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From Islamic Populism to Patronage-Driven Populism: Prabowo's Evolving Electoral Strategy (2019–2024)

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Abstrak

Artikel ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis transformasi strategi elektoral Prabowo Subianto dalam Pemilihan Presiden 2019 dan 2024 melalui lensa ekonomi politik populisme. Kerangka teoretis yang digunakan adalah populisme Islam (Hadiz, 2016), hubungan patronase-populisme (patronage-populism nexus) (Kenny, 2017), dan populisme oligarkis (Aspinall, 2015). Penelitian ini menerapkan pendekatan kualitatif dengan desain studi kasus, memanfaatkan data yang bersumber dari media massa tepercaya hingga literatur akademik. Artikel ini berargumen bahwa pergeseran strategis yang dilakukan oleh Prabowo bukan sekadar retorika belaka, melainkan sebuah transformasi mendalam dalam logika mobilisasi pemilih, bergeser dari ketergantungan pada identitas Islam sebagai perekat koalisi menuju populisme berbasis patronase yang berakar pada jaringan patronase petahana. Pertama, hal ini ditunjukkan oleh pergeseran aktor-aktor di dalam koalisi Prabowo yang menjauh dari blok Islamis pada tahun 2024. Kedua, hal ini dibuktikan oleh kooptasi kuat Prabowo ke dalam jaringan patronase Jokowi, yang mengubah posisi Prabowo dari figur oposisi menjadi aktor pro-kemapanan (pro-establishment). Ketiga, terdapat pergeseran yang jelas pada basis dukungan elektoral Prabowo, dari wilayah-wilayah basis Islam puritan ke basis tradisional PDI-P–Jokowi. Temuan ini merevisi tesis Hadiz mengenai bertahannya kohesi populisme Islam, memperluas tesis Kenny bahwa aktor populis dapat muncul dari integrasi jaringan patronase dominan, serta memperbarui konseptualisasi Aspinall mengenai populisme oligarkis. Artikel ini mengusulkan sebuah kerangka kerja baru yang disebut Patronage-Driven Populism Shift (Pergeseran Populisme Berbasis Patronase) untuk memahami karakteristik populisme kontemporer di Indonesia.

Kata Kunci: Prabowo Subianto, Populisme Islam, Populisme Patronase, Populisme Oligarkis, Demokrasi Indonesia, Strategi Elektoral.

Abstract
This article aims to analyse the transformation of Prabowo Subianto's electoral strategy in the 2019 and 2024 Presidential Elections through the lens of the political economy of populism. The theoretical frameworks employed are Islamic populism (Hadiz, 2016), patronage-populism nexus (Kenny, 2017), and oligarchic populism (Aspinall, 2015). This study adopts a qualitative approach utilising a case study design, drawing upon data from reputable mass media outlets to academic literature. This article argues that the strategic shift executed by Prabowo was not merely rhetorical, but rather a profound transformation in the logic of voter mobilisation, shifting from a reliance on Islamic identity as a coalition cohesive to a patronage-driven populism rooted in the incumbent's patronage networks. Firstly, this is demonstrated by the shift in the actors within Prabowo's coalition away from the Islamist bloc in 2024. Secondly, it is evidenced by Prabowo's robust co-optation into Jokowi's patronage networks, which transformed Prabowo from an opposition figure into a pro-establishment actor. Thirdly, there is a discernible shift in Prabowo's electoral support base from puritanical Islamic strongholds to traditional PDI-P–Jokowi bastions. These findings revise Hadiz's thesis on the persistence of Islamic populism cohesion, extend Kenny's thesis that populist actors can emerge from the integration of dominant patronage networks, and update Aspinall's conceptualisation of oligarchic populism. This article proposes a new framework termed the Patronage-Driven Populism Shift to comprehend the nature of contemporary populism in Indonesia.
Keywords: Prabowo Subianto, Islamic Populism, Patronage Populism, Oligarchic Populism, Indonesian Democracy, Electoral Strategy.

Introduction

Prabowo Subianto is one of the most phenomenal political actors in Indonesia's post-Reformasi electoral history. His political career spans over a decade and a half. It commenced with his candidacy as a Vice-Presidential running mate to Megawati Soekarnoputri in 2009, which ended in defeat, followed by two unsuccessful Presidential bids against Joko Widodo in 2014 and 2019, until finally winning the 2024 Presidential Election alongside Gibran Rakabuming Raka with over 96 million votes in a single round (Cnbcindonesia.com, 2024). The trajectory of Prabowo's political career offers a rich case study regarding the changing logic of electoral mobilisation in Indonesia, particularly in

Presidential Elections. What is fascinating is fundamentally not merely his success in seizing power on his fourth attempt, but rather the fundamental transformation in his support base, party coalition composition, and the campaign narratives he deployed from one election period to the next.

If examined more deeply, in the 2014 Presidential Election, Prabowo had already exhibited a tendency to utilise identity-based mobilisation to strengthen his coalition's cohesion. He decided to pair with Hatta Rajasa and was backed by a coalition that ideologically leaned towards political Islam, encompassing the Great Indonesia Movement Party (Gerindra), Golongan Karya (Golkar), the United Development Party (PPP), the Prosperous Justice Party (PKS), and the Crescent Star Party (PBB), confronting the more pluralist-inclined Jokowi–Jusuf Kalla coalition (Arifianto, 2018). Despite losing with 46.85 per cent of the vote, this pattern of cross-party Islamist alliance became the foundation for Prabowo's electoral strategy in the subsequent period, which was further cemented by the momentum of identity politics that erupted in Jakarta during the 212 Defend Islam Action in 2016–2017.

Looking back, the 212 Defend Islam Action itself was triggered by the controversial remarks made by the non-active Governor of DKI Jakarta, Basuki Tjahaja Purnama (Ahok), regarding Surah Al-Ma'idah verse 51 in September 2016. The movement, spearheaded by the Islamic Defenders Front (FPI) under Rizieq Shihab, took place in several large waves, namely the 411 Action on 4 November 2016 and culminating in the 212 Action on 2 December 2016, which was attended by hundreds of thousands of people in the Monas area. This movement ultimately succeeded in imprisoning Ahok on blasphemy charges and ushered in the victory of Anies Baswedan–Sandiaga Uno in the 2017 DKI Jakarta Gubernatorial Election (Cnnindonesia.com, 2019). Following this victory, elements of the 212 movement transformed into a permanent political force through the 212 Alumni Fraternity (PA 212) and the National Movement to Guard the Fatwa of Ulama (GNPF Ulama), which openly affiliated themselves with the Great Indonesia Movement

Party (Gerindra), the Prosperous Justice Party (PKS), and the National Mandate Party (PAN) as their political representation (Hasyim & Akmaliah, 2023). In July–September 2018, this group even convened the Ijtimak Ulama to determine official support for the 2019 presidential candidate, the result of which recommended the pairing of Prabowo Subianto and Abdul Somad, although this recommendation was ultimately not fully accommodated by Prabowo (Cnnindonesia.com, 2019).

This legacy of the 212 Defend Islam Action mobilisation subsequently became the backbone of Prabowo's coalition cohesion in the 2019 Presidential Election. His coalition gathered Islamist-background parties such as the Prosperous Justice Party (PKS) and the National Mandate Party (PAN), and secured street mobilisation support from groups rooted in the 212 Defend Islam Action movement, including FPI under Rizieq Shihab, which explicitly chanted the slogan "2019 Ganti Presiden" (Change the President 2019) and declared it haraam to vote for candidates backed by "parties supporting the blasphemer" (Fachrudin, 2019; Nuraniyah, 2024). The 2019 campaign was characterised by sharp religion-based polarisation, with Prabowo positioning himself against the incumbent Joko Widodo, who was portrayed as the representation of nationalist-pluralist forces (Pepinsky, 2019). Even Prabowo's grand campaign at the Gelora Bung Karno Stadium in April 2019 was criticised by his own coalition ally, Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono, for being deemed too dominated by an exclusive religious tone.

Five years later, this configuration altered fundamentally. The primary turning point was the reconciliation meeting between Prabowo and Jokowi in July 2019, shortly after the official KPU decree confirmed Jokowi's victory, which was subsequently followed by Prabowo's appointment as Minister of Defence in the Indonesia Onward Cabinet. Since then, Prabowo transformed from an extra-parliamentary opposition actor into an integral part of the incumbent's executive power structure. The pinnacle of this transformation occurred in 2023–2024, when Prabowo chose Gibran Rakabuming Raka, Jokowi's eldest son who was then serving as the Mayor of Surakarta, as his vice-

presidential running mate. The Indonesia Onward Coalition (KIM) endorsing this pair comprised ten political parties with a far more nationalist-pragmatic character compared to the 2019 coalition, with Golkar and PAN two parties previously within Jokowi's government structure serving as its primary backbone. Conversely, Islamist parties like PKS found themselves in the opposition camp alongside Anies Baswedan and Muhaimin Iskandar through the Coalition for Change (Idntimes.com, 2024). Interestingly, Rizieq Shihab, the central figure of the 212 movement who five years prior had been the engine of opposition against Jokowi, actually called for support for Prabowo's administration during the 212 reunion in 2024 (Tempo.co.id, 2024), an irony that in itself illustrates how far the political configuration has shifted.

This transformation brings forth an important theoretical question: does Prabowo's strategic shift reflect merely a tactical adjustment to a changing coalition map, or does it signify a structural transformation in the logic of populism in Indonesia, moving from a populism anchored in religious identity solidarity towards a populism anchored in an established power patronage network?. Previous studies on Indonesian populism tend to discuss Islamic populism (Hadiz, 2014, 2016, 2019) and oligarchic populism (Aspinall, 2015) as two relatively distinct phenomena, with scant attention paid to how a single actor can transition from one logic of populism to another within a relatively short span of time. This article addresses that gap by arguing that what transpired in Prabowo's case is the latter: a shift in the logic of mobilisation that can be explained through a synthesis of three theoretical frameworks: Islamic populism (Hadiz, 2016), the patronage-populism nexus (Kenny, 2017), and oligarchic populism (Aspinall, 2015).

Theoretical Framework

Islamic Populism

Vedi R. Hadiz (2016) in Islamic Populism in Indonesia and the Middle East developed the thesis that Islamic populism in Indonesia emerges as an organised response to inequalities in access to power and the marginalisation of material resources (Hadiz, 2016). Employing a historical sociology and political economy approach, Hadiz demonstrates that Islamic populism is characterised by a cross-class alliance ranging from the santri middle class aspiring for upward mobility to economically marginalised urban groups. This alliance is bound together not solely by theological doctrine, but by the articulation of shared grievances against the dominance of the nationalist-secular oligarchy controlling the post-colonial state structure. In Hadiz's conceptualisation, religious identity functions as an ideological instrument as well as a social-political cohesive that bridges the disparate economic-political interests of these cross-class actors.

However, Hadiz also underscores the structural limitations of this movement; he contends that Islamic populism in Indonesia tends to possess internal vulnerabilities and struggles to hold state power fully due to the entrenched control of state apparatuses by established oligarchic forces (Hadiz, 2014, 2016, 2018). In the context of the 2019 Presidential Election, the thesis regarding the binding capacity and cohesive power of Islamic populism was highly relevant. The political Islamic identity, which underwent massive crystallisation post-212 Movement, was utilised instrumentally as the primary adhesive of Prabowo Subianto's electoral coalition. Anti-establishment sentiments and the narrative of defending the ummah became the driving engine of voter mobilisation in puritanical Islamic pockets, although this strategy ultimately failed to secure victory due to structural constraints and the solid consolidation of the incumbent's power. Through this theoretical foundation, this article will demonstrate how the cohesive strength of Islamic populism, which Hadiz assumed to be persistent, was unexpectedly

deconstructed by Prabowo himself in the 2024 Presidential Election in order to integrate into a new logic of power circulation.

Reframing Patronage Populism

Paul D. Kenny (2017) in Populism and Patronage: Why Populists Win Elections in India, Asia, and Beyond offers a contemporary theoretical explanation regarding the electoral success of populist actors in developing nations. Kenny deconstructs the conventional assumption that views populism and patronage as two mutually repellent poles. Instead, he proposes the concept of a close relationship between the two (the patronage-populism nexus), arguing that populism that successfully attains power is rarely a pure movement relying organically on mass mobilisation from outside the system. Populist electoral success is precisely determined by the actor's ability to control, ally with, or integrate themselves into established patronage networks and clientelistic engines within the political system (Kenny, 2017).

In Kenny's political economy perspective, populist rhetoric such as moralistic claims of representing "the people" against a corrupt elite functions as a supply-side strategy to attract broad mass sympathy at the surface level. However, to convert such sentiment into concrete votes at the ballot box, the populist actor requires a stable structure. This is where patronage operates as its material infrastructure. Through alliances with dominant patronage networks, populist actors can exploit state and oligarchic clientelistic machinery to distribute material incentives, social assistance, and political concessions in a targeted manner to the voter base (Kenny, 2017).

This theoretical framework is crucial for dissecting the profound transformation of Prabowo Subianto's electoral strategy in the 2024 Presidential Election. Through Kenny’s lens, Prabowo's failures in the 2014 and 2019 presidential elections can be read as structural limitations of a populism that relied solely on personal charismatic appeal and ideological alliances (such as Islamic populism) without the backing of a solid state patronage engine. Conversely, in 2024, Prabowo no longer positioned himself as an outsider. Post-2019 political reconciliation through his position as Minister of Defence

served as a crucial phase for elite integration. Ultimately, by pairing with Gibran Rakabuming Raka, Prabowo succeeded in co-opting and being co-opted by Jokowi's incumbent patronage network. Thus, rather than dismantling the existing patronage network, Prabowo's electoral strategy in the 2024 election actually extends Kenny's thesis: he won the election by merging his populist capital into the dominant patronage structure that controls the state's material resources.

Oligarchic Populism

Aspinall (2015) in his article "Oligarchic Populism: Prabowo Subianto's Challenge to Indonesian Democracy," published in the journal Indonesia, offers a critical reading of the sociological character of populism in Indonesia. Aspinall analyses Prabowo Subianto as the embodiment of "oligarchic populism" a political paradox wherein a figure possessing a material base as an oligarch (accumulating wealth from New Order-era business and military networks) adopts an aggressive populist political style and rhetoric. This rhetoric encompasses fervent economic nationalism, claims of popular sovereignty, and sharp criticism against liberal elites deemed to have betrayed the nation (Aspinall, 2015).

Aspinall emphasises that Prabowo's populism is essentially not an anti-oligarchic movement in the classical sense aimed at democratising the socio-economic-political structure. Instead, populism here operates as an instrument for oligarchic elites to mobilise mass support from below (mobilisation from above) to seize, secure, or expand political power in order to protect the material interests of their own class. In this perspective, the ideology and narrative produced by the populist actor are fluid and instrumental. Aspinall's framework serves as an important bridge connecting Hadiz's thesis on Islamic populism (Hadiz, 2016) and Kenny's thesis on the patronage-populism nexus (Kenny, 2017). Aspinall demonstrates that the structure of capital control (wealth and power base) is a constant foundation (Aspinall, 2015), whereas the "ideological cloak" whether it be secular nationalism, Islamism, or a pro-establishment stance is a

tactical variable that can be replaced at any time by the populist actor to adapt to the landscape of electoral competition.

Research Method

This qualitative study employs a comparative-diachronic case study design to compare Prabowo Subianto's electoral strategy in the 2019 and 2024 presidential elections. This approach was chosen to analyse the dynamics of change and continuity in the logic of voter mobilisation across two distinct time periods (Yin, 2019). Data was gathered through documentary study techniques sourced from credible national and international mass media reports to relevant academic sources. To ensure data validity, this study applies triangulation techniques by cross-examining all information obtained from various sources and theoretical perspectives (Flick, 2018). Data analysis was conducted progressively through data condensation, structured data display, and drawing conclusions in accordance with the interactive qualitative analysis model (Milles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2014). Operationally, this comparative analysis focuses on three main indicators: changes in the composition of actors within the party coalition, the extent of Prabowo's co-optation into the incumbent's power network, and the geographical and demographic shifts in his electoral support base from the 2019 to the 2024 Presidential Election.

Result and Discussion

Coalition Actor Shift: From the Islamist Bloc to the Nationalist-Pragmatic Bloc

In the 2019 Presidential Election, the coalition backing Prabowo–Sandiaga Uno consisted of the Gerindra Party, the Democrat Party, and two parties with Islamist backgrounds, namely PKS and PAN, supplemented by the new Berkarya party (Setkab.go.id, 2018). The Islamist character of this coalition was reinforced by street mobilisation support from groups born out of the 212 movement, including pressures for

Prabowo to select figures like Ustaz Abdul Somad or a PKS cadre as the vice-presidential candidate, although Sandiaga Uno from Gerindra's internal ranks was ultimately chosen (Arifianto, 2019; Aspinall, Fossati, Muhtadi, & Warburton, 2018; Fachrudin, 2019). Prabowo's grand campaign at the Gelora Bung Karno Stadium in April 2019 was even criticised by Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono his own coalition ally for being deemed too heavily dominated by an exclusive religious nuance.

In the 2024 Presidential Election, this composition altered drastically. The Indonesia Onward Coalition supporting Prabowo–Gibran comprised ten political parties: Gerindra, Golkar, PAN, the Democrat Party, the Crescent Star Party (PBB), the Gelora Party, the Indonesian Solidarity Party (PSI), the Garuda Party, the Aceh Party, and PRIMA (Kompas.com, 2024). Golkar and PAN two parties that had been within the ruling coalition during Jokowi's administration became the new backbone of this coalition, replacing the central role previously held by PKS. PKS, which in 2019 had been Gerindra's most loyal partner, was instead in the opposition camp in 2024 alongside Anies Baswedan and Muhaimin Iskandar through the Coalition for Change alongside NasDem and PKB (Idntimes.com, 2024). The total combined parliamentary votes of the parties endorsing Prabowo–Gibran reached 42.67 per cent, making this coalition the largest (tergemuk) in the 2024 contest (Mediaindonesia.com, 2023).

These data indicate a structural reversal: Islamist actors, who served as the primary cohesive element of Prabowo's coalition in 2019, were instead absent or had moved to the opposing camp in 2024. In their stead, the cohesion of the 2024 coalition was constructed upon a foundation of nationalist-humanist, pragmatic parties, most of which were part of Jokowi's government power structure. This shift is consistent with the observation that Prabowo, rather than becoming the sole representative of the Islamist bloc, successfully built what is termed a "fat cabinet" coalition that embraced almost the entire spectrum of parties, including Islamist-Pancasilaist parties like PKB and PAN, through post-election ministerial seat distribution (Ahalla, 2025).

Co-optation into Jokowi's Patronage Network

The second indicator of Prabowo's strategic transformation is his profound co-optation into Joko Widodo's power patronage network. The crucial juncture of this process began in July 2019, when Prabowo and Jokowi held a reconciliation meeting that concluded their political rivalry since 2014, followed by Prabowo's appointment as Minister of Defence in Jokowi's second-term Indonesia Onward Cabinet. This moment marked Prabowo's transition from an extra-parliamentary opposition actor to an integral part of the incumbent's executive power structure.

This co-optation culminated in the candidacy of Gibran Rakabuming Raka, Jokowi's eldest son who was then serving as the Mayor of Surakarta, as the vice-presidential candidate alongside Prabowo. This process was facilitated via a Constitutional Court ruling on 16 October 2023, which permitted elected regional heads to run for president or vice president even if they had not reached 40 years of age a ruling that was subsequently widely criticised as controversial since the Chief Justice of the Constitutional Court at the time, Anwar Usman, was Jokowi's brother-in-law. Golkar officially endorsed Gibran as the vice-presidential candidate on 21 October 2023, a day prior to the official declaration of the Prabowo–Gibran pairing (Voaindonesia.com, 2023).

Following their electoral victory, this pattern of reciprocal co-optation continued in the form of distributing ministerial positions to parties originating from Jokowi's power structure. By way of illustration, the Chairman of PKB, Muhaimin Iskandar who during the 2024 Presidential Election was actually in the opposition camp was subsequently appointed as the Coordinating Minister for Community Empowerment, whilst PAN secured nine ministerial seats (Ahalla, 2025). This post-election power consolidation pattern illustrates how Prabowo's administration continues and indeed expands the grand patronage strategy previously practiced by Jokowi, resulting in nearly all significant political forces being absorbed into the government structure, rendering

effective opposition exceedingly weak (Ahalla, 2025). These findings confirm Kenny's (2017) thesis that populist actors can attain electoral victory not by challenging the ruling patronage network, but by integrating themselves into it. Prabowo did not overthrow Jokowi's patronage machine; he inherited and expanded it.

Migration of the Electoral Base

The third indicator, and the most empirically measurable, is the geographical and demographic shift in Prabowo's electoral support base. In the 2019 Presidential Election, sub-district data analysis by Pepinsky (2019) demonstrated a strong positive correlation between the votes obtained by Prabowo–Sandiaga and areas serving as bases for Islamist parties (PPP, PKS, and PBB), whereas Javanese voters, both Muslim and non-Muslim, tended to choose Jokowi. Prabowo's strongholds in 2019 were situated in provinces with more conservative Islamic characters, such as West Java, Banten, and West Sumatra. This number also showed by the Hanan (2020) in his study entitled Identity Politics in The 2019 Indonesian General Elections: Its Significance and Limitation.

In the 2024 Presidential Election, this pattern altered significantly. A Litbang Kompas survey recorded that the migration of PDI-P voters to Prabowo–Gibran increased from 22.1 per cent to 35.1 per cent within the span of August to December 2023, while the proportion of 2019 Jokowi voters shifting to support Prabowo reached 39.8 per cent (Cnbcindonesia.com, 2023). Quick count results on polling day revealed a dramatic surge in Prabowo's vote share in traditional PDI-P and Nahdlatul Ulama bastions: in East Java, his vote acquisition soared from 34.21 per cent in 2019 to around 64 per cent in 2024, whereas in Central Java the heartland of PDI-P his votes increased from 22.74 per cent to nearly 53 per cent (Bisnis.com, 2024). Conversely, in West Java, which was Prabowo's traditional stronghold in 2019, his vote share slightly declined from 59.93 per cent to the range of 57.3 per cent (Kompas.com, 2024).

This pattern indicates a geographical reversal of the support base: areas that historically served as nationalist-secular and NU-PDI-P strongholds have now become the

primary source of Prabowo's vote growth, while his puritanical Islamic base from 2019 remained relatively stagnant or declined. Gibran's presence as a symbolic representation of Jokowi's legacy serves as the primary explanatory factor for this shift, as it enabled Prabowo to claim continuity of Jokowi's popular policies particularly regarding social assistance issues and infrastructure development without the need to rely any longer on religious identity mobilisation (Kompas.com, 2024).

Discussion

Synthesis: The Patronage-Driven Populism Shift

This framework revises Hadiz's (2016) thesis concerning the persistence of Islamic populism cohesion, demonstrating that such cohesion is contingent upon the availability of alternative patronage resources once a populist actor gains access to a larger incumbent patronage network, identity-based cohesion can be abandoned without sacrificing electoral appeal. This framework also extends Kenny's (2017) thesis by illustrating that integration into a dominant patronage network is not merely a survival strategy for populist actors, but can become a transition path for opposition actors to morph completely into pro-establishment actors. Lastly, this framework updates the conceptualisation of oligarchic populism (Aspinall, 2015) by showing that populist oligarchs in Indonesia are ideologically adaptive, they can alter their cloaks from militaristic nationalism, to Islamist alliances, to becoming representations of the incumbent's power continuity, so long as the oligarchic power base and access to patronage

These findings carry profound and far-reaching implications for understanding the systemic trajectory and institutional health of post-reform Indonesian democracy. During the 2010s, the primary anxiety among political scientists was that the rise of exclusionary Islamic populism would permanently fracture the country's social fabric and dismantle its secular-pluralist foundation (Mietzner, 2018). However, this contemporary shift toward patronage-driven populism exposes a threat of an entirely

different nature: rather than an ideological assault on cultural pluralism, it presents an institutional crisis that erodes democracy from within. This erosion manifests as the systematic dismantling of checks and balances through what political scientists describe as political cartelization and "promiscuous powersharing" (Slater, 2018).

By assembling a "fat coalition" that deliberately absorbs almost all competing factions into the executive branch, the regime effectively defangs parliamentary oversight (Ahalla, 2025). When major political parties even those possessing distinct, historically ideological Islamist identities like the National Awakening Party (PKB) and the National Mandate Party (PAN) can be effortlessly co-opted through the calculated distribution of cabinet portfolios and lucrative state resources, the boundary between the ruling government and the opposition completely dissolves (Ambardi, 2008). Consequently, the legislature ceases to function as an arena for policy debate, leaving the public sphere with a dangerously narrow space for substantive opposition, transparency, and elite accountability (Power & Warburton, 2020).

Crucially, this structural transformation cannot be separated from the unique socio-political architecture of Indonesia and the specific elite lineage of Prabowo Subianto himself. As a figure whose political socialization and vast material wealth originated directly from the oligarchic inner circles of the New Order regime, Prabowo possesses a deep, historical understanding of elite-accommodation politics (Aspinall, 2015; Winters, 2011). Therefore, researchers must exercise extreme caution before generalizing this "Patronage-Driven Populism Shift" framework to other developing democracies. The successful execution of this strategy requires highly specific preconditions: namely, a heavily centralized state patronage infrastructure and a political culture where party loyalty is weak and transactional (Kenny, 2017).

In the 2024 presidential election, this transition was uniquely enabled by a top-down elite alliance between the outgoing president, Joko Widodo, and Prabowo, structurally solidified through the vice-presidential candidacy of Gibran Rakabuming

Raka (Mietzner, 2024). This dynastic arrangement allowed Prabowo to directly inherit and mobilize an entrenched, highly effective clientelistic machine including state-funded social assistance programs (bansos) and localized bureaucratic networks rather than having to build an independent populist movement from the margins (Aspinall & Berenschot, 2019). Thus, the Indonesian model proves that modern populism can successfully pivot away from risky mass mobilization, provided the political actor can secure total integration into pre-existing, state-backed patron-client networks.

Conclusion

This article demonstrates that the transformation of Prabowo Subianto's electoral strategy between 2019 and 2024 represents a fundamental shift in mobilization logic rather than a mere tactical adjustment. Three main pieces of evidence support this argument: first, the coalition composition shifted away from the Islamist bloc including PKS, PAN, and the 212 groups toward a nationalist-pragmatic bloc dominated by Golkar and parties aligned with Joko Widodo's power structure; second, Prabowo became deeply co-opted into the incumbent's patronage network through his tenure as Minister of Defence and the nomination of Gibran Rakabuming Raka as vice president; and third, his geographical electoral base migrated significantly from puritanical Islamic regions to traditional PDI-P and Nahdlatul Ulama strongholds in Central and East Java. Collectively, these three findings form the foundation of the Patronage-Driven Populism Shift framework, which revises Vededi R. Hadiz's thesis on Islamic populism cohesion, extends Paul D. Kenny's thesis regarding the patronage-populism nexus, and updates Edward Aspinall's conceptualization of oligarchic populism.

However, several limitations to this study must be acknowledged; because this research relies heavily on contemporary qualitative data and immediate post-election electoral mapping, it captures a highly specific snapshot of elite realignment that may still be in flux. Furthermore, the analysis is confined to national-level dynamics, potentially overlooking localized variations in clientelism and subnational patron-client

resistance across Indonesia's diverse regions. Moving forward, there is a clear prospect for future research to test the validity of this Patronage-Driven Populism Shift framework in similar cases of power transition within developing nations that share highly centralized state patronage structures. Future studies should also employ longitudinal tracking to explore how these massive, all-encompassing grand coalition consolidations systematically weaken the institutional quality of checks and balances, reshape civil society resistance, and alter the long-term landscape of public accountability in Indonesian democracy.

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