Immature Politicians and Oligarchy As a Threat to Democracy

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Abstract

The rise of oligarchy in political democracy in Indonesia has more potential to exterminate democracy in Indonesia itself. Democracy might be used as just a tool by the oligarchy. Oligarchy is the cause that some immature politicians with a very short experience are now holding vital positions such as regents, a party leader, or local parliament member. Some of them might have no integrity, and there is a big possibility that they only just a freeloader from their parents or family experience in politics.

Keywords: Political party, Oligarchy, Immature Politicians

A. Introduction

Immature politicians and oligarchy study become an important matter in Indonesia after the last regime steps down from their power. These immature politicians become so hard to separate from oligarchy since they were originated from some of the richest persons or families. There is a big competition among them to rule politics and economics resources through power. They occupy political positions through what we called “the power of money.” Using their wealth, they can “buy” people’s political opinions, and voters in general elections. General elections are supposed to be a democratic way to anyone who has the capability and the integrity to be a leader, but in fact, their capability is hijacked by the oligarchy and their
alliances. These are how these immature politicians suddenly created. Kuskrido Ambardhi\(^1\) in his dissertation describes how well this oligarchy\(^2\) spreads in political democracy in Indonesia, especially in a political party. After the 2004 general election, political parties are transformed into a money oriented body. The opposition started to fade away, and practically there is an opportunity for the cartels to consolidate their movements to gain back power in political leadership.

Same research conducted by Marcus Mietzner\(^3\) reveals how terrible the Indonesian political system in funding management. Natalie Sambhi, an analysis and managing editor of The Strategist Australian Strategic Policy Institute, recently in her review describes corruption and how bad is the Indonesian Political Parties on their funding management. According to his Research, political parties are so venerable in their funding management, and this issue leads them into corruption and falls into the hands of the oligarchy that needs a ‘vehicle” to maintain their power. In a long-term, this fact leads to people distrust on politics and democracy. Mietzner also describes that “The beauty of Money, Power, and Ideology is that it can be read on some levels.” Imagine how money, power, and ideology operate in the Indonesian political system, are operated by political parties.

Furthermore, Mietzner ends his curiosity with a question. How has Indonesia’s democracy remained stable if its parts are dysfunctional? Democracy stability happens in a condition where corruption is so massive, power is sellable goods, and money becomes “God” that rules everything.

If Ambardi and Mietzner take their point of view from a political party, Jeffery A. Winters, on the other hand, takes an interest in the oligarchy. Winters has been very good at describing the struggling of the richest people in Indonesia since the new order era, through to the time before the Reformation. Powers are controlled by a person, or an alliance between oligarchies while democracy was dressing on a cake. Wasisto Rahardjo\(^4\) reveals about political Cartel and the political dynasty that happens during the 2014 General election. Wasisto explains the forming of cartelization in politics and the existence of the senior politicians who already have a pre-meditated strategy on how to build their dynasty of power. The political cartel was a real practice of a strong oligarchy building


\(^2\) Kuskridho Ambardi doesn’t use the term oligarchy, instead he use “cartel”.


in Indonesia. Ambardi and Wasisto’s thesis on political cartelization and Winters’s thesis about oligarchy or Meitzner’s are such an important part to see how oligarchy is strengthening in Indonesia by ruling the political party.

Immature politicians are reproduced from political cartelization on oligarchy. They are already holding power, so they will be easily controlling what the party’s decisions that are breaking all the laws of democracy. In Indonesian politics context, the existences of the oligarchy are strengthening as well as the flow of formal democracy. Formal democracy has emerged and been the substantial part of the growth of freedom, even though people feel that formality doesn’t answer the problem at hand. Immature politicians also considered as a democracy defect in Indonesia. It was also considered to be a big obstacle in providing a better substantial democracy. They involved a history, also experience in politics. By using formal regulations, immature politicians do not need to upgrade their substantial quality. They only need to enter the party, and with a little help from the regulations, they then become public officials without having to repair their quality.

The leap of this immature politician in the political arena cannot be succeeded if did not have quite big funding and power. So, rich persons who in quality and capability are not enough can buy their way up to the top positions. This rich person can even buy a party. And also, in a very short time, they can gain power, win the election by buying their voters with money politics. They can win popularity even without having a good quality to be a leader. Based on that argument, this article will be described in: first, how this oligarchy existence in Indonesia in conquering political institutions, especially in party and regents election; and second, how the law should regulate the phenomena, and how to stop these immature politicians in Indonesian politics.

B. Discussion

1. The Term “Oligarchy” and “Politisi Karbitan”

In Indonesia, it is a well-known method to make a fruit ripe quicker by the use of carbide (calcium carbide). This term is used to describe something or someone that is being ripped faster than normal time. In politics, this word is used to describe a young man/woman (mainly a son/daughter of a senior politician to enter the political world by using greatness and a well-known family name, and money. The term “Politis Karbitan” (Immature Politicians for the English translation) is the term that we use in describing some politicians that use their family power to gain certain positions in politics. We use this term since they are not in that position because of their capability, but mostly because of their father (family) are the leader of that party. Amich Alhumami, a social researcher at University of Sussex,
England, stated that political kinship recruitment was based on a familial sentiment. Familial Kinship is commonly found in a tribal-pastoral society. Family lines are main tools to decide a communal leader, also as a pattern for traditional political inheritance power. Familial kinship politics are built upon an old doctrine: blood is thicker than water. This doctrine affirms that power – since it can bring honor, dignity, wealth and some other social privileges – have to circle between family members only. Power is distributed and moved in a circle, between sides with consanguinity.5

Relatives—with their consanguinity—are considered to be more trustworthy and with no chance to cheat, like other politicians that seeking power. So, the elite then massively support their family members to be a parliament member or a prospective head region. They become a candidate because of their family political privileges, not because they are capable and have been through the process that can make them a real politician. This concept is similar to oligarchy. If immature politicians relies on their family network, the oligarchy utilizes wealth to gain power. Oligarchy is a term that used by Plato to explain a government before democracy. Oligarchy is the government that ruled by some people. But in real term, political oligarchy is used to describe a government system that is controlled not just by several richest persons, but also interest groups that control the executive, legislative and judiciary power with their policy and decisions are mainly the upper half of society needs.6

Oligarchy is a system that the government is controlled by some rich and powerful persons for the interest of their groups. In Aristoteles7 thoughts, what they called as citizens of that era were about whom to recognize as citizens. Not everybody is a citizen. Children, female, foreigner, artisans and mechanics and all who does a public service works are not citizens. They already have their own rules. Citizens are limited to adult male, who have spare time to participate in public life. Jeffery A. Winters also admits that the term Oligarchy is a well-known term in political studies. This term is spread out from the ancient Greek era to the present time. In the international encyclopedia of social sciences, Oligarchy is defined as “a form of governance where powers are in the hands of small minorities.” The term is taken from the Greek language “oligarchs” that means governance by a

few, from the word oligoi (a little), and arkhein (ruling – to govern), oligarchy is a government ruled by some people. Oligarchy has a wealth of the ordinary or even wealthier than average rich. Or you can call it super-rich individuals. Their features in the political arena are based on the failure of a country in protecting their wealth from several threats, even if that threat comes from that country itself.

From their wealth, oligarchies manage to control both political and economic structures. They can easily be a part of power since they have an easy way to get into the public officers. If they cannot take it with the formal procedure (democracy), they can buy it with their wealth. In a democracy that relies on money, oligarchy will be easy being the leader. Whoever can provide money, will be able to reach the top positions in government. In the oligarchy system, powers are vested in some people that come from the “upper class” of the society. They have the economic asset and most of the resources, and can easily dominate the public institutions. This fact is easier in a democracy by modern people, where all public elements have the same chance to engage in public institutions.

Based on the direct democracy, there are unintended consequences to public institutions that are occupied by the election mechanism. Rich people are easy to occupy certain positions in public institution which have an open pattern of recruitment. All people are equal in opportunity to occupy a position in public institutions, but, since the low quality of substantial democracy making votes being such an easy thing to manipulate by the rich. Rich people have an easier way to occupy a certain position in public institutions. Practically at the same time, rich people with low capability reach their positions with unscrupulous ways, even if that is procedurally legitimate. This condition makes the oligarchy and the immature politicians emerged and undeniable. According to our short explanation above, immature politicians are politicians that have not experienced any process of career steps that regular people do. As well as the fruit that goes through a “carbide” process to ripe, it looks like a good fruit that ripe naturally on their tree. But the taste would be different. The same thing with politicians, they only look good on media, gain power through their wealth, but have a very low capacity to be a true leader. The process of making immature politicians, in the end, will exterminate the democracy system. Since somebody who has no capability and career process can be easily being a top leader in public institutions, or even higher.

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2. The Oligarchy and The Immature Politicians into Threatening Democracy

Oligarchy is accused of being the cause of the failure of democracy. The government is taken over by a few rich and super-rich people only to maintain their balance in wealth and capital stability. Democratic governance has a philosophy based on freedom, equality, and accountability that relies on the law. Democracy process depends on fair law enforcement, as well as moral and ethics while on the other hand, oligarchy and immature politicians hiding from it. Lack of morals and ethics leads to a situation that oligarchy and immature politicians emerged and become the serious threat to democracy. These things are similar to research by Demos in 2005 and 2007 that found out that democracy got stuck because of the elite politician who monopolizes power. They are responsible for building an oligarchic democracy. Research result from Indonesian democracy Index on 2014 which carried out by Center of Political Studies Indonesia University have scored 5,42 that means less democratic. In this publication, we can see that since 2011, democracy in Indonesia tends to be stagnant in 5 scores.

Demos' research can be a sign that democracy does not always come with freedom and equality in all public domain. Power within public institutions that politically elected can be dismantled because of the oligarchy intervention. With their power and money, they can take over every strategic position and maintain the stability of their interest in the democratic country. These conditions are the source of corruption and power abuse. Democracy and political process do not rely on the quality but only the formality. As far as someone can fulfill every formal aspect of regulation, it is enough to participate and run for candidacy in the election, even without personal quality and experience in leadership. Oligarchy and immature politicians are two concepts on the same coin. Despite several differences, they both have the same goal; gaining power through shortcuts and easy way.

The best way to review this phenomenon that whoever has the power of money can bypass the normal process in politics. Descendants of a well-known public officer can easily reach top positions in party or candidacy. Those who have money can have sufficient power to make differences.

Money can buy political decisions as well as money can eliminate the competitor. The ethos of democracy is public service. The people develop spirit of governance, managed by people, and for the people. So the ethos of democracy is completely for the public interest. This ethos of public service is nonsense if power is gained through an instant mechanism. The possession of wealth, and highly support from their family that already in power are making power can be achieved easily without process, or through a series of experiences that made a true politician. That kind of people is what we called as family politicians or family oligarch.

The future of democracy is in serious trouble because the presence of “SKIP FENCE” politicians or someone that suddenly out of nowhere emerged and became a candidate in a general election either for being a regent or local representatives. Sometimes, they come with full support from their family that already sits in strategic positions such as regent or local representatives, or some other key position in local government and that is really serious threat to democracy. The democracy that is supposed to be the quality based turns into fulfilling the greedy needs of rich and powerful families only. Oligarchy and immature politicians are as well as cancer that exterminates the democratic order. If oligarchy and immature politicians get stronger and support each other in the government, public service will be at the very bottom of the attention. Less control to the government brings a corrupt system.

The research and the development of Kompas noted, there is a corruption case that involved 77 members of parliament (2007 – 2004), ten ministers and former ministers, (2002 – 2015), ten regents (2013 – 2015), and nine politicians from various parties (2009 – 2014). Another data from Indonesia Corruption Watch (ICW) also becomes a big shocker. According to ICW, from the actor side of a case, 212 corruptors are from the government officials. On research conducted in the first semester of 2015, ICW has identified ten job backgrounds as the possible corrupt positions. First place is government officials, in second place is the private sector, starts with the management, the commissioner, and the 97 other employees. Next, corruptors are coming from Village head, District head (28). Next place is regents (27), head of the department (26), parliament member (24),

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Officials or employee from other bodies (12), CEO/officials/employee of State Owned Company (BUMN) with ten persons. The last position is random people and also Bank employee.

This phenomenon is rising because of a lack of control in the Legislative, executive, and judiciary. Controls cannot be able to perform effectively because those persons who have the power are gaining their power and positions in the same way; money from the oligarchy, and political pressure for immature politicians family. They share the same character, which is pragmatically interested in maintaining the stability of power and wealth, and on the other side, what people and nation need do not get enough attention. Undeniable, that corruption as the root of all evil keeps on surviving, since the oligarchy and immature politicians maintained it. Those two are responsible for this.

3. The Connection Between Immature Politicians and Oligarchy in Politics and Democracy

Immature politicians and oligarchy have been through a process in a democratic government. In a monarchy, there will be no opportunity for this kind. Someone who has a high position in monarchy should be coming from a certain process and have been through various level and positions. They also born and rise in a code “primus inter pares” the best there is. So a leader will emerge from a series of highly personal quality standard. The tradition of long and serious steps of career are hard to develop in a democracy that depends on the freedom and equality. There is no such thing as primus inter pares, democracy does not concern the best, just as long as formal qualification is achieved, everyone can join and participate in the government. The personal quality is not a matter of discussion.

From a long time ago, democracy is a government of the people, by the people and for the people. The trust in the government by the people causes doubt, whether the pure theory of democracy can be as good as it was in action. Democratic government is a big hope for the people who want to have a good public service since the government comes from the people itself. Hope to bring people and government to the ideal state of mind is miss-used. Starting from the reality of how high is the political cost in a single election. Anyone who wants to participate as a candidate in a general or regent elections has to be ready with some large amount of money in their pocket. That money will be used firstly in finding the party nomination, and also to be used in the campaign process. Even before the campaign, the candidate has to be ready with a succession of the team, survey, travel to almost all remote areas, etc.

Months of pre-election travel before the official campaign, of course, need a lot of money. Also, people nowadays are often attending campaign
only if they are promised something in return; Small amount of money, or sometimes just rice, flour, sugar or any other daily needs. All things make democracy more difficult and complicated. Along with the theory that we use in this research, democracy is shifting to oligarchy when some rich people are hijacking democracy for their interest. Automatically, access to power will be a very hard deal. Power is only available for those who have money.

These conditions are the cause why politician/leader/regent/parliament members sometimes have to be groomed faster without normal steps or career building from the bottom half of the positions. These immature politicians suddenly arise, with no leader capability and quality at all. A candidate only needs to prepare money since money can buy voters, a team of experts, or even a survey result. The survey results are commonly released to mass media to build the public opinion, alongside with public who are easily being manipulated without a full understanding of what democracy is. In some worrying problems, immature politicians emerged from around the inner circle of those who are in power. If their parent power is about to end, there will be the heir to be a replacement. This replacement is quickly prepared, to maintain the power within their family. It is a serious threat to good democracy.

A good democracy is important to remind people that some individuals with certain goals like power and money oriented person are a serious threat to democracy itself. In the long term, we are deeply seduced by a formal democracy that only fulfills the formal aspect of democracy and forgets anything about substance. The main principles of democracy such as equality, justice, fairness, and freedom are not having a good deal of attention to building a democratic country. Some politicians goals are how to build a democracy that fulfills the formality that is mentioned by the law. The concept of equality, justice, and freedom, if it was viewed from the positions of the existence of oligarchy and an immature politician can be described as:

First, equality. In a democracy, equality between all people are so important. This equality aspect is the reason why democracy is implemented in most countries in the world. Equally low and equally high. Between rights and obligations are in the equal state, no one-sided. In the context of discussing oligarchy and immature politicians, there is a difference when oligarch who is easily gaining power through their wealth and immature politicians making their positions with families that already in certain power. Power can be inherited like in monarchy but a different circumstance. In a monarchy, powers are automatically inherited while in democracy, an immature politician has power as a legacy of their family.

Secondly, the justice Democracy emphasizes the principle of justice as
primer principles. There is no difference between the rich, the poor, the young and the old. Justice has to be a priority in democracy. In the context of discussing oligarchy and immature politicians, people, in general, are not having the same access to power. Some oligarch and immature politicians are going through high way to power when on the other hand some good quality persons do not have access to power at all.

Third, the freedom. The third principle of democracy is freedom. Every time people speak about democracy, freedom is the main pillar. Democracy is freedom itself. Mind that democracy is freedom, so everyone with their potential and quality can have access to the main source of power. In the case of oligarchy and immature politicians, freedom was granted to anyone, but keep in mind that their quality is different, especially in access to power. Public officer positions should not be easily gained by ordinary people, even if they have quite a quality and capability as a person. But by oligarch and immature politicians, they have all the support they need to reach certain political positions even without adequate capability.

The trouble about dynasty politics as a basis of argumentation about oligarchy in Indonesia can be found in the spirit that lies behind the creation of local election laws. In the Law No. 8, year 2015 about changes of Law No. 1 year 2015, concerning election of Governor regent and Mayor, in chapter 7 point r that stated: Indonesian Citizens who are capable of running for Governor and Vice Governor, Regent and Vice Regent, and Mayor and Vice Mayor are people who fulfill all the following... “have no conflict of interest with the former officials”. What is described as not having a conflict of interest is: does not have any family relation one level above and below and to the side which his father, mother, mother in law, uncle, aunt, brother, sister, brother in law, child, son in law, unless it has been pass one period (5 years before). This article is made especially to “tackle” every potential basis of dynasty politics, which have been a serious ingredient on the oligarchy in Indonesia itself.

Through the constitutional Court decision No. 33/PUU-XIII/2015 that contains the regulation above, Constitutional Court has ruled out the article 7 point, and at the same time is just strengthening the oligarchy consolidation. The constitutional court decision has granted the family members of a former official in the running for election. Many discussions in the path of preventing the dynasty politics in Indonesia just vanished by the decision made by the judges in Constitutional Court. The judges indicate that they are not agreed because it might be discriminating and unfair for some people. The relation between oligarchy and immature politicians in Indonesian democracy context are lying on several main discussions:

First, democracy as a tool or a vehicle to ensure the needs of power. For, too, and for the sake of democracy, they sing a song about and slogans
of equality, justice, and freedom but at the same time, their political practice is contradicted to the democratic spirit. For example, we can observe the case of a political dynasty in Banten Province, under the command of Ratu Atut Chosiyah as the governor. Also in South Sulawesi in Yasin Limpo Family. The recent case must be the mayor election in Palu Central Sulawesi, where a band vocalist Sigit Purnomo is elected as vice mayor since he is already popular with his band, but of course zero capability and quality to sit in such public official position. In other cases, several celebrities are also elected as parliament member or regent/vice regent who elected in the name of democracy even many reports indicated that the power of money and popular face on TV might be the reason of their appearances.

Second, democracy is limited to fulfilling the formal aspect only. Since the fulfilling of that is considered as the same of all rituals of democracy. In this context, democracy is just a mechanism, not as behavior or actions. No need of the substantial democracy aspect, just formal aspect and what the law has to say, it is considered done.

Third, as a result of that habit, democracy has never been any better in practice. History always proofs that rich people and powerful family have always come to take over every power resource in a country.

Fourth, in the end, democracy would not be contradicted to oligarchy and immature politicians anymore. On the contrary, democracy is transformed into a tool for oligarchy and immature politicians to gain power without any need to get through several complicated ways. Money, popularity, and influence of the senior member of the family that already in positions can make a huge difference, and a big help to bring them to vital positions or became public officials.

In the end, the Constitutional Court might just become one of the responsible parts in preserving the oligarchy. This might become a big discussion, but at least, when there is no regulation against the possibility for a family member to be a successor in such vital position, we would see other same cases in the future.

C. Conclusion

Based on the discussions above, the existence of oligarchy and immature politicians in a democratic country can be summed up as follows:

1. Immature politicians and oligarchy are a big threat to democracy. In the beginning, the government is working for public interest, but the arrival of oligarchy and immature politicians can make a big switch since government turns to be a tool for them only to maintain power, and forget the public service that used to be the government’s main activity.

2. Democracy then is limited to be a procedural and formal matter, without
any attention on the substantial part. If a person has fulfilled the formal aspect of the law, then it was considered as democratic. Even when in reality, democracy will fail to comply in their public service goals since the government is ruled and used to obey the oligarch and immature politician in their hunger for power and money.

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