

Hegemony and Political Inequality: Elite Dominance through Gramsci and Marx

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Abstract

Purpose: This study analyzes the persistence of elite political dominance in Indonesia, particularly through political dynasties, using Antonio Gramsci's theory of hegemony and Karl Marx's class analysis.

Research Methodology: This research employs a qualitative approach using Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). Data were collected through library research by examining academic literature and national media reports on political elites, corruption, and dynastic politics.

Results: The findings reveal that elite dominance is systematically reproduced through the control of strategic political positions, economic resources, and ideological narratives. Although elections and formal democratic mechanisms continue to function, political competition remains unequal. Elite power operates not only through material control, as emphasized by Marx, but also through hegemonic processes that normalize dynastic rule as legitimate and natural in the public consciousness, consistent with Gramsci's framework.

Conclusions: Elite domination in Indonesia persists through the interaction of structural economic power and ideological hegemony. Democracy functions procedurally, but its substantive role in ensuring equality has been significantly weakened.

Limitations: This study relied on secondary data and textual sources, limiting direct empirical observation.

Contributions: This study integrates Marxian and Gramscian perspectives to provide a critical understanding of political inequality within contemporary democratic systems.

Keywords: *Democracy, Elite Domination, Hegemony, Political Dynasty*

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1. Introduction

In modern societies that adhere to a representative democratic system, every citizen is normatively entitled to equal rights to participate in political processes and access public offices. However, various studies on the formation of local power bases in Indonesia show that access to centers of power tends to be concentrated among elite groups possessing stronger economic resources, social networks, and institutional positions than other social groups (Hamat, 2024). This condition gives rise to sharp political stratification between a minority of rulers and a majority of the ruled, even though electoral democratic procedures continue to function formally (Ode, 2022). Research on oligarchs and political dynasties in Indonesia emphasizes that the transition to a democratic system after the New Order did not immediately eliminate elite dominance (Ferry Bastian, 2024) rather, it opened new opportunities for consolidating power among certain groups through elections, political parties, and decentralization policies (Hamat, 2024; Bastian, 2024).

The practice of political dynasties in various regions, where political families or clans repeatedly occupy executive and legislative positions, illustrates how power can be reproduced across generations through a combination of economic capital, political networks, and control over party machinery ([Agung, Indrajat, Harjo, & Juantara, 2022](#)). This phenomenon demonstrates that democracy in Indonesia often operates within an oligarchic framework, in which strategic political decisions are dominated by a small number of economically and kinship-connected actors ([Subekti, Hapsa, Putra, Beriansyah, & Saadah, 2025](#)).

Antonio Gramsci's concept of hegemony provides an important analytical framework for understanding why elite dominance persists within a democratic context. Numerous studies have explained that hegemony operates through ideological and cultural domination, whereby the values and interests of the ruling class are accepted as natural and legitimate by subordinate groups ([Haboddin, 2022](#)). In this framework, institutions such as political parties, mass media, and educational bodies function as arenas where consensus is built so that the acceptance of elite leadership is achieved not merely through coercion but through the internalization of particular values and discourses ([Subekti et al., 2025](#)).

Furthermore, when connected to the Marxian tradition of class and relations of production, political domination in Indonesia can be understood as a continuation of socio-economic stratification structures, wherein those who control capital and strategic resources possess greater capacity to influence state institutions and political decision-making processes ([Rahmat & Nurjaman, 2024](#)). Several studies on elite configurations and socio-political stratification in Indonesia suggest that changes in social and economic structures often result in the restructuring of power bases rather than a more equitable distribution of power. Therefore, this study aims to analyze political dominance in Indonesia through the lenses of political stratification, elite theory, and hegemony, focusing on how these mechanisms function within the context of contemporary electoral democracy.

2. Literature Review and Hypotheses Development

2.1 Political Stratification and Elite Formation

The concept of political stratification is rooted in social stratification theory, which emphasizes inequalities in the distribution of material and symbolic resources within a society. In its modern development, political stratification is understood as a process of differentiated access to political power that produces a structural divide between elites and non-elites ([Hernawan, 2025](#)). Contemporary studies show that although democratic systems promise political equality, in practice, access to political office remains heavily influenced by the possession of economic resources, social networks and symbolic capital ([Mutawalli, 2024](#)).

Research on local political elites in developing countries, including Indonesia, indicates that decentralization and democratization have, paradoxically, created opportunities for consolidating local elites who can convert economic and social capital into political power ([Haura, 2024](#)). These elites often dominate regional political arenas through a combination of formal positions, informal influence, and control of political party institutions. The literature suggests that political stratification does not diminish under electoral democracy but is reproduced through more procedural mechanisms ([Djufri, 2023](#)). These findings form the basis for this study, which examines how political stratification contributes to elite dominance within the context of Indonesia's electoral democracy, particularly in maintaining unequal access to power between elites and non-elite actors ([Aldi, Febriyanti, & Amaliatulwalidain, 2024](#)).

2.2 Domination and Hegemony

The concept of hegemony remains highly relevant in contemporary political studies to explain why elite domination can persist without open resistance. Recent research extending Gramsci's ideas demonstrates that elite power is maintained not only through institutional control but also through the production of discourse, moral legitimacy, and the normalization of inequality ([Hernawan, 2025](#)). In the context of democracy, hegemony operates by framing elite interests as public interests through the narratives of development, political stability, and welfare ([Salma, 2022](#)).

In the political economy literature, the neo-Marxian approach highlights that political domination is closely correlated with the structure of economic ownership ([Wijayanti, 2025](#)). Groups that control economic resources have a greater capacity to influence political processes, whether through campaign financing, policy lobbying, or media control ([Indrawan, 2024](#)). Studies in Indonesia further emphasize that high political costs reinforce candidates dependence on major financiers, thereby narrowing opportunities for alternative political actors ([Insani, Meilani, & Iman, 2025](#)). Based on this literature, this study positions elite domination as the result of an interaction between structural economic power and hegemonic mechanisms operating at both the ideological and institutional levels.

2.3 Oligarchy, Political Dynasties, and Domination in Indonesia

Studies over the past decade have consistently shown that post-reform Indonesian politics are characterized by the strengthening of oligarchic and dynastic structures ([Mutawalli, 2024](#)). Subsequent developments demonstrate that the oligarchy in Indonesia has not weakened after the reform era but has instead adapted to the institutions of electoral democracy. Recent empirical research has found that political dynasties have become a primary strategy for elites to maintain power across generations through control over political parties, financial resources, and bureaucratic networks ([Haura, 2024](#)).

Both quantitative and qualitative studies at the local level reveal that the presence of political dynasties negatively correlates with the quality of democratic competition and governmental accountability ([Insani et al., 2025](#)). In this context, democracy tends to be procedural in nature, where elections are held regularly, but citizens' political choices remain constrained by the dominance of the same elites. This body of literature highlights a research gap concerning how political stratification, hegemony, and oligarchy operate simultaneously to reproduce elite domination. This study addresses this gap by integrating these three approaches into a unified analytical framework ([Indrawan, 2024](#)).

2.4 Research Hypothesis Development

Based on the synthesis of the above literature, this study departs from the assumption that political domination in Indonesia is not merely the result of weaknesses in formal democratic institutions but rather the outcome of entrenched structures of political stratification and institutionalized elite hegemonic practices ([Hernawan, 2025](#)). Therefore, this study proposes the following hypotheses:

- H₁*: The higher the level of political stratification, the greater the likelihood that political elites will dominate access to political positions and resources in the future
- H₂*: The ideological hegemony practiced by elites has a significant effect on the low level of public resistance to elite political domination
- H₃*: The existence of oligarchies and political dynasties reinforces the reproduction of elite power within Indonesia's electoral democracy

If this study adopts an exploratory qualitative approach, these hypotheses can be reformulated into the following main research question: How do political stratification, hegemonic mechanisms, and the practices of oligarchies and political dynasties interact to reproduce elite domination within Indonesia's electoral democracy? Through this formulation, the contribution of this research becomes clear, namely, to enrich the study of Indonesian politics by providing an integrative analysis that links social structures, ideology, and elite political practices within a coherent, critical framework ([Indrawan, 2024](#)).

3. Research Methodology

3.1 Type and Approach of Research

This study employed a qualitative approach using the Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) method. A qualitative approach was chosen for its ability to explore the deep meanings embedded within social and political discourses. Its main focus is on understanding how language is used to construct ideology and power relations within society ([Harahap & Kholil, 2024](#)). In this approach, a text is not viewed as an isolated entity; rather, it is understood as a social practice that emerges from socio-cultural and political contexts and directly interacts with the realities in which the text is produced and received by the public ([Naurah & Siregar, 2023](#)).

Critical Discourse Analysis was utilized because this research does not merely describe the content of the text. It also investigates how language functions as a tool of power legitimation and as a means of normalizing political practices in the public sphere. Several studies published by Goodwood Publishing have shown that CDA is effective in revealing power relations through the ways representation is constructed, narrative patterns are organized, and ideology is implicitly embedded within texts ([Burkhanova, 2025](#)). Moreover, CDA allows researchers to connect linguistic elements with broader social and political practices. Recent studies by Goodwood Publishing further emphasize that discourse plays a strategic role in shaping public political attitudes and strengthening the legitimacy of particular political actors ([Omoniyi, 2025](#)). Based on these considerations, Critical discourse analysis is deemed appropriate for examining corruption-related discourses involving political elites, particularly in the context of how power is constructed and sustained through language.

3.2 Research Focus and Object

This study focuses on discourses surrounding corruption cases involving political elites in strategic positions. Corruption is not merely a legal violation but also a social and political phenomenon that functions to sustain and reproduce elite power through discourse construction in the public sphere ([Omoniyi, 2025](#)). The object of this research consists of written texts representing corruption cases involving political elites, both published in mass media and in digital spaces. Texts are positioned as arenas for contesting meaning, ideology, and interests. This perspective aligns with the critical discourse approach, which views language as a medium for negotiating and legitimizing power ([Naurah & Siregar, 2023](#)).

3.3 Sources of Research Data

This study falls under the category of library research, with data sources comprising scholarly journal articles. This approach was chosen because it allows researchers to conduct a critical reading of social and political discourses that have been systematically documented in academic publications ([Burkhanova, 2025](#)). The selection of documents was based on clear inclusion criteria to ensure transparency and data traceability. These criteria include narratives that directly discuss corruption cases or the exercise of political elite power; [Wijayanti \(2025\)](#) articles published in national or international scholarly journals, one of which includes journals published by Goodwood Publishing, within the last ten years (2015–2025) and narratives or representations that allow for the analysis of ideology and power relations, including references to the classical works of Antonio Gramsci and Karl Marx. The sources of research data were selected based on specific inclusion and exclusion criteria. These criteria included narratives that directly address corruption cases or the practices of political elite power, specifically articles published in national or international academic journals. Only publications from the last ten years, spanning 2015 to 2025, were considered. Additionally, the selected texts and documents were required to provide narratives or representations that enable the analysis of ideology and power relations.

3.4 Data Collection Techniques

Data collection was carried out through a documentary study by gathering and examining written documents in the form of scholarly journal articles. This technique enables researchers to systematically and deeply trace the ideological meanings and social contexts embedded within discourse ([Naurah & Siregar, 2023](#)). The stages of data collection included determining keywords relevant to political and power issues. Subsequently, articles published by Goodwood Publishing were searched. The texts were then selected based on the established inclusion criteria and followed by a critical reading process to identify main themes, narrative patterns, and the ideological content contained within them ([Omoniyi, 2025](#)).

3.5 Data Analysis Technique: Critical Discourse Analysis

Data analysis was conducted using Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), which views text as a social practice inseparable from power relations.

1. Text Analysis

This stage focuses on the selection of words, sentence structures, and narrative patterns used to represent political elites and corrupt practices. Linguistic analysis is employed to uncover the ideological interests hidden behind language construction ([Saydova, 2025](#)).

2. Discourse Practice

This stage examines the processes of text production and distribution, including the role of the media and social actors in shaping and directing the discourse that develops within the public sphere ([Burkhanova, 2025](#)).

3. Social Practice

This stage connects discourse to broader social and political contexts, such as power structures and elite relationships. This approach is used to understand how ideology and political interests are sustained through discursive practices in contemporary societies ([Naurah & Siregar, 2023](#)).

3.6 Data Validity

Data validity was maintained through source triangulation by comparing the various journal articles analyzed in the study. This step aimed to obtain a more comprehensive understanding of the discourse surrounding political elite corruption and enhance the credibility of the qualitative research findings ([Burkhanova, 2025](#)). In addition, source criticism was conducted by assessing the consistency of the arguments, the relevance of each study's context, and the appropriateness of the analytical approach used in every article. This process ensures that the research findings are academically justified and validated ([Naurah & Siregar, 2023](#)).

4. Result and Discussion

The analysis results indicate that political domination does not occur momentarily or by coincidence. Rather, it is deliberately planned, systematically structured, and continuously reproduced to maintain and strengthen elite supremacy. Fundamentally, the dominance of political elites within dynastic systems does not arise suddenly; it is the result of a long-term and consistent process ([Ruri Maidany, 2024](#)). In the case of Ratu Atut Chosiyah's political dynasty in Banten, power is maintained not only through familial ties but also through the control of key positions within the regional political structure ([Hafsari, 2022](#)). Members of this dynasty are consistently placed in various strategic roles within the local government, legislative bodies, and political parties. This pattern creates a closed circle of power, where decision-making and policy direction are concentrated under the same group's control. As a result, actors outside the dynasty find it difficult to enter or compete because the political sphere has already been monopolized by interconnected networks that protect shared interests.

The strength of this political dynasty is further supported by its control over diverse resources. Large-scale economic support allows elite families to sustain their political activities, from election campaigns to the consolidation of post-election power ([Dedi., 2022](#)). Social capital also reinforces ties with bureaucrats, local leaders, and support networks, ensuring that power relies not only on formal positions but also on personal loyalty to the leader. Political capital secures recognition and legitimacy through official positions and institutions. Together, these three forms of capital—economic, social, and political—interact to create deep inequality within the local political arena, where non-elite actors, though legally equal, remain structurally disadvantaged.

Under such conditions, democracy continues formally through elections, yet political competition becomes fundamentally unequal. Citizens face limited choices as viable candidates often come from the same circles of power and are frequently relatives of existing elites. Public participation is administrative rather than substantive, limited to casting votes without the capacity to influence power distribution or policy direction. As a result, the public's role as voters is not accompanied by mechanisms of accountability over the ruling elites, causing democracy to lose its original essence as a tool for fair elite rotation and power redistribution. In this context, democracy functions as an instrument to legitimize and preserve dynastic dominance because power is maintained through legally and institutionally sanctioned processes. Instead of constraining elite domination, democracy paradoxically helps to stabilize and perpetuate it at the local level.

From Antonio Gramsci's perspective, elite domination relies not only on the control of formal institutions, such as the government, parliament, or political parties, but also on the ability to shape how society perceives and interprets power. The analysis reveals that political dynasties achieve social acceptance through gradual normalization narratives that frame elite family rule as being legitimate and natural. Political elites are often portrayed as experienced and meritorious leaders whose authority is inherited across generations. This framing makes elite power appear as a continuation of capable leadership rather than a concentration of power. Over time, the values and perspectives of the elites become embedded in everyday social consciousness. Dynastic rule is no longer seen as an unjust power relation but as something logical and acceptable to the people. Gramsci refers to this as the success of hegemony, when the worldview of the ruling class becomes "common sense" for society. Thus, public consent emerges not through coercion but through habits, symbols, and repeated narratives woven into daily life. Citizens accept elite rule as natural, not because they consciously choose inequality but because it feels normal and expected.

This condition gradually narrows the space for criticism of dynastic practices. Dissent is often misrepresented as a threat to stability, a lack of respect for past leaders, and even opposition to regional development. Consequently, counter-narratives questioning the concentration of power are marginalized, while discourses supporting elite continuity dominate public attention. Thus, elite domination depends not only on institutional strength but also on the successful shaping of public perception and political meaning (Tukan, 2022). These findings confirm that hegemony operates subtly yet effectively, maintaining elite control through social acceptance rather than through open conflict (Zahwa, 2025). This makes political change difficult, as the problem lies not only in power structures but also in the way society understands and legitimizes them.

From Karl Marx's perspective, elite domination cannot be separated from class structures and control over material resources (Raya et al., 2024). The findings reveal that political elites within dynasties control not only formal authority but also economic capital, business networks, and access to state resources. Ownership and control of capital grant a decisive advantage, since political processes inherently require financial means, networks, and material support (Banna, Ardana, Kurniawan, & Prasetyo, 2025). Through this economic strength, elites can finance campaigns, cultivate loyalty, and steer public policy in their favor. Such class and production relations produce structural inequalities that are systemic and self-perpetuating (Siti Afifatur Rohmah, 2025). Economic power enables elites to secure political power, while political power protects and expands their economic interests. This mutually reinforcing relationship supports Marx's argument that the class controlling capital also controls political institutions, shaping policies that reflect its own interests (Aswari Lubis, Anggelica Aini, & Rolenza Lumban Raja, 2025). Thus, public policies often serve elite agendas, while marginalized groups find it difficult to gain equal representation. Hence, elite domination in political dynasties is not merely personal or familial; it reflects structural class inequality. As long as economic and material resources remain concentrated within the same elite circles, political power will continue to rotate among them, leaving non-elite groups excluded (Fajar, 2025).

Viewed through both Gramscian and Marxian lenses, elite domination emerges from the interaction between the control of material resources and ideological influence. In the Banten political dynasty, elites maintained their power not only through economic and institutional means but also by constructing legitimacy through discourse that presented their rule as natural and rightful (Remanu, 2025). The class structure provides the material foundation for elite influence, granting access to capital, state resources, and business networks, while cultural and political hegemony ensure the social acceptance of this dominance.

This power reproduction process spans generations and is reinforced by political institutions, social norms, and patron-client relationships, where positions, networks, and loyalty mutually reinforce one another. Consequently, the space for non-elite political actors has become exceedingly narrow. Elite narratives and values are internalized into society's "common sense," whereas criticism is often dismissed as destabilizing or anti-development (Febriani & Hamdi, 2024). Under such conditions, political inequality becomes systemic and deeply entrenched, as both material structures and social

consciousness are organized to preserve elite dominance ([Suteki, 2022](#)). Formally, democracy continues through elections, but its emancipatory function weakens. Political competition is confined to elite circles, and public participation is largely symbolic, without genuine control over decision-making or power distribution. Consequently, power circulates among the same groups, while the broader public becomes a passive observer who accepts political outcomes as inevitable.

These findings demonstrate that elite domination through political dynasties profoundly undermines the quality of democracy ([Candra, 2024](#)). Political equality, the cornerstone of democracy, is eroded as opportunities for non-elite actors shrink. Representation becomes exclusive and confined to elite families or networks, while accountability weakens under the weight of patronage, personal loyalty, and material influence. Elections persist, but the substance of democracy is distorted as strategic decisions and key policies remain controlled by the same groups across generations. Therefore, understanding elite domination requires going beyond procedural flaws, corruption, or formal irregularities. This phenomenon is structural and hegemonic, rooted in unequal class relations, accumulated capital, political networks, and legitimizing ideologies. The values and narratives constructed by elites make dynastic continuity appear natural, even desirable. Social consent arises not from coercion but from the internalization of norms and habits, where criticism of elite domination is framed as disruptive to stability or disrespectful to the leadership tradition.

Thus, strengthening democracy in Indonesia cannot rely solely on institutional reform or procedural improvements. Change must address the underlying class structures and social discourses that sustain the elite's domination. Without attention to these material and ideological dimensions, procedural reforms alone will not foster genuine political competition, inclusive representation or meaningful public participation ([Firdaus, 2025](#)). A democracy confined to formal procedures without correcting structural inequality and hegemony ultimately functions to stabilize existing disparities and consolidate power in the hands of the same elites.

5. Conclusions

5.1 Conclusion

The domination of political elites within the practice of political dynasties in Banten is the result of a long-term, deliberate, and continuous process of power consolidation. Political elites consistently occupy strategic positions in government institutions, legislative bodies, and political parties. This condition narrows the political arena and limits competition among actors outside the elite circles. Although local democracy continues to operate through formal procedures, it does not fully reflect fair and equitable political competition. From Antonio Gramsci's perspective, elite domination is sustained not only through institutional control but also through hegemony. Elites construct and disseminate discourses and narratives that become normalized in everyday social life, leading society to perceive dynastic power as natural and legitimate. Over time, elite worldviews gradually merge with public consciousness, illustrating how hegemony operates to maintain and reproduce dominance.

From Karl Marx's perspective, elite domination is rooted in class structures and control over material resources. Political elites within dynasties possess economic capital and extensive networks that facilitate the acquisition and maintenance of political authority. Political competition is structurally unequal from the outset because access to significant resources determines the ability to compete, thereby disadvantaging non-elite groups even before the electoral process begins. The interaction between economic power and ideological influence comprehensively reinforces elite domination. Class structures provide the material foundation for the intergenerational reproduction of power, while ideological hegemony ensures the social acceptance of such domination. Consequently, although democratic mechanisms, such as elections, continue to function, the substantive meaning of democracy weakens. Power circulation becomes limited and less inclusive, and democracy tends to operate more as a mechanism of legitimization than as a genuine expression of popular sovereignty. The findings demonstrate that the practice of political dynasties significantly affects local democracy quality. Political equality and social representation have declined, and public participation has become largely procedural rather than substantive. As a result, citizens have a limited capacity to exercise effective control over the ruling elites.

5.2 Research Limitations

This study has several limitations. First, this study focuses specifically on the context of political dynasties in Banten Province, which may limit the generalizability of the findings to other regions with different political, cultural, and institutional dynamics. Second, this study primarily employed a qualitative approach grounded in critical theory perspectives. While this approach provides deep analytical insights, it may not capture measurable variations in political behavior, voter preferences, or institutional performance that could be revealed through quantitative analysis. Third, the study relies on available documents, literature, and secondary data, which may limit the comprehensiveness of empirical verification of internal party mechanisms and financial networks that operate informally.

5.3 Suggestions and Directions for Future Research

Based on these findings, several recommendations can be proposed. Strengthening regulations that limit the practice of political dynasties is urgently necessary to protect democratic principles. Political parties should implement open, transparent, and merit-based recruitment and cadre development systems to expand opportunities for actors outside the elite circles. Stronger oversight of political financing is also necessary. Transparency and accountability in campaign funding can reduce the dominance of economic capital in electoral competitions. A more equitable funding system would help ensure that political opportunities are not solely determined by material resources. For future research, comparative studies across different provinces or regions are recommended to examine the variations in the dynamics of political dynasties and elite domination. Integrating quantitative methods could also provide empirical measurements of the impact of dynastic politics on voter behavior, policy outcomes, and institutional performance. Further studies could explore the roles of civil society movements, youth political participation, and digital media in challenging elite hegemony and fostering more substantive democratic practices.

Author Contributions

The process of this study was conducted collaboratively, with each author contributing to the different stages of the research process. The distribution of roles and responsibilities among the authors is as follows. MF contributed to the conceptualization of the research and was responsible for revising the manuscript to ensure the clarity and coherence of the study. JA drafted the manuscript and organized the initial structure of the article. AD performed the data analysis and contributed to the interpretation of the research findings. MS collected the research data and assisted in organizing the empirical materials used in the study. VI contributed to the study design and development of the research framework. FP supervised the overall research process and provided final approval of the manuscript prior to submission.

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