

The Politics of Power: Ridwan Kamil and the Dynamics Of the 2024 Jakarta Election

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Abstract

The 2024 Jakarta elections reflect the complexity of politics in Indonesia, where power is used strategically to maintain dominance. This paper aims to analyse the dynamics of power used by Ridwan Kamil, through the approach of Steven Lukes' (2005) three-dimensional view of power. Using a qualitative descriptive method based on literature study, this paper finds that although Ridwan Kamil utilizes the dimensions of Visible, Hidden and Invisible Power strategically; public resistance hinders the effectiveness of this strategy. This confirms that in an increasingly elitist political system, the 2024 Jakarta election still proves that as in democratic politics, power is not solely about elite dominance but also a matter of legitimacy and public acceptance that cannot be fully controlled by political actors. Although it cannot be denied that the power struggle between elites will always continue to occur.

Keywords: Elections, Jakarta Elections, Power, Political Strategy, Public Legitimacy

Abstrak

Pilkada Jakarta 2024 mencerminkan kompleksitas politik di Indonesia, di mana kekuasaan digunakan secara strategis untuk mempertahankan dominasi. Tulisan ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis dinamika kekuasaan yang dimanfaatkan oleh Ridwan Kamil, melalui pendekatan kekuasaan tiga dimensi dari Steven Lukes (2005). Dengan metode deskriptif kualitatif berbasis studi pustaka, tulisan ini menemukan bahwa meskipun Ridwan Kamil memanfaatkan dimensi Visible, Hidden dan Invisible Power secara strategis; resistansi masyarakat menghambat efektivitas strategi tersebut. Hal ini menegaskan bahwa dalam sistem politik yang kian elitis, Pilkada Jakarta 2024 masih membuktikan bahwa sebagaimana dalam politik yang demokratis, kekuasaan semata-mata bukan soal dominasi elit, tetapi juga soal legitimasi dan penerimaan publik yang tidak bisa sepenuhnya dikendalikan oleh aktor-aktor politik. Meskipun tidak bisa dipungkiri bahwa pertarungan kekuasaan antar elit akan terus terjadi.

Kata kunci: Pilkada, Pilkada Jakarta, Kekuasaan, Strategi Politik, Legitimasi Publik

A. Introduction

The 2024 Jakarta election is one of the most dynamic and significant political events in Indonesia. As the nation's capital as well as the centre of government and economy, Jakarta has strategic significance that extends beyond its borders. This election is not just an electoral contestation, but also an arena that reflects the pattern of power in Indonesian democracy. The Jakarta elections are often placed in the highest position which often becomes a benchmark for how the national election model will take place in the future. It is inevitable that the Jakarta elections will always attract public attention, both locally and internationally. This contestation, which is often intervened by influential political groups, is at least one arena of competition to be reckoned with.

Therefore, the 2024 Jakarta election is indeed one of the most dynamic political events, with Ridwan Kamil as one of the leading candidates in this contestation. As the influential former Governor of West Java, Ridwan Kamil carries the image of a technocrat committed to development, innovation, and sustainability. In his candidacy, he was supported by the KIM Plus coalition (Koalisi Indonesia Maju), a coalition of major parties that have significant influence at both local and national levels (Feisal, 2024). This support is further strengthened by the presence of President Prabowo Subianto who has openly provided political legitimacy through endorsements on various occasions – *acting as the Chairman of the Supporting Party, Gerindra*. Through this coalition, Ridwan Kamil is expected to consolidate the dominating political power and reinforce his position as a highly regarded gubernatorial candidate. Along with the presence of the seventh President of the Republic of Indonesia, Joko Widodo, who also expressed his full support for him (Khoirunikhmah; 2024, Salam, 2024). Of course, this further strengthens Ridwan Kamil's position in this election competition.

Power in politics is often not only direct or visible, but also hidden and even invisible (Beli, 2016; Lukes, 2005; Pradana, 2020). This power is closely intertwined with the oligarchic structure that dominates Indonesian politics. Winters (2011) states that oligarchy not only involves economic power but also controls the political system to maintain the *status quo*. It should be underlined that this power struggle is not only faced with the position of the elite and the masses, but also occurs among fellow elites in the government (Haboddin, 2020). In the 2024 Jakarta elections, this oligarchic power was reflected through the support of the major parties that formed the KIM Plus coalition, which indirectly gave Ridwan Kamil access to political resources. This election is also an example of how political parties play a central role in maintaining elite power (Riawan et al., 2024). This kind of domination is often met with resistance

from the masses, especially in urban Jakarta, which has a high and diverse political awareness (Lubis, 2024).

However, in addition to solid political support, Ridwan Kamil still has to face various challenges in order to maintain his dominance in the election. One of them is Dharma Pongrekun's candidacy through the Independent route, which is a surprising move that has raised political speculation among the public (CNN Indonesia, 2024). Behind Dharma Kun's candidacy, there are more complex matters related to Jakarta's political dynamics. One of them is the polemic against the attempt to block Anies Baswedan, who has been considered as the main political rival in the 2024 Jakarta elections. Moreover, Anies' position as an incumbent also has considerable electability compared to Ridwan Kamil in Jakarta.

On the other hand, the process of nominating Pramono from Indonesian Democratic Party of Struggle (PDI-P) as Jakarta's gubernatorial candidate also added to the complexity of this contestation. PDI-P, as a party with a strong mass base in Jakarta, nominated Pramono as a gubernatorial candidate to strengthen their position in the elections. This decision presents a bigger challenge for Ridwan Kamil, who still has to compete with Anies Baswedan's *influence*, as well as with a strong candidate from a major party like PDI-P. In this case, Ridwan Kamil must navigate challenges from various parties, both from within the coalition and from political opponents who have great power in Jakarta. Pramono's presence is enough to put additional pressure that is difficult to avoid. This shows that support from major parties and national figures is not enough to ensure political dominance in Jakarta. Moreover, PDI-P, which is known to have a strong political network and support from various circles, including Jakarta's elites, is a tough opponent that Ridwan Kamil must face. This shows that in the Jakarta elections, although Ridwan Kamil has strong support, there is no guarantee that his power can guarantee a win in this highly competitive political arena.

In addition to support from large parties, Ridwan Kamil is also suspected to have relied on a social assistance (Bantuan Sosial; Bansos) based political strategy to boost his electoral performance in the elections (Wisesa, 2024). This is often used as a way to increase popularity, strengthen government legitimacy, and garner political support at the grassroots level (Haliim, 2020; Hicken, 2011; Rahmanto et al., 2021). This strategy aims to strengthen the voting base among the lower middle class, which is often the decisive group in elections (Rahmanto et al., 2021). Although this social assistance is often considered effective in gaining public sympathy, the practice is often seen as controversial and risks worsening the image of politicians in the eyes of the public and not necessarily providing maximum results (Aspinall & Berenschot, 2019).

Despite being supported by a large coalition, political parties, and a strong figure such as President Prabowo Subianto, it was not enough to be able to overcome the challenges coming from his political opponents and deliver him to victory. The Jakarta election 2024, which was initially predicted to be an easy victory for Ridwan Kamil, has instead shown that there are severe challenges in maintaining dominance. Despite his success in courting major political forces, both locally and nationally, he cannot ignore the importance of the popular vote, which has become increasingly critical of political practices. His failure to win the elections shows that although power can be mobilised through various strategies, its success is still influenced by other decisive factors. Based on the vote recapitulation of the 2024 Jakarta elections, Pramono-Rano won the first position with 50.07% of the vote, followed by Ridwan Kamil-Suswono who won the second position with 39.4% of the vote, and Dharma Pongrekun-Kun Wardana who won 10.53% of the vote (kpu.go.id, 2024). The declaration of Pramono as the winner of the 2024 Jakarta election in just one round further shows that no one can guarantee victory in this political contestation that is full of uncertainty and competition. However, this paper seeks to look at the dynamics of Ridwan Kamil's use of power in the 2024 Jakarta election, without comparing with other candidates, in order to understand his political strategy in maintaining power dominance by considering the three dimensional view of power by Steven Lukes (2005), in an effort to maintain his political dominance in the midst of intense competition with other elites.

B. Research Methods

This research uses a qualitative approach with descriptive analysis that focuses on the three-dimensional view of power by Steven Lukes (2005) as an analysis to understand how the dynamics of Ridwan Kamil's use of power in the 2024 Jakarta elections, as well as his political strategy in maintaining power dominance. This approach aims to identify the emerging patterns of power, both visible and hidden, as well as the political strategies applied by the main actors such as Ridwan Kamil and his coalition. The focus of the research is to see how Ridwan Kamil utilises the three dimensional view of power to maintain his position in the midst of competition with the influence of other elites, as well as to describe the public's response to these political practices. Data was collected through desk research from secondary sources such as online media, books, journal articles, and other related publications.

C. Result and Discussion

The 2024 Jakarta regional election is a contestation arena that not only shows the dynamics of electoral politics, but also how power operates through various complex and interlocking means. This election reflects how power in Indonesian local politics is not only overt and visible, but also operates through hidden and structured mechanisms. Ridwan Kamil, as one of the main candidates, utilised power in various dimensions to strengthen his position in the midst of intense political competition, but even so, it cannot be denied that he still faces tough challenges in his efforts to maintain his dominance. In this case, the three-dimensional view of power by Steven Lukes (2005) becomes a relevant framework to analyse how Ridwan Kamil and his coalition utilise power to maintain their political position, amidst competition with other major actors such as Pramono from PDI-P and the issue of Anies Baswedan's blocking. Visible, hidden, and invisible power each played an important role in this election, creating a complex dynamic between elite strategy, agenda setting, and structured and covert power.

The three-dimensional view of power by Steven Lukes (2005) offers a more comprehensive approach to analysing power in political and social contexts. Lukes identifies three main dimensions in understanding power, which include overt, covert and structured aspects of power, providing a deeper understanding of how power is exercised, maintained and contested in various contexts. In the first dimension, *Visible Power*, Lukes refers to power that is explicitly visible in the political actions of dominant individuals or groups. This power operates in the form of decision-making that can be seen directly, such as in policy-making or electoral decisions. In this dimension, power is open and transparent, with powerful parties having the ability to influence outcomes or processes.

On the other hand, when looking at the second dimension, *Hidden Power*, power operates through control over the political agenda and issues that are considered important in the decision-making process. In this dimension, power is not only seen in the decisions taken, but also in the ability to regulate what is considered or not considered in a political discourse. By setting the agenda, the powerful can ensure that certain issues do not come up for discussion or debate, while other issues can get greater attention. In this case, power operates in the form of agenda-setting that leads to decisions that favour the ruling party. Furthermore, the third dimension is *Invisible Power*, which is power that is more hidden and operates at a more structural level, where the influence of power can shape the preferences, beliefs, and interests of individuals or groups without them fully realising that they are being manipulated. It works in a more subtle way, often without the awareness of those involved, and

operates at a deeper level in society. Through this dimension, power can reinforce existing social structures, create invisible inequalities, and influence the way people think and act.

When looking at the contestation in the current Jakarta election, it can be seen that the first dimension, *Visible Power*, refers to power expressed directly through political decisions, actions, or support that is clearly visible to the public. In the case of the 2024 Jakarta elections, Ridwan Kamil is utilising this dimension by relying on the massive support from the KIM Plus coalition. This coalition consists of 12 major parties, including Gerindra Party, National Awakening Party (PKB), Indonesian Solidarity Party (PSI), United Development Party (PPP), NasDem Party, Perindo Party, Prosperous Justice Party (PKS), National Mandate Party (PAN), Golkar Party, Garuda Party, Democratic Party, and Gelora Party, which provide a strong political base for Ridwan Kamil to strengthen the legitimacy of his candidacy (Akbar, 2024; Helmi, 2024). With this support, Ridwan Kamil has easier access to significant political resources, both in the form of campaign funds, cadre networks, and political infrastructure that enables massive voter mobilisation. This is in line with Pareto (2019) and Mosca (1939), who state that elites tend to dominate the political system by maintaining exclusive access to strategic resources. As part of the elite, the major parties supporting Ridwan Kamil not only provide political legitimacy but also become a tool to control the local political agenda. In practice, this party dominance is often used to suppress competitors or create favourable narratives for the candidate. Elites use structural power, such as local budget distribution policies, and symbolic power, such as political rhetoric, to create public loyalty and weaken opposition (Higley & Burton, 2006). This shows how political party power can function as an extension of wider oligarchic power (Aspinall & Berenschot, 2019).

In addition, the endorsement of Prabowo Subianto, as the President of the Republic of Indonesia and chairman of the Gerindra Party, reinforces Ridwan Kamil's position as a candidate who is considered to have political legitimacy at the national level. Legitimacy is key for elites in avoiding threats from political opponents and maintaining power hegemony through elite consolidation in an electoral democratic system (Fokate & Mas'udi, 2020; Schatzberg, 2001). Prabowo's presence in Ridwan Kamil's campaign does not only symbolise political power. Prabowo's support also gives Ridwan Kamil an advantage in gaining media access and a wider political platform, given Prabowo's great influence as a major political actor. On the other hand, this endorsement also brings its own challenges. In Jakarta, where resistance to oligarchic politics and central domination is high, the presence of national figures such as Prabowo and Joko Widodo supporting Ridwan Kamil is not always well received

by local voters (Lubis, 2024). Most Jakartans want leaders who are more independent from the influence of national elites, so the support of figures such as Joko Widodo has created resistance in certain circles (Yaputra, 2024). The incompatibility of the candidate's figure with the political aspirations of the Jakartans has contributed to their reluctance to vote; this is a contradiction for the relatively educated and politically literate Jakartans (Lubis, 2024). This suggests that visible power does not always provide significant political benefits, especially when public perceptions of support are at odds with local aspirations.

In addition to the support of parties and national figures, Ridwan Kamil also utilised visible power through his control over the campaign and political structures at the local level. For example, Ridwan Kamil's campaign team controls most of the political communication channels in Jakarta, including social media and the endorsement of celebrities who at least influence public perception of them. With this dominance, Ridwan Kamil managed to present an image as a technocrat candidate capable of continuing development and innovation relevant to urban Jakarta. This narrative, although effective in reaching certain segments of the electorate, has not been able to reach all levels of society, especially the lower middle class who are more focused on daily needs such as public transport and housing. As for some controversial programmes offered by Ridwan Kamil, they have attracted public attention, such as the car confession programme (Program Mobil Curhat) as a form of online psychologist consultation, overcoming brawls with cultural festivals and the development of recreational areas such as Disneyland (Fallahnda, 2024).

Visible power is also reflected in support mobilisation strategies through massive and structured campaign activities. Ridwan Kamil often attends major events organised by his supporting parties to demonstrate his power before the public. The endorsement of Prabowo, which also involves Gerindra's party structure, provides a significant advantage in this mobilisation. However, survey data shows that despite Ridwan Kamil's high media exposure, his acceptance rate among Jakarta voters has remained stagnant, indicating a resistance that cannot be reached by visible power (Yaputra, 2024). Furthermore, visible power is also used to demonstrate Ridwan Kamil's formal presence in institutional politics. For example, the official decision of major parties to nominate Ridwan Kamil as governor of Jakarta is a manifestation of institutional power translated into administrative support. Large coalitions such as KIM Plus give the impression that Ridwan Kamil is a candidate who has the trust of various political groups. However, the size of this coalition has also led to negative perceptions that view the coalition as a form of monopolisation of power by national elites. As noted by Koho (2021) and Syawawi (2021), in the context of Indonesia's

increasingly complex politics, visible power must be complemented by strategies that are more inclusive and responsive to the aspirations of local communities to deliver optimal results.

Furthermore, when looking at the second dimension, *Hidden Power*, focuses on how power is used to set the political agenda and determine prioritised issues in the decision-making process. In the 2024 Jakarta election, Ridwan Kamil and his coalition actively utilised this dimension to influence the dynamics of the contestation. Agenda-setting includes not only efforts to promote himself as the leading candidate but also to minimise threats from political rivals, such as Anies Baswedan and Pramono. One visible form of agenda setting was Dharma Kun's candidacy as an independent candidate. This move was seen as an attempt to ensure that the Jakarta election would not only be filled by Ridwan Kamil as the sole candidate, where this was reinforced by the threshold polemic and the dominance of KIM Plus which only left PDI-P as the only major opposition party, which could create a democratic imbalance. Dharma Kun, despite not having significant popularity or political support, was passed as a candidate despite controversies over administrative processes, such as the profiteering of citizens' names as supporters (Bustomi, 2024). Some experts, such as Zaki Mubarak, a political expert from Syarif Hidayatullah State Islamic University Jakarta, noted that Dharma Kun's candidacy reflected a deliberate political effort to create a narrative that the Jakarta election was a healthy competition (Bustomi, 2024). In this way, Ridwan Kamil and his coalition are able to divert attention from criticism of their political dominance while maintaining the image that they still respect democratic principles.

Besides Dharma Kun's candidacy, agenda-setting is also evident in the systematic attempt to block Anies Baswedan, who has been considered the strongest rival from the beginning. Anies, who has a high level of electability in Jakarta, poses a major threat to Ridwan Kamil. This can be seen through the loss of support from some parties such as PKS, PKB, and NasDem Party, which previously supported Anies, immediately turned around and supported KIM Plus, the coalition supporting Ridwan Kamil (Putra, 2024). This change in support effectively prevented Anies from running. This strategy reflects not only political agenda setting, but also how coalitions of political elites work to eliminate potential threats to their dominance. Agenda setting by KIM Plus also reflects the oligarchic pattern in Indonesian politics, where a handful of elites control access to the political process and determine who can participate (Koho, 2021). In the case of the Jakarta election itself, the attempt to get rid of Anies, one of which is seen through the strategy of forming KIM Plus coalition, has shown how hidden power can be used to control the outcome of elections even before the election process begins. In line with Syawawi (2021), who mentions that elite

domination is often exercised through control over the political agenda to ensure that their power structure is maintained. Agenda setting is also evident in the attempt to create the perception of Pramono from PDI-P as the main threat, even though Pramono's electability is not as high as Anies. Jakartans, who have a relatively high level of political awareness compared to other regions, began to realise that there were attempts to control the contestation. This resistance was reflected in the election results, where Ridwan Kamil did not manage to win the election despite having controlled many aspects of the political agenda, especially the support of many parties.

Moreover, the third dimension, *Invisible Power*, focuses on how power shapes people's preferences, beliefs, and values without them realising it. In the case of the 2024 Jakarta election, this power is used strategically by Ridwan Kamil and his coalition to influence public perception and subtly shape support through various means, such as grand narratives, distribution of social assistance, and use of media to frame a positive image of the candidate; most importantly, how to gain public legitimacy through the massive support of artists and influencers. The manipulation of power at this level creates a political reality that is accepted by society as normal, despite the hidden agenda at work behind it.

One form of invisible power used is through the distribution of social assistance. Ridwan Kamil and his partner, Suswono, utilised social assistance by organizing a cheap basic food market as a tool to build an image that they are leaders who care about marginalised communities. Social assistance is usually distributed in the form of basic necessities, cash, or other welfare programmes directed to low-income groups (Dharmakarja, 2017; Winters & Weitz-Shapiro, 2013). It is often used as a way to increase popularity, strengthen government legitimacy, and garner political support at the grassroots level (Haliim, 2020; Rahmanto et al., 2021). Social assistance is often a determining factor in elections (Nelfira, 2024; Rahmanto et al., 2024). The social assistance was distributed through a structured strategy, with several reports indicating that some social assistance programs have been symbolically linked to Ridwan Kamil's campaign, including the use of his campaign logo (Wisesa, 2024). This creates a perception among social assistance recipients that Ridwan Kamil is a leader who genuinely cares about their needs. The distribution of social assistance is often not based on objective needs, but rather is directed to areas that have certain political interests, such as strong voter bases or electorally strategic area (Aspinall & Berenschot, 2019; Tanuwidjaja, 2010).

However, this social assistance is not free from criticism. Some have pointed out that this practice is a form of disguised money politics that violates democratic ethics. From an elite perspective, social assistance ahead of elections is used as a political

strategy to increase electability, especially for incumbents or candidates who have access to state resources (Mietzner, 2009; Rahmanto et al., 2021; Saragintan & Hidayat, 2016). Political elites tend to use social assistance programmes as a tool of clientelism, where a patron-client relationship is formed between the donor and the recipient, in exchange for political support (Aspinall & Berenschot, 2019). For example, Churniawan (2024) notes that people are beginning to realise the political motives behind the distribution of social assistance, especially when it is only given to certain groups that are key electoral targets. This suggests that the invisible power used by Ridwan Kamil may face resistance when the public starts to question the motive behind the action. In addition to social assistance, Ridwan Kamil also utilised grand narratives to shape public perception. He carries concepts such as "Jakarta Maju, Jakarta Baru" (Advanced Jakarta, New Jakarta) which focuses on sustainability and technology-based development. Through these campaigns, Ridwan Kamil shapes public preferences by positioning himself as the only candidates who are able to fulfil the needs of modern urban communities (Chairunnisa & Khoirunikmah, 2024). However, while this narrative is successful in reaching certain segments, such as the middle and upper classes, it is less effective in reaching the lower classes who are more focused on pressing issues, such as housing, flooding, and public transportation.

Invisible power is also used through the media. The media affiliated with the KIM Plus coalition played an important role in framing Ridwan Kamil's image positively. In many news reports, Ridwan Kamil is portrayed as an innovative and visionary candidate. In this case, invisible power works through information control to shape people's preferences without them realising it (Putra, 2024). The use of invisible power in the 2024 Jakarta elections also reflects the oligarchic pattern in Indonesian politics, where political oligarchs operate in an invisible way, shaping a power structure that is difficult to challenge by the public (Koho, 2021).

Ridwan Kamil, as the leading candidate supported by a large coalition and national figures such as Prabowo Subianto and Joko Widodo, demonstrates how power is leveraged through party mobilisation, political narratives and media dominance to strengthen positions. However, the challenges that emerged, such as resistance from local voter segments who wanted independence from the influence of national elites, served as a reminder that power does not always deliver the expected results. Overall, the 2024 Jakarta elections are an arena that shows how power works in a complex and multidimensional framework. The dynamics that are built, through visible, hidden and invisible power strategies, reflect the great challenge of managing local politics in the midst of increasingly diverse societal expectations.

D. Conclusion

The 2024 Jakarta election features complex political dynamics, where Ridwan Kamil as the leading candidate utilises the three dimensions view of power as explained by Steven Lukes – visible, hidden, and invisible power – to maintain his dominance. Visible power through the backing of the KIM Plus coalition, which consist of 12 political parties, as well as the endorsements from President Prabowo Subianto and Joko Widodo, granting Ridwan Kamil significant political legitimacy. However, this strong support has also sparked resistance among Jakartans, who are increasingly critical of oligarchic political dominance. besides, Hidden power was used to set political agendas, such as the nomination of Dharma Kun to create the perception of healthy competitive elections, and the deliberate weakening of rival elites' positions.

Invisible power is manifested through the distribution of social assistance and the framing of a positive image through the media to subtly shape voter preferences. While these strategies wielded considerable influence, the election results ultimately revealed their limitations, as they were insufficient to secure victory. As it turned out, the election was won by Pramono from PDI-P.

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