increasingly be trapped in unhealthy practices, where the quality of elections is no longer based on candidates' work programs or visions but on personal relationships and established power. As a result, people's political choices will be increasingly limited, and local democracy will lose its function of creating good, clean, and people-centered governance.

5. The Role of the Public and Media in Addressing this Phenomenon

The role of the public and the media is very important in addressing the phenomenon of regional head candidates' involvement in corruption cases and the dominance of political dynasties. The public needs to be more active in seeking information about candidates who are running in the head region election, one of which is by utilizing platforms such as [RekamJejak.net/kandidatpilkada2024](https://rekamjejak.net/kandidatpilkada2024) which provides transparency about the background and track record of candidates (Padangsidimpunan City Government, 2024). Community activism in checking the eligibility of candidates can prevent the election of candidates who are involved in corrupt practices or come from

harmful political dynasties. The Smarter voter decisions will minimize the opportunity for unqualified candidates to lead the region.

The media also has a significant role in disseminating objective and transparent information about regional head candidates so that the public can make decisions based on clear and accurate information. The media should also watch against unfair political practices, including corruption and political dynasties. With more significant public pressure, candidates with competence and integrity are expected to dominate the 2024 elections (Dairani, 2023). Collective efforts between the community, media and electoral institutions will ensure that local democracy is healthier and free from destructive practices (Juantara, 2024).

The role of the public in addressing the phenomenon of regional head candidates' involvement in corruption cases and the dominance of political dynasties must be strengthened. The public should not only act as voters but also as agents of change who have the power to influence the course of elections through monitoring and active participation. One of the steps that can be taken is to form discussion groups or information forums that allow the community to share knowledge and opinions regarding the candidates to be elected. In addition, using social media to discuss regional head candidates' track records and policies is also a very effective means of broadening people's horizons. When people are more educated and critical, it will be more difficult for unfit candidates to manipulate election results (Pakaya, Katili, & Latuda, 2022).

The media has a primary function in this democratic process, as it not only provides complete and objective information but also creates an open public space for healthy political debate. The media needs to be more responsive in reporting information related to regional head candidates, both in terms of performance, track record, and potential conflicts of interest that the candidates may have. Independent and unaffiliated media with particular political interests will be a strong counterweight to the dominance of political dynasties. In addition, the media must also utilize technology to provide information that is easily accessible to all levels of society (BBC News Indonesia, 2023). It is hoped that the 2024 elections will produce qualified leaders free from corruption and political dynasties that harm the people through good collaboration between the public and the media.

CONCLUSION

Corruption in the 2024 regional head elections and the dominance of political dynasties reflect deep problems in the integrity of Indonesia's local democracy. Many regional head candidates have been implicated in corruption cases, demonstrating the weakness of existing supervision and selection systems and the practices of money politics that undermine the democratic process. In addition, the existence of political dynasties exacerbates the situation by limiting voter choice and prolonging social injustice. This corruption and dominance of family politics hamper the quality of local governance and lower people's trust in local elections as a fair electoral mechanism. As such, it worsens the quality of local democracy and slows down equitable development. Reforming the electoral system and strengthening oversight and regulation are important steps to improve this condition. Efforts to increase transparency in the electoral process are also urgently needed to ensure that candidates who stand are those with integrity and capacity. Communities also need to be empowered to be more critical in choosing leaders, not only based on loyalty or family attachment but also on vision and commitment to regional development.

In improving the integrity of local democracy, the government and oversight institutions need to strengthen the verification system for regional head candidates and take firm action against those involved in corruption cases. In addition, regulations governing the nomination of regional heads must be stricter to prevent candidates with lousy track records. Reform within political parties is also fundamental so that candidate selection prioritizes integrity and competence over electability alone. The public should be encouraged to oversee the election process to ensure transparency and accountability actively. Limiting the influence of political dynasties should also be a focus to ensure fair competition and make room for new candidates with adequate capacity.

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