

## The Rise of Dynastic Politics: Is it an Asian Value?

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In recent years, dynastic politics colors the discourse of Asian politics, drawing both support and criticism from different segments of society. One controversial comment is whether this is an "Asian value," one that is deeply rooted in the region's historical, cultural, and social contexts.

The debate on this so-called Asian value was especially hot in the Indonesian social media. The controversy was around the concept of "Asian Value," which was defended by the host of the podcast "Total

Politik" as a justification for supporting dynastic politics in Indonesia. The host argued that this practice aligns with the human rights of Indonesian society, sparking intense further heated discussions among human rights activists, practitioners, academics, and the general public. This contentious issue raises a crucial question: If some consider dynastic politics valid and acceptable, does it mean that dynastic politics won't pose any problems within a government framework?

Dynastic politics refers to the practice where political power and leadership are passed down within a family, often across generations. This trend is evident in several Asian nations, including the Philippines, India, and South Korea, where political families wield significant influence and control over the political landscape. Proponents of dynastic politics argue that it aligns with traditional Asian values of family loyalty, respect for elders, and the continuity of leadership.<sup>1</sup> They claim that political dynasties can provide stability, continuity, and a wealth of experience in governance. In societies where family ties and lineage are highly regarded, the transfer of political power within families can be seen as a natural extension of these cultural values.<sup>2</sup>

In the Philippines, a country closest to Indonesia, for instance, political dynasties have been a staple of its political scene for decades. The Marcos, Aquino, and Duterte families are prime examples of how a single family can consolidate and perpetuate political power. However, what is less discussed by the public is the perspective highlighted by senior political analyst Dinna Prapto Raharja on her YouTube channel "Dinna On Diplomacy."

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<sup>1</sup> Asia Times. 2019. Political dynasties, democratic decay in Philippines. See <https://asiatimes.com/2019/09/political-dynasties-democratic-decay-in-philippines/>

<sup>2</sup> Kompas. 2023. Political Dynasties and the Threat to Democracy. See <https://www.kompas.id/baca/english/2023/11/02/en-dinasti-politik-dan-ancamademokrasi>

She points out that the deeply rooted dynastic politics in the Philippines, extending even to local governments, has transformed elections from a contest of ideas, values, or ideologies into a practical battle between families. As a result, although the Philippine economy is not particularly poor, the country's wealth is predominantly enjoyed only by the families involved in dynastic politics.<sup>3</sup>

The wealth of Southeast Asian countries, which still heavily relies on natural resources, end up being controlled by only a small group of people. Consequently, even though these countries have adopted democratic systems, in practice they still resemble monarchies that believe in the inheritance of power. This is often misinterpreted as "Asian Value." In Western countries, the aversion to the re-establishment of monarchical practices in government stems from their historical experiences with monarchy, which often led to conflict and revolution in the pursuit of more democratic systems. This historical context has led Western nations to favor democratic forms of governance and to be wary of reverting to monarchic rule.<sup>4</sup> In contrast, in Southeast Asia, the

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<sup>3</sup> Dinna on Diplomacy Youtube Channel. 2024. Kutukan Politik Dinasti. See <https://youtu.be/RBXmrMxaT34?si=CkJ7XBxh7JzCcsSG>

<sup>4</sup> University of Hawaii Manoa Library, 2019. Colonialism in Southeast Asia: Resistance, Negotiation and Legacies. See <https://manoa.hawaii.edu/library/about/newsev>

historical context is markedly different. The region's kingdoms and monarchies often unified in response to colonial threats, fostering a sense of national identity and resistance against foreign powers. This collective resistance was pivotal in the eventual push for independence across the region.

This legacy of colonialism has had enduring impacts on the socio-political and economic landscapes of Southeast Asian nations, creating a complex dynamic of power and influence that continues to shape their modern political dynasties. No matter how many systems and regulations are in place, if societal ethics and norms justify the existence of dynastic politics and the government deliberately perpetuates this practice, consequences like corruption and structural poverty will be unavoidable. This is certainly a contrary to human rights.

## Highlights

- Dynastic politics as an Asian value is a multifaceted phenomenon that embodies both the strengths and challenges of the region's political systems. It highlights the enduring influence of cultural traditions in shaping political dynamics, while also raising important questions about the future of democracy and governance in Asia.

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- The Deputy Chairman of the Corruption Eradication Commission or Komisi Pemberantasan Korupsi (KPK), Alexander Marwata, acknowledges that dynastic politics, or power that is inherited and exercised by a family or blood relatives, opens the door to corruption. This was stated after the KPK apprehended and named many regional officials involved in corruption cases and engaged in dynastic politics.<sup>5</sup>
- At the beginning of 2024, Charta Politika analyst Nachrudin stated that 748 respondents (61.3%) out of 1,220 respondents acknowledged being aware of the issue of political dynasties in the 2024 Presidential Election, and the majority of the public rejected political dynasties in Indonesia.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Berita Satu. 2021. KPK Akui Politik Dinasti Membuka Celah Terjadinya Korupsi. see <https://www.beritasatu.com/news/842127/kpk-akui-politik-dinasti-membuka-celahterjadinya-korupsi>

<sup>6</sup> Media Indonesia. 2024. Survei Charta Politika: 63% Masyarakat Tolak Politik Dinasti. See <https://mediaindonesia.com/politik-dan-hukum/645632/survei-charta-politika-63-masyarakat-tolak-politik-dinasti>

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