

# Indonesia's Nepo Baby Takes Charge

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Prabowo Subianto

On September 16, 2023, fire at Indonesia's National Museum swept through the roof and back wall, causing the building to collapse. It remains closed. Officially no one was blamed. Down the street from the National Museum is the Constitutional Court, no more than a stone's throw away. Although there is no obvious connection between the two buildings, they both are structures that have been hallowed out, one by fire, the other by nepotism.

In the same neighborhood near the National Monument, one can easily walk to the Presidential Palace and the Indonesian National Library, where a small classical building serves as an entry way to a huge modern library. Walking through the entrance to the back building, ten out of ten enlarged photos depict President Jokowi in various roles: with farmers, with foreign dignitaries, with military officials, with industrial leaders, and so on. It is enough to make Xi Jinping jealous.

President Jokowi's popularity consistently polls at 80% approval, a remarkable figure in today's world, where less than honest governments abound and are increasingly unpopular. Although he is constitutionally barred from a third term, through the recent elections, he has firmly tightened his grip on power and established a family dynasty that will remain ensconced at the highest levels of government for at least another decade. The ascent of this former furniture store owner is nothing short of remarkable.

Recent elections on Valentine's Day were only the sixth since Indonesia overthrew more than three centuries of Dutch colonialism and three decades of a US-backed military dictatorship. A young nation still in formation encompassing 17,000 islands and 400 languages, the elections were a day of national celebration. In 24 hours, at more than 820,000 polling stations, more than two hundred

million votes were cast for president and 10,000 other positions. To be sure, conducting such a monumental election was quite costly, and not just financially. On or just after election day, some 114 poll workers died and over 15,000 others fell ill, an unbelievable number until we realize it is a sharp drop from the 900 poll workers who perished five years ago.

More than a month after the polls closed, the final results were finally released on March 20. To no one's surprise, the Prabowo-Gibran ticket so controversially supported by President Jokowi won by a wide margin. For those unfamiliar with these candidates, Gen. Prabowo twice lost presidential bids after being dismissed from his high-ranking position in the Armed Forces in 1998 because of his alleged involvement in human rights abuses in East Timor as well as the disappearances of democracy activists protesting against his former father-in-law, the late dictator Suharto. His vice-presidential running mate is Gibran, Jokowi's eldest son.

Although Gibran was constitutionally barred from running for vice president because he is only 36 years old, in October of last year, Jokowi's brother-in-law (and Gibran's uncle), Anwar Usman, then head of the nation's Constitutional Court, railroaded through a last minute exception to the minimum age limit that barred anyone below the age of 40 from running for high office. Anwar declared anyone who has held a regional office to be eligible, a ruling that came in the nick of time for his nephew's candidacy. This blatantly unethical act cost Anwar his position as chief justice, at least temporarily since he is suing to be reinstated, but he retains his seat on the nation's highest bench. More importantly, the court's alteration of the constitution was deemed binding. Within a month, the Election Commission, which is supposed to be neutral, approved the new vice presidential candidate without even having a meeting as required by its own statutes.

With the ease of rigging student government elections, the Jokowi government established an inter-generational dynasty. The president's second son, Kaesang, recently entered politics as well, and within two days of joining a small new party was appointed its leader. He has not yet decided whether to announce his candidacy for governor of Jakarta or the position formerly held by both his father and brother, mayor of Surakarta. His wife Erina, a former model and beauty pageant contestant, has expressed hope to be elected in one of Yogyakarta's regencies. Jokowi's son-in-law, Bobbi, already mayor of Medan city, is running for governor of North Sumatra Province.

### **Fair Elections?**

The *Jakarta Post* called the Valentine Day vote "the most rigged and manipulated election since the fall of the New Order in 1998." Amnesty International reported dozens of cases of intimidation and persecution of people who raised concerns about fraud in the election process. Physical assaults targeted at least 34 activists who spoke out critically against President Jokowi. Artists, journalists, and academics became police targets. Even before the voting began, police publicly interfered with discussion of procedures appropriate to democracy. On February 3, uniformed officers did not allow a student-led meeting about electoral fraud in Jakarta. When legal experts made a film, *Dirty Vote*, which documented how Jokowi mobilized state resources in support of Prabowo-Gibran, charges were filed against the filmmakers.

In the weeks before the election, the president barred all ministries and government agencies from using 5% of their 2024 budget to make sure there was a cash reserve that could be easily allocated by himself. No one has disclosed or even attempted to say where the money was spent, but tens of millions of people received direct cash payments and other forms of social assistance from the government. Thousands of tons of rice were handed out by the government—so much that a post-election rice shortage has led to a surge in the market price of rice. Much of the public believes the Jokowi regime handed out more money to buy votes than it spent during years of fighting COVID.

After the polls closed, charges of fraud and vote tampering have continued to multiply, so much so that the legislature is planning a formal inquiry into “structured, systematic and massive” fraud. A host of complaints include how the unique data of 204.8 million Indonesian voters was offered for sale in November, irregularities with the counts of the digital platform newly used to tabulate results for this election, and thousands of names of non-existent voters on the rolls. No matter what the findings of any inquiry, they will not be able to change the election results. The best that can be hoped for by critics of Jokowi and Prabowo is that the investigation will taint the election and damage both presidents’ images. As the momentum for an inquiry built, a shadowy figure emerged from within the police to place corruption charges against Ganjar, the presidential candidate who proposed the investigation, with taking kickbacks during his tenure as governor of Central Java from 2014-2023.

Beset by continuing allegations of fraudulent vote counts, the General Elections Commission (KPU) suddenly took down its public platform that had been reporting results. Among dozens of complaints were disappearing votes and vote buying. The most egregious posted result showed the Indonesian Solidarity Party led by Kaesang (Jokowi’s youngest son) gaining over 230,000 votes in three days, despite being a tiny party with limited public standing. So precipitous was the KPU’s hiding the public tabulation of results that even the chairman of the watchdog Election Supervisory Agency stated that he had been left in the dark.

Although Jokowi had originally pledged neutrality, as was the honored tradition in Indonesian politics until 2024, as the election drew closer, he spoke out decisively for his eldest son and Prabowo, his Minister of Defense. During the campaign, all levels of the Indonesian police, the military, civil servants, and regional and village heads were instructed to take “all necessary actions” to make sure Prabowo was the victor. Charges were filed in many provinces alleging that police and soldiers took down posters of other candidates.

Gibran was continually accused of ethical violations, such as leading applause during the presidential debates, handing out milk to infants during campaign events, and illegally meeting with hundreds of village leaders. The young man may be quite image conscious, but substance is lacking—except that he will dutifully follow in the footsteps of his father. By his own admission, Gibran was a “nobody” a few months before the elections. Although already a millionaire, his only political experience was serving three years as Surakarta’s mayor. Sadly, Gibran’s intelligence does not match his ambition. His wealth aside, intelligence and maturity are attributes no one uses to describe him. One report of his accomplishments in college in the UK placed his grade average below 50% of others. On the campaign trail, his one word answers to the press and his arrogant dismissal of critics led many people to call him a spoiled kid. During one of his two nationally televised debates, he could not, or would not, identify acronyms he used, even after other candidates patiently asked him to explain what he was talking about. On several occasions he did not bother to use all of his allocated time at the microphone, instead departing with bows and well-wishes worthy of reigning royalty.

It is not simply the elections that are tainted by allegations of backroom deals. For years now, Jokowi has been angling toward his continuation in power. In 2022, his regime railroaded through the legislature a Jakarta special designation bill that redefined Jakarta’s standing into an autonomous province within a newly created urban region. Due to take effect after the government relocates the country’s capital to Nusantara in East Kalimantan, the bill is flawed not only because it set a completely unrealistic date of February 15, 2024 for the transition, but also because it stipulated that the president will appoint Jakarta’s governor and deputy governors, replacing their current selection through popular elections.

Besides annulling Jakartans’ the right to elect their local leaders, the law empowers the vice

president to chair the newly-created regional council, which would oversee strategic national programs and development. The legislation is further proof of Jokowi's attempt to cling to power through his son, Gibran. "The drafting process, as has been the case throughout Jokowi's regime, was largely opaque and loaded with conflicting interests," said Feri Amsari, constitutional law expert of Andalas University.

From an early age, Gibran has been groomed to act as a stand in for his father, first in the family furniture business and only belatedly in politics. Gibran relishes his role as Indonesia's top nepo baby in a society in which family dynasties are celebrated. So intent is Jokowi on retaining power, he has already announced he will play a major role in naming Prabowo's new cabinet when the transition is formally made in October. He has promoted sons of former rivals to high positions, and he promises to keep a watchful eye over continuation of his key projects, especially the new capital city in Kalimantan, a project considered a boondoggle and ecological disaster by many. Jokowi's spending spree has already accomplished a new high-speed train from Jakarta to Bandung, and he plans to continue expanding high speed service to other lines on Java. Under his administration, Indonesia has become the world's top exporter of palm oil and a center of global nickel production. Sustained economic growth of around 5%/year has expanded the middle class to around 20% of the population and shrunk the ranks of people living in absolute poverty to less than 10%.

### **Prospects of a Prabowo Presidency**

Although only just elected, the trajectory of a Prabowo presidency is clear. At best, he will continue Jokowi's policies, and at worst, he will take the nation in the same direction as the ill-fated Suharto regime. Already the government's budget deficit is nearing the statutory limit of 2.8% of GDP, in excess of the 2.3% allocated in the state budget for this year. During the campaign, Prabowo continually promised to increase spending on a number of programs. Weeks before official election results were released, he informed current Finance Minister Sri Mulyani Indrawati, widely credited with wisely guiding the country through the 2008 global crisis, that she will not be asked to continue in her current capacity. Even though he is the incoming president who will take office in October, Prabowo has already publicly questioned the 3% deficit cap, a move which drew the IMF country chief to issue a stern warning about the need to keep to the legal limit to "maintain macroeconomic and fiscal stability." Prabowo compared Indonesia with major EU countries like France, Germany and Italy, without any evidence to back up such touchstones. The most controversial part of his program is to increase government spending on nutritional support in schools, which would require US\$30 billion/year or about 12% of the national budget, 2% of GDP.

The former general also promises to raise defense spending. During the high point of the presidential debates, he was harshly criticized by his two opponents for agreeing to buy secondhand F-15 jets from the United Arab Emirates for tens of billions of dollars. Defending his rash purchase, Prabowo said that Indonesia must arm itself or risk "becoming the next Gaza," a paranoid projection that indicates dark clouds on the country's horizon-and in the psyche of its president-elect. Widespread public disapproval of his purchase after the debate compelled the government to cancel the order, but Prabowo continues to insist that he will spend money on a host of programs designed to boost his popularity before the election and to reward his supporters afterwards.

Given its isolated location surrounded by friendly nations, Indonesia prides itself, and rightfully so, on being one of the few countries in the world dedicated to international cooperation and peace. All the country's presidents have paid homage to the 1955 Bandung Asian-African Conference where non-alignment was first promulgated. Since 1964, Indonesia has played a leading role in the G77, a group created in a follow up meeting in Geneva to amplify voices of the global South. Regionally, the country has played a mediating role between the Philippine government and Muslim rebels on Mindanao. Mammoth investments of Chinese and Malaysian capital are stable and growing parts of

Indonesia's infrastructure. Indonesian exports to and imports from Australia are in the tens of billions of dollars.

Domestically, Prabowo promises more violence against the West Papuan insurgency. While both his rivals endorsed political engagement rather than military actions, Prabowo insisted he would follow the policies now in place under Jokowi. The ongoing conflict is more serious than publicly acknowledged. In the past years, dozens of army personnel, rebel fighters, and civilians have been killed, amid widespread reports of starvation in the mountains. On April 17, 2023, the West Papua National Liberation Army (WPNLA) kidnapped New Zealand pilot Phillip Mertens, and the Indonesian army's subsequent attempted rescue resulted in six soldiers killed and 30 missing. Media-savvy rebel leader Egianus Kogoya is part of the 500-member WPNLA, the armed wing of the Free Papua Movement. Anti-defamation laws were used to silence two prominent Jakarta-based activists, Haris and Fatia, who criticized Coordinating Minister for Maritime Affairs and Investment Luhut for his involvement in controversial and highly-profitable Papuan mining activities. Although acquitted of the defamation charges that carried potential jail time, the threat of imprisonment hung over them for months and has had a chilling effect on anyone else speaking out about Papua and cases of blatant corruption at the highest levels of power.

Prabowo has sought to portray himself as gentle and friendly, but he publicly lost his temper on national television when his opponents criticized his misguided purchase of second-hand jets. This is one indication that the leopard cannot change his spots. In September 2023, allegations were widely reported that Prabowo strangled and slapped the Deputy Agricultural Minister during a policy debate at the Presidential Palace. If not for Jokowi publicly laughing off the incident without denying that it happened, Prabowo could well have faced criminal charges—although in Indonesia the wealthy and powerful are largely immune from prosecution.

### **Nepo Babies Here, Nepo Babies There**

South Asia is full of political nepo babies, from the Marcos and Aquino clans in the Philippines to the Sinawatra's in Thailand, Gandhi's in India, Bhutto's in Pakistan, and Han Sen and his son Hun Manet in Cambodia. Aung San Suu Kyi's enduring appeal is no doubt in large part because she is Aung San's daughter. The United States has its own share of family dynasties—from the Kennedy's and Bushes to towns and states where political powers are controlled by families, but the current situation in Indonesia is at another level. With Jokowi's two sons, his son-in-law, and other family members jockeying for powerful positions, one family has seized control of the largest economy in South East Asia and the world's fourth largest country.

Sometimes with nepotism at least qualified people find high positions. But no one is making that case in Indonesia. Female cancer patients cannot receive prescribed medications in government hospitals simply because administrators do not order them. There is next to zero traffic control. Noise pollution is severe. Any pre-teen with a megaphone who is willing to scream religious slogans is empowered to disturb citizens at all hours of the night. Cities are flooded and beaches are inundated with garbage because of poor drainage caused by rubbish blocking waterways.

As conditions become increasingly problematic, yes men continue to nod while poor decisions are made. To give a major example, Jokowi's rush to downstream production of nickel by implementing a ban on export of unrefined nickel and the construction of mammoth processing plants was a major success—at least to him and his supporters. In 2021, nickel based batteries were 70% of the world market, and by 2023, Indonesia was producing 40% of the world's nickel. During the presidential debates in January and February 2024, Gibran insisted on several occasions that he would continue his father's down-streaming policy when his opponents questioned its wisdom. Yet as the electric vehicle industry evolved from nickel-based batteries to lithium iron phosphate batteries, the demand

for nickel batteries drastically decreased. Already in 2022, three quarters of electric vehicles in Indonesia used cheaper, iron-based batteries, which are projected to comprise more than 50% of the world market by 2025. Given the rapid pace of technological change, Jokowi's down-streaming policy is a big mistake—even before we consider its environmental and social costs.

An expert image manager, President Jokowi owes his popularity to stable economic growth during his decade in power. At least 70,000 jobs have been created on the island of Sulawesi. Although he presents an affable image of progress to the public, his administration has inaugurated an unprecedented assault on the environment and the lives of workers by opening new mega-projects across the country. On Halmahera Island in North Maluku, French and Chinese corporations constructed a mammoth nickel processing complex. Despite longstanding and ongoing resistance from local residents, this complex appears to have been built on lands illegally taken from citizens. These corporations plan to supplement the five existing coal-powered smelters with twelve more, creating an industrial park that would burn more coal annually than Brazil or Spain. Despite having the world's largest nickel reserves, more than one-fifth of the global total, so great is the current consumption that the country's Energy and Resource Minister forecast that Indonesia will run out of nickel in just 15 years.

The willy-nilly pace of Jokowi's projects has resulted in a continuing onslaught of deadly accidents. On December 24, 2023, at least 18 workers were killed and 41 injured in an explosion at a nickel-processing plant on Sulawesi. The previous April, two workers were buried under a heap of nickel at Chinese-owned Morowali Industrial park in central Sulawesi. At the nearby North Morowali plant, a fire killed one worker and injured six others. That January, two workers, including one Chinese citizen, died there during protests over safety conditions and pay. On December 22, 2022, an explosion in a furnace killed two Indonesians. Between 2015 and 2022, some 53 workers in smelting plants were killed, among them 40 Indonesians and 13 Chinese. The pace of industrial death is increasing. From January to September 2023, the Makassar Legal Aid Institute reported 16 people killed and 37 others wounded at nickel processing plants.

Under his watch, hundreds of thousands of Indonesians have died prematurely. Despite repeated court rulings requiring the president to clean up Jakarta's polluted air, Jokowi refuses to comply. At the same time as he claims insufficient funds to solve the problem, he enlarges a host of favored projects such as the new capital city, projects that provide jobs and profits for his cronies. Meanwhile, ultra-high levels of PM2.5, tiny airborne pollutants that lodge deeply in lungs, have earned Jakarta the distinction of being named the world's most polluted city. One analyst blamed the country's bad air for more than 123,000 premature deaths annually, to say nothing of tens of billions of dollars in health costs. That figure amounts to 337 deaths every day, 14 deaths per hour, day and night.

In 2021, citizens won a suit against the government for failing to uphold their right to clean air in Jakarta. Jokowi's administration appealed, and after two years delay, on November 13, 2023, the Supreme Court found the government negligent for not acting strongly enough to clean up the air in Jakarta. Unlike the Suharto dictatorship's slaughter of more than 500,000 people in 1965, Jokowi's casualties are scarcely noticed, since they occur in "normal" everyday life, but if we add together the number of premature deaths over his ten years in office, the numbers he has killed are much higher.

As long as minimal progress is made in the material goods available to millions of people, who even bothers to count the casualties? A southern Pacific nation, Indonesians on the streets smile broadly and laugh without pause. They dislike conflict. They are cooperative and easy going, friendly and caring. On the streets, strangers address each other as father or uncle, mother or sister. Their inherent connection to Nature can be found in their name for orangutans (*orang hutan*)—literally in

the Indonesian language, people of the forest.

### **Corruption, Collusion, and Nepotism**

Whether or not they are critical of it, the current regime is often referred to as *KKN (Korrupsi, Kolusi dan Nepotisme)*. Jokowi is the friendly face of this regime, which he has skillfully integrated with Chinese capital. Instead of competence, political patronage rules Indonesia. Even before the official election results were announced, Prabowo's campaign team was awarded supervisory positions for all government State Operated Enterprises (SOEs), which account for 53% of Indonesia's GDP. By contrast, Chinese SOE's make up only 25% to 40% of its GDP (depending upon whether we use data from diplomat.com or Wikipedia). Indonesia's hybrid command economy, instead of being controlled by a disciplined party with internal rules and oversight mechanisms, is ruled by informal clusters of entrepreneurs loyal to the centralized patronage system centered on the president.

*Pancasila*, the founding principle of Indonesia articulated in 1945 by Sukarno, remains the country's guiding core: monotheism, Indonesian unity (nationalism), social justice, representative democracy and peace for humanity. According to this notion, the state's responsibility is to manage national resources. An investigation by *Tempo* found that Prabowo owns a total of 361,983 hectares of land across Indonesia. Additionally, he owns mining companies that sit on 19,773 hectares, as well as four more landed projects in East Kutai. When his vast land wealth was raised during the presidential campaign, Prabowo did not deny his holdings. Instead, he defaulted to crass nationalism: "I would rather continue to manage those lands than having them end up in the hands of foreigners." Under 20<sup>th</sup> century communism, the party replaced the proletariat as the rich and powerful; in Indonesia today, fat-cat politicians have replaced the state in taking control of the country's abundant natural resources.

Although he was originally elected on an anti-graft platform, Jokowi has done everything possible to eviscerate the national Corruption Eradication Commission (KPK), which languishes under the cloud of the its leader having been charged with extortion of people suspected of corruption. Other commissioners have been charged with meeting with persons under investigation for graft. Despite calls for intervention, Jokowi has refused to act. The KPK's performance continues to be a huge problem. On March 15, 2024, dozens of its prison employees, some 78 in total, were found guilty of taking bribes in exchange for providing illegal privileges for prisoners.

Selective enforcement of anti-corruption laws, however, is used to compel acquiescence to commands of the top. Under extreme pressure and facing a decade or more in prison, former Papua governor Lukas Enembe suffered a heart attack in late 2023 and died, a tragedy followed by severe riots in his home province. At almost exactly the same time, eight employees of the national Finance Ministry were merely dismissed for attempting to conceal US\$22 billion in suspicious transactions over many years.

Indonesia was notorious for corruption during Suharto's 33 year rule. Despite Jokowi's image of statesmanship and fairness, many people feel that under Jokowi, corruption is even worse. Writing in the *Jakarta Post*, senior editor Kornelius Purba summarized the situation: "Now we experience the "democratization" of corruption and abuse of power, meaning everybody stands an equally great chance of committing corruption and abusing power." Corruption at the highest levels is matched by police in everyday life. Although Jakarta's traffic is notoriously terrible, rather than helping traffic move smoothly, police contribute to jams. At rush hour, they stand at every on and off ramp to cloverleaves looking for odd or even license plates, depending on which are not allowed in the city that day, pulling cars over and collecting 100 rupiah/car, (about \$7 US), transactions colloquially known as "86." The money goes into police pockets, not government revenue. Jokowi is no

exception: In 2022, on a salary of less than \$100/day, Jokowi's wealth increased by more than US\$600 million (IDR 10.8 billion as reported to KPK, which has yet to confirm this figure).

### **Opposition to the Land-Grabbing Regime**

In September 2023, thousands of residents in Batam clashed with hundreds of police who sought to remove them from Rempang Island to make way for a new government project, Rimpang Eco-City. Planned to be the world's second largest glass factory, the project resulted from a summit between Jokowi and Xi Jinping in July 2023. Lying near Singapore and Malaysia, the island is scheduled to receive private investments in excess of US\$11 billion and create 35,000 jobs. For the project to go forward, the government attempted to evict 7,500 people, even though they live on a small share of the 17,000 hectare island. For two days, citizens felled trees, burned tires, and threw stones and Molotovs against police who used tear gas and water cannons. The protests were followed by days of targeted arrests of key organizers.

Although Jokowi had promised during his 2019 campaign to acknowledge and legalize *kampung tua* (ancient villages) in Batam, after the riots broke out, he smiled as he attributed the problem to "poor communication." Other observers blamed a decline in information transparency, while Batam's mayor named external "provocateurs" as the problem.

The regime's land grabs are not limited to Batam. In Gorontalo, Sulawesi more than 2,500 people recently marched to the regent's office demanding compensation for mining damage to their lands. After no one was willing to meet with them, they burned that office before marching to their representative council. That building was also damaged. In defense of the mining, the president of the Copper Gold Company announced they were operating on government issued licenses.

In West Sumatra, in August 2023, the governor sent in dozens of police to the Grand Mosque to force hundreds of protesters onto buses that took them 250 kilometers from their daily gatherings against his plan to build an oil refinery in their area. No charges were brought against the governor, although police filed cases against a dozen protesters and their attorneys.

Jokowi's land hungry extractive projects and his "infrastructure first regime" have resulted in more than 100 cases of conflict between residents and the government involving about one million people and more than 800,000 hectares of land. In half the cases, the government response has been to use physical violence and verbal intimidation. Hundreds of people have been brought up on charges or imprisoned. According to a 2023 report by the Agrarian Reform Consortium, Jokowi's administration was directly involved in 73 land conflicts in the past three years. Under Jokowi's watch, between 2015 and 2022 some 2,710 land disputes involving more than 1.8 million families resulted in 29 killings, 1,600 arrest, and 842 victims of violence.

The new capital city is hugely controversial, although it has been protected by legislation that insists it must continue. Considered by some to be required because of Jakarta's gradual sinking below sea level, the city's toxic air and horrendous traffic are also problems motivating the new capital project. Although a few buildings (a police station and government offices) have been built, massive destruction of rain forests already has resulted in poisoned water for residents in the area. On March 8, 2024, more than 200 Pematang villagers were ordered by courts to vacate their lands in seven days. The project also endangers orangutans and contributes to soaring deficits.

Centuries of Dutch domination left Indonesia without modern indigenous economic infrastructure, so the country relied on Chinese-Indonesian capitalists to develop after 1945. Only in 1977 did an Indonesian stock exchange open. In 1996, as the country approached the reform era (*Reformasi*), 26 of the top 30 corporations with sales comprising 30% of GDP were dominated by ethnic Chinese.



*Reformasi* after 1998 failed to transform this underlying class structure of capitalism but instead made oligarchic power stronger and more flexible within a new accumulation regime. In post-Suharto Indonesia, already existing enormous concentrations of capital created distance from government patrons and used their autonomy to become more powerful within ruling circles, marking a transition from bureaucratic to plutocratic capitalism. Within this constellation of forces, patronage became increasingly important for the smooth functioning of the economy. Today, non-market forces such as control of SOE's and patronage transfers are central factors in controlling the economy.

The stability of Jokowi's friendly dynasty, while repugnant to Indonesians most concerned with democracy, is quite acceptable, even preferable to the rulers of plutocratic capitalism. The economic elite does not want to hear even a whisper about the need for popular will to determine the strategic direction of the country, about the common sense feeling that the nation's bountiful natural resources must be preserved and protected. In the final analysis, the complementary character of a family dynasty and plutocratic capitalism is the best explanation for why Jokowi's ascent to power has been permitted and encouraged by larger forces.

When Prabowo becomes the next president in November, it remains to be seen just how well he can maintain a friendly face of elite rule. His temper and his health are both wildcards. His own preference will be to use the police and army to suppress protests. With Gibran as his vice president, and Jokowi standing behind him, Prabowo appears to be little more than a figurehead legitimating Jokowi's clan among the military elite. Yet Prabowo may overstretch his support from the nation's elite if he spends too much on free milk programs or the military-or if he uses too much violence against citizens. Prabowo's poor health and feeble fitness may become excuses for Gibran to become president even before 2029. Already the press and legislators have discussed precisely what steps would be needed to confirm the vice president's early ascension. With Gibran's all but certain eventual rise to the top, another Nepo Baby, his brother Kaesang, is waiting in the wings. If all goes according to plan, Jokowi and his sons will rule the country for another 25 years.