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Anti-Corruption Politics in Indonesia: A Critical Analysis of Corruption Eradication Policies in the Era of Joko Widodo's Government and Prabowo Subianto's Transition

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Abstract

Corruption is a structural problem that consistently hinders the consolidation of democracy, the enforcement of the rule of law, and the quality of governance in Indonesia. Although the eradication of corruption has long been a national political agenda after the reform, its implementation often experiences dynamics influenced by the configuration of power and the interests of the elite. This article aims to critically analyze the direction of anti-corruption politics during the Joko Widodo administration and examine policy trends in the transition period to the Prabowo Subianto administration. The focus of the study is directed at the relationship between political power, legal policy, and the effectiveness of corruption eradication, especially after regulatory changes, institutional restructuring, and indications of weakening of the independence of anti-corruption institutions. This research uses a qualitative approach with legal political analysis through literature studies on laws and regulations, academic literature, and independent institution reports. The results show that anti-corruption political commitments tend to shift from a reform agenda that emphasizes institutional strengthening and public accountability to a more pragmatic pattern of power consolidation. This shift has implications for the decline in the effectiveness of corruption eradication and the weakening of public

trust in the state's commitment to upholding the principles of the rule of law.

Keywords: Anti-corruption, Legal Politics, KPK, Jokowi Regime, Power Transition.

Introduction

Corruption in Indonesia cannot be understood solely as an individual violation of criminal law, but as a political phenomenon rooted in power relations, institutional configurations, and the interests of elites who control state resources. In many cases, corrupt practices thrive when power is centralized without effective oversight mechanisms and strong public accountability. Since the reform era, the eradication of corruption has been placed as the main symbol of the commitment to democratization and the enforcement of the principles of the rule of law through the establishment of legal apparatus and special institutions. However, the implementation of the agenda has not been consistent because it often faces political resistance that arises in various forms, such as weakening regulations, intervention in law enforcement agencies, and delegitimization of efforts to crack down on corruption. This condition shows the inherent tension between the ideals of legal reform and the reality of power politics, where the law is often positioned not as an instrument of limiting power, but as a tool for legitimizing certain political interests.[1]

In the era of Joko Widodo's administration, the anti-corruption agenda shows a paradoxical face between normative commitment and policy practice. On the one hand, the government has consistently carried the narrative of bureaucratic reform, digitization of public services, and strengthening clean and efficient governance as part of the national development agenda. However, on the other

[1] Satjipto Rahardjo, Law and Social Change (Yogyakarta: Genta Publishing, 2009), 37–40.

hand, various policies and political decisions have emerged that are considered to weaken the independence of corruption eradication institutions, both through regulatory changes, institutional restructuring, and restrictions on law enforcement authority. These policies give rise to the perception that the eradication of corruption is no longer placed as a priority agenda free from political intervention, but is tailored to the interests of stability and consolidation of power. This condition has caused widespread criticism from academics, legal practitioners, and civil society who consider that the direction of anti-corruption politics in that period tends to experience a substantive setback and has the potential to weaken public trust in the state's commitment to upholding the principles of the state of law and government accountability.[2]

Entering the transition period to the Prabowo Subianto government, public concern about the sustainability and direction of the anti-corruption agenda is getting stronger in line with the lack of clear explicit commitments in the discourse and political agenda of the transition of power. The absence of clear policy statements regarding the strengthening of anti-corruption institutions, law enforcement reform, and the guarantee of the independence of law enforcement officials raises the perception that anti-corruption issues have the potential to be marginalized in the interests of political stability and consolidation of power. This condition risks perpetuating the practice of impunity, especially for political and economic actors who have close ties to the center of power, while weakening the deterrent effect in the enforcement of corruption laws. In the end, the unclear direction of anti-corruption politics in this transition period not only has an impact on the effectiveness of corruption eradication, but also has the potential to reduce public trust

[2] Simon Butt and Tim Lindsey, Indonesian Law (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 289–295.

in the law as an instrument of justice and in the state as a protector of the public interest.[3]

Literature Review / Theoretical Framework

Theoretically, corruption is understood as a consequence of the configuration of power characterized by a monopoly of authority, a wide space of discretion, and weak accountability and public supervision mechanisms. In this framework, corruption is not solely born from individual morality, but rather is the result of an institutional design that allows the abuse of power to take place systemically. Klitgaard asserts that when political and administrative power is centralized without effective institutional control, adequate transparency, and strict legal sanctions, then corrupt practices tend to become rational behavior in the system of government. Thus, the eradication of corruption requires more than just law enforcement, but also structural reforms that limit power monopolies, reduce uncontrolled discretion, and strengthen accountability as the main foundation of clean governance.[4]

From a legal political perspective, the direction and effectiveness of anti-corruption policies are highly determined by the political will of the rulers as the main actors shaping and implementing the law. Mahfud MD emphasized that in constitutional practice, especially in developing countries, the law is often positioned as an instrument of power that serves the political interests of the ruler, not as a normative mechanism to limit and control power itself. This condition means that anti-corruption policies are not always designed to strengthen accountability and the rule of law, but are often tailored to the needs of political stability and the protection of elite interests. As a result,

[3] Marcus Mietzner, Authoritarian Innovations in Indonesia (Singapore: ISEAS Publishing, 2020), 55–58.

[4] Robert Klitgaard, Controlling Corruption (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), 75.

the law loses its emancipatory function as a guardian of public justice and has the potential to become a legitimacy tool for power practices that are vulnerable to abuse, including structural and systemic corruption.[5]

A democratic state of law requires the existence of law enforcement agencies that are independent, professional, and free from the intervention of political power so that the law can function as an instrument of justice and control power. This independence is the main prerequisite for the realization of the principle of rule of law, where every government action is subject to the law that applies in a fair and non-discriminatory manner. The weakening of law enforcement agencies, whether through restrictions on authority, political intervention, or regulatory changes that reduce institutional autonomy, reflects a deterioration in the quality of democracy. This condition marks the shift from the rule of law to rule by law, namely the use of law as a tool of power to regulate and control certain political interests, rather than as a means of protecting citizens' rights and enforcing substantive justice.[6]

Research Methodology

This research uses a qualitative method with a juridical-normative approach combined with legal political analysis to comprehensively understand the dynamics of anti-corruption policies in the context of the relationship between law and power. The juridical-normative approach is used to examine legal norms, legal principles, and institutional constructions that govern the eradication of corruption, while legal political analysis is used to examine the political background, power interests, and policy implications that

[5] Mahfud MD, Legal Politics in Indonesia (Jakarta: Rajawali Pers, 2010), 12–14.

[6] Jimly Asshiddiqie, Introduction to Constitutional Law (Jakarta: Rajawali Pers, 2016), 119–122.

affect the formation and implementation of these legal norms. Research data was obtained through literature studies of relevant laws and regulations, academic books, scientific journal articles, as well as reports from credible independent institutions and civil society organizations, thus allowing for critical, systematic, and accountable scientific sources.[7]

The data analysis in this study was carried out in a descriptive-analytical manner by systematically examining the relationship between legal policies, political power configurations, and their impact on the effectiveness of corruption eradication. This approach is used to fully describe the characteristics of the prevailing anti-corruption policies, as well as critically analyze how they are formed, implemented, and influenced by power dynamics. Through this analysis, the study seeks to identify policy patterns that reflect the strengthening or weakening of corruption eradication, as well as assess their implications on the performance of law enforcement agencies and overall government accountability.[8]

Discussion / Results and Analysis

During Joko Widodo's administration, anti-corruption policies showed a tendency to weaken institutions which was reflected in various regulatory changes and institutional restructuring. These policies are considered to prioritize considerations of political stability, bureaucratic efficiency, and consolidation of power rather than strengthening the eradication of corruption in a substantive and sustainable manner. This weakening can be seen in the reduced

[7] Soerjono Soekanto and Sri Mamudji, Normative Law Research (Jakarta: RajaGrafindo Persada, 2015), 13–15.

[8] John W. Creswell, Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches (California: Sage Publications, 2014), 183.

independence of law enforcement agencies, the narrowing of the space for enforcement discretion, and increased political control over anti-corruption institutions. As a result, the effectiveness of law enforcement against corruption tends to decrease, while the normative message that corruption is an extraordinary crime is becoming increasingly blurred. This condition strengthens the view that the direction of anti-corruption politics in this period has shifted from the spirit of reform to a pragmatic approach that prioritizes the interests of power stability.[9]

This phenomenon shows a shift in policy orientation from the reform agenda that emphasizes institutional strengthening, accountability, and the rule of law to a more pragmatic pattern of power consolidation. In this context, corruption is no longer positioned as a common enemy that must be eradicated decisively and consistently, but rather treated as a negotiated variable in the practice of power politics. Law enforcement in corruption cases is selective and tends to be influenced by political considerations, elite interests, and the need to maintain power stability. As a result, the eradication of corruption loses its moral and constitutional character as a public agenda, and turns into a flexible political instrument, which can be tightened or loosened according to the dynamics and interests of the ongoing power.[10]

In the transition period to the Prabowo Subianto government, there has not been a clear and firm normative agenda to reverse the direction of institutional weakness in the eradication of corruption that occurred in the previous period. The absence of concrete policy statements regarding strengthening the independence of law enforcement agencies, reforming anti-corruption regulations, and

[9]Transparency International, Corruption Perceptions Index 2022 (Berlin: Transparency International, 2022), 6–9.

[10] Vedi R. Hadiz, Islamic Populism in Indonesia and the Middle East (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021), 141–145.

committing to power accountability creates uncertainty about the future direction of law and politics. This ambiguity has the potential to deepen the crisis of public trust in the seriousness and consistency of the state in eradicating corruption, while strengthening the perception that the anti-corruption agenda is no longer a top priority in governance. If this condition is left unchecked, the risk of normalizing the practice of impunity and weakening the legitimacy of the rule of law will be even greater, thus threatening the quality of democracy and substantive justice in Indonesia.[11]

Conclusions and Recommendations

This study concludes that anti-corruption politics in the era of the Joko Widodo administration until the transition period to the Prabowo Subianto government experienced substantive degradation, both in terms of policy and institutions. Commitment to eradicate corruption is more manifested in the form of symbolic narratives and political rhetoric that emphasizes the image of reform, rather than through consistent, sustainable, and progressive structural policies. This condition is reflected in the weak political courage to strengthen the independence of law enforcement agencies, the lack of regulatory reforms in favor of accountability, and the tendency to compromise the interests of the elite. As a result, the eradication of corruption loses its transformational impetus and risks being reduced to a mere administrative agenda, without any real ability to address corruption that is systemic and rooted in power structures.[12]

The main recommendations of this study emphasize the importance of strengthening the independence of anti-corruption institutions as a fundamental prerequisite for the effectiveness of corruption eradication in Indonesia. The strengthening must be

[11] Daniel S. Lev, Law and Politics in Indonesia (Jakarta: LP3ES, 2013), 92–95.

[12]Transparency International, Corruption Perceptions Index 2022 (Berlin: Transparency International, 2022), 10.

accompanied by the affirmation of the rule of law over short-term political interests, so that the law truly functions as an instrument of limiting power and protecting the public interest. In addition, the active involvement of civil society, the media, and the academic community in overseeing the course of power needs to be continuously expanded as an essential democratic control mechanism. Without these measures, the anti-corruption agenda risks being reduced to mere rhetoric and a tool of political legitimacy, which is used to build the image of the government without being followed by real policy commitments and oriented towards substantive justice.[13]

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[13] Mahfud MD, Legal Politics in Indonesia (Jakarta: Rajawali Pers, 2010), 23–25.

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