

Shadows of political corruption amidst the trend of declining democracy in Indonesia: Learning from the dynamics of 2024 Presidential Election

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Abstract: This conceptual article is based on primary and secondary data from various sources discussing the dynamics of Indonesian politics and democracy through the 2024 General Election. This article aims to identify various alleged political corruption practices as well as to evaluate the development of the quality of Indonesian democracy implied by the 2024 political process. Although allegations of political corruption are believed to be common among many groups, proving them legally and politically is not easy to do. This leaves a number of notes, especially regarding the nature of power and the trend of weakening the quality of democracy in the country. The 2024 General Election provided some valuable lessons that the aspects of neutrality and independence of state power should be of common concern to reorganize and increase the quality of the future Indonesian democracy.

Keywords: Political Corruption, Democracy, Declining Democracy, 2024 Presidential Election, Indonesia

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Introduction

General election is among the key instruments in a democratic political system. It plays a fundamental role in realizing the principles of aspirational, equitable, and accountable government. After WWII and the Cold War era, the Indonesian democracy has undergone many phases of consolidation and changes in various spheres. The recovery of our democratic system was at its height during the 1998 Reformation era, marked by the fall of the authoritarian New Order regime that had co-opted the structure of power in Indonesian for more than three decades (1965-1998).

Therefore, as one of the main pillars of democracy in the Southeast Asia region, the Indonesian Presidential Election held on 14 February 2024 was an important chapter in the history of world democracy, specifically in the Indo-Pacific region. Adopting the "one person, one vote, one value" (OPOVOV), the General Election provides the citizens with equal opportunity to express their political preference in order to form a government that represents the interest and aspiration of the people in its governmental system (Blais, 2000; Norris, 2004; Sartori, 2016).

Other than serving as an instrument for political expression, the General Election also provides the citizens with an opportunity to evaluate the performance of their government and the direction of public policies through debates and discourses that are grounded on the principles of civil liberty. Through a meaningful political participation, the General Election allows the elected leaders to use their political mandate in formulating decisions and public policies legitimately (Colomer, 2016; Cox & McCubbins, 2005; Diamond & Plattner, 2006; Lijphart, 2012).

When political process optimally runs under a fair and equitable political representation among social groups, General Election shall become an orderly mechanism of power, as well as an effective instrument of peace, which regulates the transfer of power in a stable and orderly manner, without inciting chaos and conflict of massive scale. As such, the General Election serves as a main pillar in keeping the sovereignty of the people, promoting political participation, maintaining government accountability, while keeping the socio-political balance during the transition of power in democratic manner.

However, as stated by Huntington (2006) and Emerson (1976), the quality of a democracy should not be measured solely by whether a General Election existed or not in a country. Democracy also comes with a fair government as the main prerequisite, which includes law supremacy, civil liberty, freedom of press, and a transparent and accountable political culture among the people. Without all of these, the General Election shall only serve as a political system that beacons a chaotic routine of power struggles every five years, lacking any significance (Lindberg, 2006; Reynolds et al., 2008; Ware, 2009). The General Election only creates a system filled with cheap publicity stunts and gimmicks, failing to yield good governance and an innovative and responsive public service delivery.

As such, this article shall examine and evaluate the quality of democracy in the recent 2024 Presidential Election. On one hand, some argued that the 2024 Presidential Election was filled with political corruption, which is the root of all corrupt practices. Hundreds of Professors and intellectuals across universities nation-wide, activist networks, and civil society had even warned us of the threat of structured, systematic, and massive rigging in the 2024 Presidential Election. The soundings were made by intellectuals of Universitas Paramadina, Universitas Gadjahmada, Universitas Islam Indonesia (UII), Universitas Indonesia, and several other universities outside Java.

Thus, even though 2024 Presidential Election was not dominated by politics of identity which polarize and divide the people, the banality of political corruption that had led to riggings in the previous Election is deemed as destructive forces threatening the key pillars of quality and integrity in upholding democracy of our nation. As a result, this side has a tendency of refusing to trust the integrity of instruments of power who were in charge of conducting and supervising a fair, transparent, and accountable Election (Sherlock, 2024).

On the other hand, some consider the rigging practices in 2024 Election as within reasonable limits. This perspective tends to consider such practices as still seen as the result of imperfection in the logistics of conducting democracy as a political system. However, despite such imperfection, this 2024 Presidential Election was still appreciated as a political instrument capable of maintaining political stability in a peaceful transition of power that incites participation and far from bloodshed. Parties of this side mostly adopt the logics of procedural administrative, which deemed that every suspicion of political corruption and rigging which may lead to any disputes regarding the result of the Election should simply be filed to the authorities, specifically the General Election Supervisory Agency (Bawaslu) and the Constitutional Court (MK). This 'procedural democracy' logic seems to be used as an effective shield or political protection while disregarding the quality of the supervision and legal enforcement being implemented.

This article methodologically is the result of a conceptual studies based on secondary data from various sources that cover the dynamics of politics and democracy in the process of 2024 Presidential Election in Indonesia. In order to further refine its result, this conceptual research is supported by primary data from a series of interviews with 10 politicians from various national political parties and democratic actors from civil societies who were directly involved in the process of 2024 Presidential Election. This article also aims to identify suspected instances of political corruption, while also evaluating the quality of democracy in Indonesia during 2024 Presidential Election. Although people were convinced that political practices which breed riggings have occurred, proving it through legal-formal or political means is never easy due to an unfavorable nature of power. This reality further confirms the trend of declining quality of democracy in our country.

Political Corruption in Democratic Trends: Consolidation, Stagnation, and Regression

Many branches of the science of politics define political corruption through different perspectives. In general, political corruption is often interpreted as actions that go against the principles of integrity, transparency, and accountability of power, wherein public officials or politicians abuse their position or power for the benefit of certain groups or individuals through illegitimate means.

Robert Klitgaard (1988) defines political corruption as a "misuse of public power for private profit". Klitgaard (1988) definition puts emphasis on the essence of abusing power or authority

held by public officials for gaining vested interests, be it in the form of money, wealth, position, or other political-economic benefits. As such, Klitgaard emphasizes on the importance of transparency, accountability, institutional reformation, and significant changes to the system as the effective incentive to prevent abuse of state power and authority.

In line with Klitgaard, Rose-Ackerman and Palifka (2016) and Johnston (2005) also define political corruption as "the use of public office for private gain". Similar argument was also made by Diamond (2007), who defines political corruption as "the abuse of entrusted power for private gain". Furthermore, Diamond (2007) argues that political corruption is not merely an issue of legal morality, but is also a serious threat to democracy itself. Political corruption may erode public trust in the government, reduce public participation, and damage the integrity of democratic institutions.

In its practice, Klitgaard (1988) and Rose-Ackerman & Palifka (2016) elaborate that political corruption can manifest in various actions. *First*, Bribery, namely the act of offering or receiving money, items, and services in an effort to influence the decision or action of public officials or politicians. *Second*, Nepotism, which is the act of granting certain position or favor to family members or acquaintances based purely on personal relationship instead of qualifications or competence that is based on a merit system. *Third*, Clientelism, or the act of giving political support or assistance to a certain individual or group in exchange of political support or vote during general election.

Fourth, Embezzlement, or the abuse of public funds for private gain. *Fifth*, Money laundering, or the process of concealing the origin of money made through illegal business or received through corruption in order to make it appear legal for certain economic or political purposes, either by funneling it through fictitious business or fake bank account to conceal practices of corruption. *Sixth*, Conflict of Interest, or a situation where the personal interest of a public official or politician is conflicting with the interest of the public that they represent. *Seventh*, electoral fraud, or underhanded practices in general election in order to rig or manipulate the voting result, either through illegally adding or removing votes, intimidations, or buying and selling of votes.

Considering the wide spectrum of modus operandi of political corruption and the various types of political corruption that often take place during election, the ones that have been most notably mentioned in public discourses and debates during the 2024 Presidential Election in Indonesia are as follows: *First*, nepotism, the act of granting a position, stance, or decision that favors closest relatives or acquaintances in an unfair manner, which is solely based on personal relationship instead of qualification or eligibility that is based on the principles of ethics, integrity, and meritocratic values (Sinclair, 2006). *Second*, pork barrel politics, or the misuse and allocation of public funds in order to gain political advantage, namely by allocating public funds for social aid and the practice of money politics that favors the political interest of certain individuals and groups (Fenno, 1977; Ferejohn, 1974; Grafton, 1975; Jacobson & Carson, 2019; Kiewiet & McCubbins, 1991). *Third*, electoral fraud, or allegations of political corruption during general election, which manifests in the practice of voter's data manipulation, fraud, voter intimidation, and manipulation of votes, which often involves illegal intervention by people in charge in a structured, systematic, and massive way in order to boost the total votes of a certain candidate or reducing the total votes of opposing candidates during General Election.

All these irregular practices shadowed Indonesia's democratic journey throughout the years. Indonesia's democratic process has undergone various phases, from consolidation, stagnation, and the current one that has been labeled as the era of regression by many people. According to some scholars, the early phase after the 1998 Reformation put Indonesia in a very unstable and uncertain political and economic situation. The process of democratic consolidation began during the initial term of office (2004-2009) of President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono (Aspinall, 2005, 2010; Mietzner, 2008, 2009a, 2009b). Democratic consolidation during the early years of President Yudhoyono's term was evident in the improvement of political stability and national security, improvement of freedom of public speech and press without any fear of repression from the authorities, and the increasingly active corruption eradication that actually had a deterrent effect. Public trust in democratic institution also improved significantly, which brought about a time of peace and high economic growth as provisions for a sustainable development going

forward (Honna, 2007). Indonesia even gained international recognition as representing the biggest Muslim-based democratic nation in the world, and as a new economic force from Southeast Asia and Indo-Pacific region.

However, this democracy reached a stagnation phase in President Yudhoyono's second term of office, which was marked by national legal-politics turmoil. The government's effort in focusing on a more robust development was hindered by political-legal dynamics that involved certain political elites or authorities. Such condition was taken advantage of by the opposing parties, which happened to be given ample opportunities to sound critics for the ruling government. Despite having a military background, President Yudhoyono relatively managed to maintain the freedom of public opinion during his terms. He was committed to it, even though it eventually impacted the public's perception of his governance (Aspinall et al., 2015; Aspinall & Warburton, 2018; Kimura, 2011; Mietzner, 2008, 2009a, 2009b).

During the initial years of President Joko Widodo's term, the public had high expectation to continue this consolidation phase of democracy. Joko Widodo came to the national political stage and was seen as a representation of the "common people", a leader figure who often visit traditional markets and other common spaces for inspections (*blusukan*), and humble. The leadership of President Joko Widodo, who came to power through a very polarizing political process, made the support of the people for him seemed very solid. However, the public policies issued during President Widodo's terms in responding to various national political situations that were increasingly polarized due to abuse of identity politics and allegations of law enforcement politicization, had started to bring critical evaluation at the end of his first term of office. Power (2018) and Hadiz (2017) for example, clearly stated that at that point in time, Indonesia was already undergoing democratic regression. Power (2018) and Hadiz (2017) even pointed out that a power with an autocratic nature was emerging, marked by the declining freedom of public opinion, the weakening anti-corruption institution, and the allegations of criminalization and discrimination in law enforcement efforts, among others.

This critical evaluation upon the regressing democracy in Indonesia became more intense as the nation entered the era of the Covid-19 pandemic. Many other countries in the world also caved in to public demand to take swift actions in formulating tactical and strategic measures amidst uncertainty. The pandemic has forced a lot of countries to relax their regulations considering the importance of fast decision making in order to save lives, and the heavily impacted socio-economic situation at the time. Ironically, the relaxed regulations during the pandemic gave the opportunity to the birth of centralized power within a country, prone to political hijacking. As a result, dictatorship and authoritarianism that threaten democracy were instead given an opportunity to grow amidst the pandemic (Transparency International, 2020).

It led to the issuance of some decisions and policies that were considered counterproductive to the strengthening of democratic pillars in our country. As a result, the Democratic Index score released by *The Economist Intelligence Unit (EIU)* for example (2/3/2021) saw a sharp decline, especially in the cultural and political aspects (4.38) and freedom of opinion (5.59) which yield very low scores and drove down the index aggregate. Based on the four categories of democracy formulated by EIU, Indonesia was categorized as "flawed democracy". In terms of quality of democracy, Indonesia was still below its neighbors, Malaysia, Philippines, and even Timor Leste.

Not only that, Indonesia has continued to score lower in the Corruption Perception Index released by Transparency International (TI) from 2020 to 2024. The Corruption Perception Index consists of nine consolidated indexes which evaluate business environment, law enforcement, and national development of democracy. This means Indonesia has received a "bad mark" on its efforts in eradicating and preventing corruption. In 2022 and 2023, the Index even shown stagnation at 34, with 0 being very corrupt and 100 being very clean. Score 34 was the same score Indonesia received in 2014, the year Joko Widodo started his first term of presidency. Many political experts, domestic or abroad, saw this as a significant decline in freedom of public opinion. The result was legislative process that is not participative, the rise in autocratic legalism, politicization of law enforcement, and weakening checks & balances system, all contributed to a lack of democracy in Indonesia's political process (Azra, 2021; Mujani & Liddle, 2021; Susanti, 2023).

Some deemed that this fundamental condition had heavily impacted the quality of 2024 Presidential Election. Approaching the 2024 Presidential Election, some people were concerned about the potential of democratic unfairness due to the government's favoritism. This perception was triggered by the political statement of President Joko Widodo, who often gave political endorsement to certain parties running for the upcoming 2024 Presidential Election. The President also conducted a consolidation with other leaders of political parties in the State Palace, which should serve as a 'symbol of national politics' that rule over all political powers in the country.

Responding to such concern, in early May (4/5/2023), President Jokowi made a statement which affirmed that he was not involved in the 2024 Presidential Election's affairs. However (29/5/2023), later on, the President made a statement that affirmed his involvement in the coming Election (*cawe-cawe*). Although his latter statement was claimed to be a sign of commitment to not participating in practical politics, some people began to question his commitment in keeping the neutrality of the ruling regime of the country.

The public became increasingly critical when President Jokowi was seen as stepping too far by orchestrating and consolidating the forces of various political parties and network of volunteers to support one of the candidate pairs running for Presidency, specifically one in which his eldest son, Gibran Rakabuming Raka, was a vice president candidate after going through a process of changing the age requirement for election candidacy in the Constitutional Court (MK), which had sparked a controversy. Many were concerned of the high risk of political corruption in the 2024 Presidential Election, considering President Joko Widodo, who holds the executive power, is in a potential conflict of interest situation with one of the candidate pairs. Furthermore, this potential conflict of interest was seen as possible trigger to abuse of power due to the bias of interest, which may hurt the integrity and fairness of the democratic process of the 2024 Presidential Election.

The Uncertainty of Political Dynamics and the Result of 2024 Presidential Election

Under article 434 of Law No. 7 of 2017 on General Election, Legislative and Presidential Election shall be conducted simultaneously. In the Legislative Election process, at least 18 national political parties were competing. Meanwhile, for Presidential Election, there were three candidate pairs running for the presidency: candidate number 1: Anies Baswedan - Abdul Muhaimin Iskandar; candidate number 2: Prabowo Subianto - Gibran Rakabuming Raka; and candidate number 3: Ganjar Pranowo - Mahfud MD.

The simultaneous execution of Legislative and Presidential Election often brings about a bias in the voters' participation. Despite being held simultaneously, the participation in Presidential Election was higher than Legislative Election. Furthermore, approaching the date of the Election, the dynamics of national politics were dominated by the discussion about the presidential candidates themselves instead of the visions and objectives of the political parties.

Political parties had less room of interactions with the people during the campaign period. As a result, the public orientation in choosing political parties was influenced by short-term transactional factors. The Table 1 are details on the voters, including Voting Area, and distribution of parliamentary seats.

Table 1. The voters

Detail	Total	Description
Number of voters	204,807,222	
Province with the highest number of voters	35,714,901	West Java
Province with the lowest number of voters	367,269	South Papua
Number of legislative seats being contested	20,462	
Number of DPR seats being contested	580	
Number of provincial DPR seats being contested	2,372	
Number of district/municipal DPR seats being contested	17,510	
Number of voting area for Provincial and District/Municipal DPR RI	2,710	
Number of participating Political Parties in the election	24	18 National Political Parties; 6 Local Political Parties

Amidst the complexity of the General Election involving 204 million voters scattered across 38 Provinces, the good news was that there was no more identity politics causing massive division

and conflict among the public. However, just like the Legislative Election, the coalitions formation scheme in the Presidential Election was not based on the visions, objectives, and the projected performance platform in the government, but instead determined by the figures, who is being supported by whom, how strong their political logistics are, and who is favored by the current ruling regime. These factors played a significant role in the formation of coalition during the 2024 Presidential Election. As such, it was not surprising that some candidate pairs were formed last minute, while some names that had previously circulated in public discussion and prediction of the political map were easily thrown out of the picture.

The most surprising candidate name of the 2024 Presidential Election was the Mayor of Surakarta, Gibran Rakabuming Raka, who is also the son of President Joko Widodo. Previously, the President had made a statement that his son was not ready and still under the lower age requirement of 40 for President and Vice President as regulated under the Law on General Election. However, the political dynamics ran swiftly, as marked by the issued Decision of the Constitutional Court (MK) No.90/PUU-XXI/2023, which ultimately allowed Indonesian citizens under the age 40, as long as being equipped with the experience of serving as Regional Heads or other offices through the mechanism of General Election or Election of Regional Leaders (elected officials), to be a President or Vice President candidate during the 2024 Presidential Election.

This decision has led to a controversy among the public, as it was deemed the result of an operation under the ruling regime to put the “red carpet” for the son of President Joko Widodo, Gibran Rakabuming Raka, to run the election as vice president candidate which, during the final momentum of the Candidacy period, was contested by Prabowo Subianto and Ganjar Pranowo as presidential candidates. The controversy was sparked by opposing legal views and political calculation that highlighted the formal and material aspects of the decision.

For those who were opposed to Gibran's candidacy (interview with Ronny Talapessy, Legal Team of Candidate Pair 03, Jakarta, 1 April 2024; interview with Reffly Harun, Legal Team of Candidate Pair 01, Jakarta, 1 April 2024; interview with Deddy Sitorus, Campaign Team of Candidate Pair 03, Jakarta, 4 March 2024), this decision number 90/ 2023 issued by the Constitutional Court was seen as having a conflict of interest because the one who served as the Head Judge of the Constitutional Court at the time, Anwar Usman, is also the uncle of Gibran who benefited from the decision. There is also a concern that this decision taken by the Constitutional Court might trigger further practices of misuse and abuse of power in subsequent political processes, especially considering the fact that President Widodo still holds full executive power. The public worried that other moves would soon be made by means of such executive power in order to grant favors to the President's closest circle. As such, those who were opposed to Gibran's candidacy have consistently tried to revoke the Constitutional Court's decision No.90/ 2023, as it opens room for conflict against Article 17 Paragraph 3, 5, 6 and 7 of Law No. 48/2009 on Judicial Authority, which stated as in Table 2.

If referring to Article 17 paragraph 3 of Law No.48/2009 (Table 2), the fact that the Chief Constitutional Court, Anwar Usman, is the brother in-law of President Jokowi, and the uncle of Gibran Rakabuming Raka, further confirmed the allegation of a conflict of interest, which some people deemed to be against the spirit of independence of the judicial authority. Furthermore, during the Judge Decision Meeting in the Constitutional Court, the votes for the decision were not absolute, with 3 judges expressing agreement, 2 judges expressing dissenting opinion (DO), and 2 judges expressing Concurring Opinion (CO), or having different arguments but choosing to follow suit with the majority decisions by the panel of judges. This means that the 2 judges expressing Concurring Opinion (CO) might be under pressure, yet unwilling to take action in the face of a greater power that shadowed the neutrality and independence of the panel of judges. This was confirmed by the testimony of Saldi Isra as a Constitutional Court Judge, who admitted that there were a lot unusual things during the decision-making process.

For those who were opposed to Gibran's candidacy, with reference to Article 17 paragraph 6 and 7 of Law No. 48/2009, if there was indeed a conflict of interest or a suspected political pressure that undermine the independence and neutrality of the judges, the decision made by the Constitutional Court number 90/2023 should be revoked, being declared void, and the parties being suspected with disrupting the neutrality and independence of the judges shall be given

administrative sanctions or even criminally punished. After the decision has been revoked, the case shall be reexamined by a different panel of judges.

Table 2.

No.	Articles in the Judicial Authority Law	Regulation
1.	Article 17 paragraph 3 of Law No. 48/2009	“Judge shall be obliged to resign from a trial with regards to a blood or marriage relationship up to the third degree, or a marital relationship even though they have been divorced, with the chairman, one of the member judges, a prosecutor, an advocate, or a registrar.”.
2.	Article 17 paragraph 5 of Law No. 48/2009	“Judge and registrar shall be obliged to resign from a trial if they are in a direct or indirect conflict of interest with the case being examined, be it on their own will or the will of the party being involved in the case”.
3.	Article 17 paragraph 6 of Law No. 48/2009	“In the event that there is a violation to the provision as referred to in paragraph (5), the decision made shall be deemed invalid and the judge or registrar related to the violation shall be given administrative sanctions or punished in accordance with provisions of the applicable laws”.
4.	Article 17 paragraph 7 of Law No. 48/2009	“The case referred to in paragraph (5) and (6) shall be reexamined by a different composition of panel of judges”.

However, for political groups who are in favor of Gibran’s candidacy (interview with Fahri Bachmid, Legal Team of Candidate Pair 02, Jakarta, 1 April 2024; interview with Emanuel Ebenizer, Campaign Team of Candidate Pair 02, Jakarta, 4 March 2024; interview with Faldo Maldini, Campaign Team of Candidate Pair 02, Jakarta, 4 March 2024), the decision issued by the Constitutional Court is considered final and binding. The basis of this argument shall refer to Article 24C paragraph (1) of the 1945 Constitution, which stipulates that, “The Constitutional Court has the authority to adjudicate on the first and final level, the decision of which shall be final to review laws against the Constitution ...”. Furthermore, in the Elucidation to Article 10 paragraph (1) Law No. 8 of 2011 on the Constitutional Court, the phrase “the decision shall of which be binding” affirms that the decision by the Constitutional Court shall be immediately implemented. As such, the judicial process by the Constitutional Court shall be the first as well as the final level. This means that after the verdict or decision has been made, there shall be no other judiciary forums that able to alter it. As such, there is no legal opportunity or petition to revoke or change the decision, including extraordinary petition. In reviewing the Law, the Constitutional Court is considered not bound by the principle of *ultra petita*. Under the reason of serving the interest of the public, the Constitutional Court may pass a decision beyond the *petitum* of a petition. As such, the decision for case number 90/2023 was considered final and binding, and effective immediately to be used by Gibran in his candidacy as a contestant in the 2024 Presidential Election.

This controversy of legal politics eventually disappeared, as the Constitutional Court finally issued Decision number 141/PUU-XXI/2023, which completely denies any petitions on the material review of the age requirements for President and Vice President candidates, further supporting the previously controversial decision number 90 by the Constitutional Court. It seems as if this decision number 141 was issued to deny the allegations that something was wrong during the making of decision 90, internally, in the Constitutional Court, be it in the context of faulty material consideration of the judges or allegations of intervention of executive authority upon judicial authority.

Furthermore, this decision number 141 by the Constitutional Court was used as the basis of argument by the campaign team of Prabowo-Gibran that Gibran’s candidacy was underpinned by a valid and constitutional decision, and not based on fraud or manipulation. When the Prabowo-Gibran team was able to make use of the situation to deny the allegations of power intervention and fraud in the revision of age requirement, the potential of electoral consolidation during the campaigning phase 3 months before the Election could be performed effectively. As predicted, if basis of electoral consolidation can increase by 2.5 percent or even 3 percent, the potential of only one round of Presidential Election was likely to happen. However, with reference to the survey across agencies, there was no candidate pair that could surpass the psychological threshold of 50 percent plus 1 up to the date of the election on 14 February 2024. Furthermore, Anies-Imin and

Ganjar-Mahfud have tried to restrain any potential vote swings during the final phases of the Presidential Election.

However, through a very concise political process, the 2024 General Election was finally held. The participation rate in this 2024 Election was relatively stable compared to previous elections, at around 81 percent. The followings are details of voters’ participation in comparison to previous Elections.

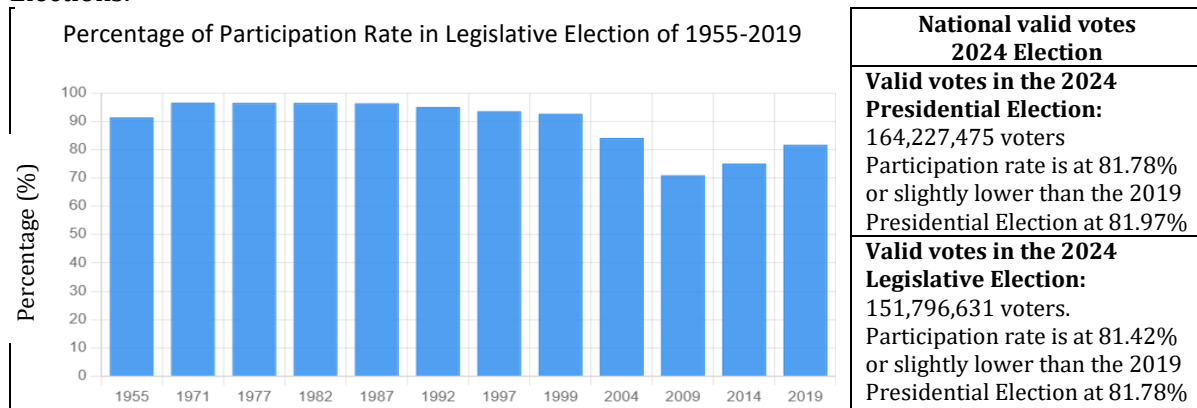


Figure 1. Voters’ participation data 1955-2024

With a relatively stable participation rate, 2024 Election can be considered a success. While the 2019 Election involved a sharp polarization in the grass-root level, with hundreds death on the side of KPPS (Voting Organizer Committee) due to exhaustion and high workload, the 2024 General Election in comparison concluded quite smoothly. In fact, the situation after the election was quite peaceful without any turmoil or horizontal conflict in the grass-root level.

This peaceful socio-political situation was maintained up to the announcement of vote recapitulation results for the Presidential and Legislative Election by the KPK on 20 March 2024. Table 3 and Table 4 are the details of the 2024 General Election results.

Table 3. Recapitulation of 2024 Presidential Election vote count results

Candidate Pair	Votes Gained	Percentage
Anies-Muhaimin	40,971,906	24.95%
Prabowo-Gibran	96,214,691	58.59%
Ganjar-Mahfud	27,040,878	16.47%

Table 4. Recapitulation of 2024 Legislative Election vote count results

Political Party	Number of Votes	Percentage (%)
PDIP	25,387,279	16.725%
Golkar	23,208,654	15.289%
Gerindra	20,071,708	13.223%
PKB	16,115,655	10.617%
NasDem	14,660,516	9.658%
PKS	12,781,353	8.420%
Demokrat	11,283,160	7.433%
PAN	10,984,003	7.236%
PPP	5,878,777	3.873%
PSI	4,260,169	2.806%
Perindo	1,955,154	1.288%
Partai Gelora	1,281,991	0.845%
Hanura	1,094,588	0.721%
Partai Buruh	972,910	0.641%
Partai Ummat	642,545	0.423%
PBB	484,486	0.319%
Garuda	406,883	0.268%
PKN	326,800	0.215%

The Table 3 and Table 4 are recapitulation data of 2024 General Election vote count results as released by the Electoral Commission (KPU) shows several unique results that trigger further speculative questions. For instance; *First*, the Presidential Election lasted one round with extreme vote gap among the candidate pair 02 (Prabowo-Gibran) against Anies-Muhaimin (01) and Ganjar-Mahfud MD (03). Even if votes for Anies-Muhaimin and Ganjar-Mahfud MD were combined, there would still be a discrepancy with votes for Prabowo-Gibran by 16 percent. Accounting for a total of 204 million voters in General Election 2024, the gap between candidate pair 02 to candidate pair 01 and 03 is around 32.6 million votes. The question is, despite the fact that the 2024 Presidential Election 2024 is not as competitive as the 2014 and 2019 Presidential Elections, which both only involved 2 Candidate Pairs, and even with political campaigns for 2024 only lasted practically 3 months, how can the gap of votes among three candidate pairs for this year's election greater than those of 2014 and 2019 Presidential Elections?

Second, even though Candidate Pair 02 (Prabowo-Gibran) received a huge electoral incentive up to 58 percent, why was there practically no significant coat-tail effect felt by the main political party basis that support them? In fact, Gerindra Party, where Prabowo had settled in for the past three Presidential Elections, which was supposed to gain dramatic increase in votes, had to settle for a third position with an electability of only 13 percent. Such phenomenon of no coat-tail effect present is certainly unique, compared to those of the General Elections in 2004, 2009, 2014, and 2019. From this, some speculative questions raise up from several parties, whether there was political machinery that worked independently (it worked well for the Presidential Election, but was less effective for Legislative Election).

Such speculation is also relevant to the next irregular fact; *Third*, why is it that the most effective electoral incentive in General Election 2024 is felt by political parties with no President-Vice President Candidates, which during their campaigns didn't show much political 'passion' and intensity during the Presidential Election? Is there a possibility that there exist a really massive logistic-based political machinery that worked effectively, and hence, reversing expectations from the coat-tail effect theory that so far has always been proven right in most Presidential Elections in our Country?

'Shadows' of Political Corruption in 2024 Democratic Process

Speculative questions such as above almost never found certain answers. Moreover, even when Candidate Pair 01 (Anies-Muhaimin) and 03 (Ganjar-Mahfud) in many occasions accuse that the victory of Candidate Pair 02 (Prabowo-Gibran) was due to structured, systematic, and massive operation of both political and power, they are having a hard time providing adequate proof and legal facts. Meanwhile, the Election Supervisory Board (Bawaslu) which main task and function is to monitor potential violation and unfairness in General Election, has a tendency to assume 'wait and see' action. Meanwhile, the Dispute over General Election Result (PHPU) handled by the Constitutional Court also seem to find it difficult to reveal suspected violation and unfairness to the public.

Suspected violation and unfairness in the General Election merely become shadows, which may seem real, but cannot be proven with solid and factual evidence based on election jurisdictive mechanism that is in line with existing legal-formal regulations. From such elaboration and as part of a lesson taken from this democracy process, the aim of this research is to point out at least three "shadows" of political corruption that haunted the 2024 Election.

First, suspected practice of nepotism involving major political powers. Referring to the lawsuit material from Candidate Pair 01 (Anies-Muhaimin) and 03 (Ganjar-Mahfud), accusation of such nepotism is addressed to President Joko Widodo, deemed to be in favor of Candidate Pair 02 (Prabowo-Gibran), as he has familial relationship with the pair. The suspicion of nepotism was taken since the context of paving ways for the candidacy of Gibran by issuing Constitutional Court decree No.90/ 2023 up to the process of making the later a winner in the run up to the General Election on 14 February 2024.

Indeed, in legal-formal terms, a president does have political rights, to either give vote or reelected for a second term. Therefore, Article 299 of Law No. 7 of 2017 on General Election firmly mentions that the President and Vice President reserve the rights to do political campaign. In this

context, campaign has two interpretations in the perspective of a president. One, running a campaign for himself as a Presidential Candidate, or two, running a campaign for other candidates, either for a political party, a legislative member (Legislative Candidate), or for another Presidential Candidate.

However, the General Election Law also stipulates firm restrictions for the president and vice president not to run any campaign using state facilities funded by the State Budget, except for pertaining facilities, such as security details, health benefits, and according to protocol. This elaboration can be found in Article 304 Paragraph 1, Paragraph 2, and Paragraph 3 of the General Election Law, even though they are not usually given further details in the Electoral Commission Regulation (PKPU).

Such restrictions are indeed served only to limit maneuver rooms for the president and vice president during the campaign period. However, such restrictions should convey strong message to the president and vice president as leaders of the nation or political and governmental leaders to separate between private and public domains.

In this context, the president is expected to wisely separate work agendas related to collective interest of the government, the nation, and the state (public domain) from those of personal, group, class, and party agendas (private domain). When a president takes actions in the public domain, his power over the nation and the facilities that come with it may be used optimally, and vice versa. When a president takes actions in the private domain, his power over the nation and the facilities and logistics provided by the nation shall not be utilized.

Although, quite a lot of parties within the inner circle of power are able to justify their moves by claiming that the private political agendas carried out by the president are also related to the public and state interests. Such 'grey' area requires moral awareness and high moral-ethical guidelines for anticipating possible arguments who are in support or against the intermingling between private and public domains. Therefore, the responsibility of national politics carried by the president shall be executed with sound morale and conscience, ensuring public interest to always be above personal and group interest.

In this context, the frequent meetings between President Joko Widodo and Candidate Pair 02 (Prabowo-Gibran), along with their political underpinnings, was taken by Candidate Pair 01 (Anies-Muhaimin) and 03 (Ganjar-Mahfud) as 'silent campaign' that could potentially direct economic & political powerhouses to help Candidate Pair 02 (Prabowo-Gibran) in winning the election. Other than being accused as unethical political moves by Candidate Pair 01 and 03, such maneuver by President Joko Widodo is deemed to be in opposite of Reform movement that is aimed at eradicating corruption, collusion, and nepotism (KKN). In this context, as explained by Sinclair (2006), Candidate Pair 01 and Candidate Pair 03 deemed that the favor given to Gibran to be the Vice President Candidate and to win the Presidential Election 2024 is a form of nepotism. It is deemed as to have given him the position, the swing in votes, and the decisions that benefit close relatives in an unfair manner. Such facilities are given based on personal relationship, instead of qualification and appropriateness based on the principles of ethics, integrity, and meritocracy. Despite the accusation, the basis of such argument is denied by Candidate Pair 02, as Gibran is in fact has proven track record that deserve appreciation in the domain of public policy.

Second, the accusation of pork barrel politics that also serves as part of the corrupt political practice. In this context, the pork barrel politics is often interpreted as misuse of public funds for certain political gains. Allocation of political budget is used as political logistics to be distributed to the public in the form of social aid and money politics that serves the political interests of certain individuals and groups (Fenno, 1977; Ferejohn, 1974; Jacobson & Carson, 2019; Kiewiet & McCubbins, 1991).

In the context of Presidential Election 2024, Candidate Pair 01 and 03 strongly accuse Candidate Pair 02 of using such tactics in their winning strategy. In the PPHU lawsuit material proposed by Candidate Pair 01 and 03 to the Constitutional Court, the legal teams of both Candidate Pairs accuse that some actions of the president, ministers, head of regional offices, and village government apparatus are in breach of their authorities and that they use governmental programs and state budget for the interests of Candidate Pair 02.

In line with that, the practice of money politics also indicated high prevalence during the 2024 General Election. Some informants of political background also mentioned that the intensity of money politics in the 2024 General Election is much more spectacular compared to those of previous elections. In the 2024 Election, Legislative Candidates for the House of Representatives of the Republic of Indonesia (DPR-RI) commonly form political machinery by collaborating with Legislative Candidates for Provincial Legislative Council (DPRD Provinsi) and Municipal Legislative Council (DPRD Kabupaten/Kota) with a more real voter basis, Legislative Candidates for Municipal Legislative Council, who only need around 5 to 10 thousand votes to win, commonly focus on gaining votes in 3 subdistricts. With much more measurable voter basis, many candidates allocate funds for money politics at the amount of Rp100,000 to Rp200,000 per vote. In big cities, a voter may be appraised to be worth Rp300,000. Added by money politics from DPRD Provinsi and the DPR RI, one voter could earn between Rp400,000 to Rp500,000. It is only natural that a family of 4 voting members may earn at least Rp2 million from such transactional politics. Therefore, it is also safe to assume that high participation rate in General Election could actually be driven by money politics. The result is even more expensive price for democracy.

“In the 2024 General Election, people are growing pragmatic. All parties play their roles and enjoy such practice of money politics. Even religious institutions that serve as moral compass are taking part in it as well. If democracy is getting more pragmatic, there will eventually be no more idealistic politicians who fight for strong visions for the country. The current system of money-based General Election will only breed politicians who buy votes. In both the DPR and the DPRD, there will be no more substantial debates on legislative politics. Transactional democracy will only trigger even worse corrupt practices. Moreover, the Corruption Eradication Commission is getting weaker now.” (An anonymous interview with a politician from Riau Islands, Jakarta, 3 March 2024.)

“So, don't be surprised when you heard the news of a massive National Budget leak sometime in the future. Why? Because to be a member of DPR RI, our fellow Legislative Candidates must be willing to part with 20 billion to 30 billion Rupiahs. People no longer care about politicians who come and put their programs to work around their neighborhood. You cannot buy votes by T-shirts and sarongs alone these days. They are just simple and unworthy perks. What voters want is cash money before the voting day” (An anonymous interview with a politician from West Nusa Tenggara, Jakarta, 3 March 2024).

Moreover, political machineries in Legislative Election work in tandem with political machineries of Presidential Election. For Candidate Pair 01 and 03 (An anonymous interview with an elite member of a political party that supports Candidate Pair 01, Jakarta, 14 February 2024; and An anonymous interview with an elite member of a political party that supports Candidate Pair 03, Jakarta, 14 February 2024.), this is categorized as a structured, systematic, and massive violation as stipulated in Article 282 and Article 283 paragraph (1) of the Laws of General Election. Therefore, Parties of Candidate Pair 01 and 03 filed a spectacular lawsuit, that is asking the Constitutional Court to annul Recapitulation of General Election vote count results as authorized by the Electoral Commission, disqualify Candidate Pair 02, and to run a reelection.

Third, concerning electoral fraud in the form of voters' data manipulation, fraud or intimidation against voters, to fraudulent practices by manipulating voting results which usually involves illegal authorities, in order to increase the number of votes of a prominent candidate, or to reduce the number of votes of a less desirable candidate. In their lawsuit material, Parties of Candidate Pair 01 and 03 accused that the victory of Candidate Pair 02 is gained from electoral fraud involving many parties. From appointment of regional head of state, involvement of state officials, mobilization of village heads, to indicated involvement of certain members of the Electoral Commission.

The modus operandi put forward by Parties of Candidate Pair 01 and 03 (An interview with Deddy Sitorus, a *Member* of Campaign Team for Candidate Pair 03, Jakarta, 4 March 2024) is in general, based on the notion of procedural violation stemming from accusation of manipulation of the Permanent Voters List (DPT), used ballot, reduction in votes for Candidate Pair 01 and 03, the practice of casting more than 1 vote, existence of dubious Polling Stations (TPS), and child

voters during the election, and also fraudulent act by the general election committee using information technology and the Recapitulation Information System (Sirekap).

Negotiation of Interest and Putting the Future of Democratic Quality at Stake

In response to Recapitulation of 2024 General Election vote count and in light of the national political dynamics, Candidate Pair 01 and 02 only have two possible options. *First*, to sincerely accept the Presidential Election result that they believe is rife with unfair practices. *Second*, to hold on fast by taking legal stance before the Constitutional Court and the Election Supervisory Agency (Bawaslu), and *carrying* out political contest using the voting rights in DPR RI. The next question is, after both Pairs carried out contests outside constitutional avenue, will they still believe and have faith in the composition of the panel of judges and the constitutionality of the Constitutional Court, which over the past four months they accused of being unethical and is filled with conflict of interest? The Parties of Candidate Pair 01 and 03 do make a contest, therefore they must refer to Article 286 of Law No. 7 of 2017 and also Regulation of the Election Supervisory Agency No. 8 of 2018 of possible structured, systematic, and massive (TMS) General Election violation.

In the context of regulation, such structured violation is interpreted as fraudulent practices performed collectively by structural personnels, either government officials or members of the electoral commission. Further, systematic violation is interpreted as pre-planned and properly prepared violation, that is neat, and of such good pattern. Meanwhile, massive violation is interpreted as any violation that has wide implications and impacts against the result of the current general election. In order to prove all those, the plaintiffs, in this case, Parties of Candidate Pair 01 and 03, must be able to provide the data, information, and evidences of the accused violation in at least 50 percent of all provinces in Indonesia, and that such fraud is truly massive in its scale and is highly systematic. In a formal juridical dispute, valid empirical evidence is required, and obtaining such valid and adequate evidence is no trivial task.

On the other hand, once the legal team of Candidate Pair 01 and 03 brought legal contest to the Constitutional Court, will the parties supporting Candidate Pair 01 and 03 ready to deal with the consequences of opposing the new power, and be willing to abstain from power for the next five years? Referring to the political dynamics to this day, there is great likelihood that Candidate Pair 01 and 03 will 'accept' the result of the 2024 Presidential Election with some considerations. *First*, there is an insurmountable gap in votes between Candidate Pair 02 and Candidate Pair 01 & 03. Such huge gap in votes that gives victory to Candidate Pair 02 is triggered by shattered solidity in the voter basis loyal to Candidate Pair 03, who in turn migrate to Candidate Pair 02. Armed with political power of 25% parliamentary seat (PDIP and PPP), and with results showing Ganjar-Mahfud earned 16%, the remaining 9% of vote was missing. This means the split ticket voting proved to be fatal for Candidate Pair 03. Moreover, such split ticket voting took place in regions where the Banteng party (PDIP) has its bases, such as Central Java, East Java, North Sumatra, East Nusa Tenggara, and some others. Therefore, filing a lawsuit to make up for such discrepancy of votes from Candidate Pair 02 is certainly quite an undertaking.

Second, mediocre political parties will tend to look for a 'save haven' after post-contest period is over. Mediocre parties as such are not ready to oppose the ruling power, or even to abstain from power. Other than affecting logistical supply, the option of opposition politics often affects internal solidity and has the potential to cause external disturbance that in turn, may split the strength of a party. Therefore, it is not only a matter of pragmatism, but also how to avoid downturn and destruction of political power.

Therefore, even though both Candidate Pair 01 and 03 think that it is still too early to acknowledge the victory of Candidate Pair 02, political realities will probably drive their supporting parties to be open to negotiations and compromises with Candidate Pair 02 in order to survive. Such situation only leads to even deeper question on the quality and future of the democracy. Will the values and pillars of democracy that supposed to perform check and balances still possible to be uphold? Or will such pillars be eroded from orchestrations by political powers that are based on short term interests? The dynamics of politics and power shall provide the answer.

Conclusion

General election is a political conflict arena that is legal and constitutional, a means to regain and maintain power. A fair general election may become an effective conflict management system to mitigate social & political insurrection, instability, and chaos due to multi-power collision. On the other hand, under unfair circumstances, a general election may trigger conflict at both the elite and grassroots levels. Therefore, power impartiality is required in order to realize a fair and democratic general election.

The 2024 General Election leaves us with many notes concerning aspects of power neutrality and independence. Each party is contesting with their own accusations and argument bases that are against one another. The winning parties consider their winning methods, that are deemed by other parties as power exploitation and in breach of fair and open democratic principles, as necessary and not unusual practices. On the other hand, the losing parties, such winning methods by the winning parties are deemed as serious violation of general election principles and general election running principles of just, honesty, and fairness with the help of power machineries that are deemed as breaching the procedural guidelines.

In the context of 2024 Presidential Election, suspected political corruption come in various forms. They include accusations of nepotism, use of pork barrel politics, politicization of state power instruments that result in all kinds of violation and unfairness in the general election (electoral fraud). Nonetheless, such accusations practically rage only within the realm of public political discourse. This is because even the trials over PHPU, where each complainant had already provided experts and factual witnesses, are still not able to prove any suspected fraud that they believe to have occurred in structured, systematic, and massive fashion. This means such accusations and predictions seem to become tangible 'shadows' that is not easy to prove in the form of expert witness elaboration or factual witness's logical and concrete explanation. Moreover, many existing political powers do not seem to have the will nor the courage to provide proofs, as they think that there are other political interests deemed to be strategic for the future. This means that after General Election, it is no longer legal-formal realm that they are after, but rather, opening up negotiation and compromise to find common grounds with those in power.

Nonetheless, as a learning curve for improving the quality of democracy in the future, evaluation of political process from the 2024 General Election shall be noted and reflected together. In this context, state power impartiality is still an important aspect to be maintained by all parties. This is because partiality of the highest political leader to one political power might potentially be misinterpreted and misused by certain parties to mobilize state resources and instruments, whilst they should otherwise be impartial in nature.

Whenever state power is no longer impartial, politicization of state agencies, such as law enforcement agencies, military units, intelligence agencies, General Election commissions, and civil apparatus might be misused as 'political campaign vehicle'. Partiality of state power might raise conflict of interests and abuse of power on a large scale.

Research conducted by Alyena Batura (2022) in some sophisticated democratic experiences of Algeria, Belarus, Serbia, Tunisia, Kenya, Venezuela, and Zimbabwe shows that when neutrality of state power is in question, it may trigger perception of unfair election, which in turn, may result in political distrust, potential chaos, and weakened power legitimation of the elected government.

Such important lessons from the 2024 General Election may serve as an early warning for the execution of the Regional Head Election (Pilkada) which will be held simultaneously in 545 regions, comprising of 37 provinces, 415 districts, and 93 cities all over Indonesia. Moreover, the political magnitude from the 2024 Regional Head Election is pertinent for the power configuration in the future. This is because winners of the 2024 General Election will not be willing to lose their influence toward their political cells at the regional level. On the other hand, composition of the 2024 Regional Head Election will play major part in determining the result and configuration of the upcoming 2029 General Election. Therefore, fierce competition among political powers shall decorate the 2024 Regional Head Election. The shadows of political corruption practice may potentially be present in all sorts of forms and variation, considering that all parties shall make use of all resources and measures, at all costs, to ensure that victory is in their hands.

Thus, it is pertinent for us to always monitor and ensure that the state power is always in check for its impartiality. The political rights of state leaders should be executed under certain measurements, and is based on the notion that state leaders must also be responsible for the public trust on the possibility of a neutral state power. Whenever state leaders are able to convince the people that state power runs impartially and independently, the process of democracy shall be improving.

State leaders are often given the analogy of parents, who are expected to be fair and cater for all child of the nation competing and striving to further development of our nation. State power impartiality is one of the keys for the advent of competitive, integrated, and fair democracy. Looking ahead, Indonesian democracy must be strengthened with the values of fairness and openness as to prevent prejudice and political distrust against the nation. In order for such effort to materialize, people must support and appreciate any measure, wisdom, and wit of the leaders who strive to maintain neutrality of state power for the advent of mature and just democracy.

At the same time, various important notes from the event of 2024 General Election shall be an important part of the basic evaluation measures to improve election quality in the future. Other than improving the capacity of people's monitoring for the neutrality of power, measures to improve election regulation system is also important to run. Improvement of election regulation system involves many aspects, from parliamentary threshold mechanism or presidential threshold mechanism, in proportional system scheme, and political party simplification scheme that may also be achieved from district magnitude reduction, improvement of vote-to-seat conversion system that currently still employs the Sainte Lague calculation, tightening of regulation on moral hazard of transactional and vote buying practices, improvement of digitalization and electronification of General Election vote result recapitulation, to reviewing the principle of simultaneity of the General Election.

Other than improvement on regulations in the General Election Law above, there is also the need for strengthening of capacity and quality of the General Election executive agency. Not only tightening stages of General Election that must be accounted for by the Electoral Commission during the 2024 General Election, which also triggered some controversies, reports of suspected violation and unfairness that seem to not been proper responses and follow ups by the Election Supervisory Board (Bawaslu) must also be improved.

On some occasions, slow response to reports in Bawaslu is caused by many reasons, from incomplete reports, limited jurisdiction of Bawaslu, and some others. As a state agency with its main task and function to monitor General Election, Bawaslu must strengthen its institutional nature as to have more courage and strength to face political actors, who actually choose the board of commissioners of Bawaslu themselves.

On top of those, conflict of interests and power bias must be mitigated proportionally and adequately in order to consolidate the current democracy to be more mature, with political dynamics that emphasizes on the focus of presenting good governance and adequate & sustainable public delivery service for the future.

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Interviews:

1. An anonymous interview with an elite member of a political party that supports Candidate Pair 01, Jakarta, 14 February 2024.
2. An anonymous interview with an elite member of a political party that supports Candidate Pair 03, Jakarta, 14 February 2024.
3. An anonymous interview with a politician from West Nusa Tenggara, Jakarta, 3 March 2024.
4. An anonymous interview with a politician from Riau Islands, Jakarta, 3 March 2024.
5. An interview with Reffly Harun, a Team Member of Candidate Pair 01, Jakarta, 1 April 2024.
6. An interview with Fahri Bachmid, a Team Member of Candidate Pair 02, Jakarta, 1 April 2024.
7. An interview with Ronny Talapessy, a Team Member of Candidate Pair 03, Jakarta, 1 April 2024.
8. An interview with Deddy Sitorus, a Member of Campaign Team for Candidate Pair 03, Jakarta, 4 March 2024
9. An interview with Emanuel Ebenizer, a Member of Campaign Team for Candidate Pair 02, Jakarta, 4 March 2024
10. An interview with Faldo Maldini, a Member of Campaign Team for Candidate Pair 02, Jakarta, 4 March 2024