

ARGUING PRESIDENT SUBIANTO'S NARRATIVE ON OPPOSITION: BETWEEN ANDERSON, MACHIAVELLI, AND BOURDIEU'S CAPITAL

Azzumar Adhitia Santika¹, Ari Santoso Widodo²
Universitas Sultan Ageng Tirtayasa, Banten, Indonesia¹
LSPR Institute of Communication and Business, Jakarta, Indonesia²
First author's contact: azzumar.adhitia@untirta.ac.id

Abstract

President Prabowo Subianto stressed that the concept of opposition originates from Western culture and is not part of Indonesia's political culture framework, a statement made during his early months as president. To reflect this view, he formed a large cabinet, even appointing a former presidential election rival as a coordinating minister. This observation study re-examines Prabowo's assertion by analyzing it through Benedict Anderson's perspective on the concept of Power in Javanese culture, Niccolò Machiavelli's teachings on political power, and also Pierre Bourdieu's Theory of Capital. The findings reveal that Prabowo's statement aligns with Anderson's view, which posits that Power in Javanese culture is absolute, leaving little room for opposition. Similarly, Machiavelli, a prominent Western philosopher, advocates securing power without interference, opposing the concept of opposition to maintain sovereignty. These findings challenge Prabowo's claim that opposition is solely a Western concept. Furthermore, the authors argue that Prabowo's political narrative is inseparable from the accumulation of capital he possesses—particularly cultural, social, and symbolic capital—as framed by Pierre Bourdieu's framework, rather than a genuinely rooted and robust political philosophy. Therefore, we argue that his statement serves as a political public relations strategy to legitimize his expansive cabinet and consolidate power.

Keywords : *Benedict Anderson, Niccolo Machiavelli, Opposition, Political Public Relations, Prabowo Subianto*

Abstrak

Presiden Prabowo Subianto mengungkapkan bahwa konsep oposisi berasal dari budaya Barat dan tidak sesuai dengan budaya politik Indonesia. Hal ini diimplementasikannya melalui pembentukan kabinet besar yang bahkan menjadikan mantan rival politiknya sebagai seorang Menteri Koordinator. Studi observasi ini bertujuan menguji kembali pernyataan tersebut melalui perspektif Benedict Anderson mengenai konsep *Power* dalam Jawa, pemikiran Niccolò Machiavelli tentang kekuasaan politik, serta Teori Modal Pierre Bourdieu. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa pernyataan Prabowo selaras dengan pandangan Anderson bahwa *Power* dalam budaya Jawa bersifat absolut tanpa memberikan ruang bagi oposisi. Namun, pemikiran Machiavelli—seorang filsuf Barat—yang menganjurkan pengamanan kedaulatan tanpa intervensi justru membantah klaim bahwa oposisi adalah konsep Barat semata. Lebih lanjut, penulis berargumen bahwa narasi politik Prabowo lebih merupakan manifestasi dari akumulasi modal budaya, sosial, dan simbolik miliknya, alih-alih sebagai sebuah filosofi politik yang mengakar kuat. Studi ini menyimpulkan bahwa pernyataan tersebut berfungsi sebagai strategi *political public relations* untuk melegitimasi kabinet besarnya serta mengonsolidasi kekuasaan.

Kata Kunci: *Benedict Anderson, Niccolo Machiavelli, Oposisi, Political Public Relations, Prabowo Subianto*

BACKGROUND

Before being officially inaugurated as Indonesia's eighth President in October 2024, Prabowo Subianto said that the concept of opposition is not part of Indonesian culture and asked political elites to collaborate in his upcoming government (Muliawati, 2024). The former Defence Minister of Indonesia delivered this speech at the Third Congress of the National Democrat Party (Partai Nasdem) in Jakarta, which was held on the 27th of August 2024 (Nugroho, 2024). The National Democrat Party, as written in history, was supporting Anies Baswedan in the last Indonesian Presidential Election of 2024 (Komisi Pemilihan Umum, 2023). The election that Prabowo won after several failures before (Putri & Nugroho, 2024). It seemed that Prabowo wanted to get full support from all political elements in the country for his government.

Prabowo manifested that intention by building quite a big presidential cabinet, which is called the Red and White Cabinet (Kabinet Merah Putih) (Saini, 2024). The cabinet is bigger than President Joko Widodo's (Jokowi) last presidential cabinet, containing 48 ministers, dozens of vice ministers, and some ministerial-level officials, with a total of 112 cabinet members (Detik, 2024). There was also the name of Muhaimin Iskandar when Prabowo announced his cabinet members. Muhaimin was Anies Baswedan's vice president candidate in the 2024 Indonesian presidential Election, which means he was Prabowo's rival in the previous political contest (Fathonah, 2024).

'From rival to friend' is not a new phenomenon in the Indonesian political realm. After the 2019 presidential election, Jokowi appointed Prabowo as the Defence Minister of Indonesia, an event that attracted big attention from the media (Pratama & Annisa, 2021). It is because Jokowi and Prabowo were facing each other in two consecutive presidential elections with quite intense rivalry (Mubin, 2023). Prabowo lost in both elections (Panuju, 2019).

After the Gerindra Party (the party led by Prabowo) joined Jokowi's cabinet in his second presidential term, Jokowi stated that the concept of opposition was not part of Indonesia's culture, since the democratic culture in the nation believed in the collectivism (gotong royong) value (Rishan, 2020; Erwanti, 2019), the same words that Prabowo reiterated several years later after he was elected as Jokowi's successor.

The rivalry between Jokowi and Prabowo appeared to have dissipated after Gerindra joined the coalition. However, the party was one of the largest opposition forces during Jokowi's first presidential term (Satriawan & Purwaningsih, 2021).

Collaboration between the two figures indirectly continued in the 2024 Indonesian presidential election when Prabowo ran for the election with Gibran Rakabuming Raka (first son of Jokowi) as his vice presidential candidate (Dirgantara & Prabowo, 2024). It indicates that both Prabowo and Jokowi are implementing their belief about the nature of Indonesia's democracy (with no place for opposition) seriously, particularly after Prabowo decided to support Jokowi's government in 2019. On the other hand, Santika (2024) argued that Gibran also played a role as a symbolic message of Jokowi's political public relations agenda at that time.

It is interesting to see how Prabowo tends to follow Jokowi's political moves. Firstly, as mentioned before, Prabowo said that the concept of opposition is not part of Indonesian culture. The same phrase that was already spoken by Jokowi before. Secondly, Prabowo appointed Muhaimin Iskandar, who was his rival in the previous presidential elections, as one of his cabinet's coordinating ministers. The same political move that Jokowi made when he appointed Prabowo, his "legendary political rival", in the 2014 and 2019 presidential elections as his minister. Prabowo also welcomed the National Democrat Party and Justice and Prosperity Party to support his government (Muliawati, 2024; Sari & Maullana, 2024), even though both parties did not support him in the presidential election. Thirdly, building a big coalition was also demonstrated by Jokowi from his first term of presidency until his second term (Rishan, 2020; Satriawan, 2021). The move that Prabowo followed by forming a larger cabinet. Giving almost no room for the opposition in the governmental area.

Prabowo even clearly stated that opposition is Western culture (Safitri, 2024). If we look at this from the Western perspective, as Prabowo mentioned, Trantidis (2017) stated that government contestability is an important part of democracy's definition. Citizens must be protected from dominant political power by joining a single group or a coalition of groups. It is important to make sure democracy will not degenerate into an oligarchy. This means the concept of opposition can't be separated when we talk about the concept of power in the "Western culture" (as Prabowo labeled them).

According to that, there is an academic gap that has to be filled here. There is a need to dig more into the concept of power in non-Western culture and its relation to presidential political communication practice in Indonesia. The authors hope this filled gap will be a significant novelty in the aforementioned theme of the discipline.

The concept of power will be the main focus of this research because the concept of opposition itself is very related to the concept of power in democracy (Helms, 2021; Trantidis, 2017), and because Prabowo is implicitly giving more focus on the power he has by neglecting the concept of opposition. Then, as the authors mentioned before, some evidence shows that Prabowo tends to follow Jokowi's political moves (Kurniawan, 2024). Some prior research also shows that Jokowi's practices of politics and communication can be seen from the lens of Javanese culture in seeing the concept of power (Widodo & Dhani, 2023; Santika, 2024). Based on that logic, there is a possibility that Prabowo will follow it—in his style—since both figures also share the same philosophical view on the concept of opposition. Moreover, Prabowo also has Javanese descent from his father. Derived from the explanation provided, the authors will limit the search for a conceptual foundation on power in non-Western culture only to the Javanese culture's perspective. Particularly, in the lens of Benedict Anderson's concept of power in Javanese culture. The authors then raise the research questions: What is the conceptual foundation that supports Prabowo's statement on the concept of opposition in Indonesia? And what are the possible impacts in the context of his presidential political communication based on that conceptual foundation?

METHOD

A qualitative methodology will be employed in this study, as it is best suited in exploring a problem and developing a detailed understanding of a phenomenon (Creswell, 2012). The phenomenon that draws attention in this study is the moments Prabowo made statements regarding the concept of opposition in the context of Indonesia's politics. Specifically in the time when he was forming his cabinet.

Observation data collection techniques will be employed in this study. This data collection technique is a systematic qualitative data collection method where the researcher studies subjects in their natural environment in order to gain a holistic

understanding of the phenomenon (Kuswarno, 2013). The authors will observe Prabowo's presidential communication messages regarding the concept of opposition through media amplifications. Data were purposely sampled from various reputable media such as Detik, Kompas, Kompas TV, Kompas id, Tempo, Metro TV, TvOneNews, Liputan 6, Kumparan, and The Conversation Indonesia. We gathered the data from the weeks leading up to the first month of Prabowo's presidency in October 2024. The reason for choosing this timeframe is to capture the discursive moments during the formation and launch of the 'Merah Putih Cabinet', when the rhetoric of 'national unity' was most intensely used by Prabowo to justify a large-scale coalition.

The collected data then scrutinized using a triangulation of theoretical perspectives, which are Benedict Anderson's view on Power in Javanese culture, Machiavellian political realism, and Pierre Bourdieu's Theory of capital to uncover the underlying motives behind that political public relations strategy. By using those theoretical perspectives, the study moves beyond a surface-level reading of the President's rhetoric. Anderson's framework is applied to examine how the narrative of 'national unity' and the rejection of opposition mirror the Javanese philosophical belief in the oneness and absoluteness of Power. Simultaneously, Machiavellian realism provides a lens to analyze these statements as pragmatic maneuvers to consolidate sovereignty and eliminate political interference under the guise of stability. It is also chosen to demonstrate that the rejection of political opposition is not exclusive to Indonesian political philosophy only, but also finds roots in Western political philosophy.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Reviewing Prabowo's View On Opposition Through The Lens Of Machiavelli

In the Third Congress of the National Democratic (Nasdem) Party, held in Jakarta on the 27th of August 2024, Prabowo Subianto emphasized that the concept of opposition is not part of the nation's culture (Nugroho, 2024). Nasdem supported Anies Baswedan—Prabowo's rival—in the 2024 Presidential Election. In previous presidential elections, the party also backed Joko Widodo (Jokowi), meaning it consistently opposed Prabowo. This context makes Prabowo's statement particularly striking, as he delivered it in front of his long-time rival.

“Don't follow the culture of others; Western culture may favor opposition and conflict, unwilling to cooperate” (Prabowo, as cited in Tempo, 2024).

Because Prabowo described opposition as a Western concept, it is important to analyze it from a Western perspective. In this section, the authors will specifically apply Machiavelli's lens, as he is one of the most renowned and influential Western political philosophers. He is even considered to possess a prophetic spirit in his thought (Viroli, 2017). But if we refer to one of his works, *Discourse on the First Decade of Titus Livius*, Machiavelli seems to support the concept of opposition. He stressed that the Roman Republic was strong not because of harmony. Machiavelli emphasized that the conflict between the elite and the people can strengthen the republic (Machiavelli, 2004).

From Machiavelli's perspective, opposition was not a threat to a country but a vital element for maintaining governmental balance. He argued that a republic could decline when citizens became idle, laws weren't enforced, and citizens grew corrupt (Machiavelli, 2004). Thus, opposition serves as an essential mechanism to ensure the stability and integrity of the government (Lucchese, 2014).

Based on that thesis, then Prabowo's statement appears correct, as Machiavelli supported the concept of political opposition. However, this conclusion might be premature. This is because Machiavelli's thought was highly contextual (Viroli, 2017; Di Pierro, 2023), meaning the interpretation may vary depending on the political context or situation.

For example, in his seminal work, *The Prince*, Machiavelli describes opposition as rebellion driven by dissatisfaction and proposes three methods to counter it: destroying the resistance city to eliminate the source of unrest, residing in the region to directly control potential opposition, and allowing the people to live under their own laws while paying tribute to reduce incentives for rebellion (Machiavelli, 2006). This work cemented his reputation as a controversial thinker, as he viewed power as essential to politics, advocating its preservation through deception or violence when necessary (Quagliani, 2014; Qomariyah, 2023). This means a good ruler—in his perspective—is the one who can secure his/her power, even if it means eliminating the opposition.

Prabowo eliminated the opposition by embracing them. Before his official

inauguration as president, he held several meetings with political figures and leaders, including his rivals from the 2024 presidential election, Muhaimin Iskandar (Cak Imin) and Sandiaga Uno (Qodar, 2024; Nugrahaeny & Meiliana, 2024). After being officially inaugurated, he appointed Cak Imin as a coordinating minister, although Cak Imin was Anies Baswedan's vice presidential candidate. This action can be seen as his move to eliminate potential resistance, particularly from those dissatisfied with the government, as Anies Baswedan and Cak Imin had challenged the election results in court. This means they can be categorized as the parties that are dissatisfied and subsequently might disrupt the throne.

Moreover, Cak Imin is the chairman of the National Awakening Party (Partai Kebangkitan Bangsa/PKB), a party that ranked fourth in the 2024 election (CNN Indonesia, 2024). Statistics show that this party has significant grassroots support, which means it could pose a serious threat to the government if it acted as the opposition. Prabowo cleverly saw that potential and contained it through the approach mentioned above.

Prabowo also manifested his political view on opposition by making his cabinet consist of 48 ministers, dozens of vice ministers, and some ministerial-level officials, with a total of 112 cabinet members (Detik, 2024). This leaves the Indonesian Democratic Party of Struggle (Partai Demokrasi Indonesia Perjuangan/PDI-P) as one of the parties in parliament—along with Nasdem and the Prosperous Justice Party (Partai Keadilan Sejahtera/PKS)—that are not in the government coalition. Prabowo didn't directly and literally implement Machiavelli's suggestions by physically destroying the centers where resistance groups exist. Instead, he destroyed the spirit of resistance by embracing them and inviting them to join his government. He split power among them to minimize the dissatisfaction that can arise when some parties or groups have no power in the government after the election. Nonetheless, there are still some groups that hold power outside the government, which could potentially disrupt Prabowo's power and stability as president. However, these groups are a minority in parliament, which means the legislature is dominated by Prabowo's allies. This condition makes Prabowo's presidency potentially lack legislative control.

“I will continue to fight alongside all forces willing to cooperate. For those who don't want to cooperate, that's fine—if they want to stand on the sidelines and watch, please be good spectators. But if they

refuse to cooperate, they shouldn't disrupt those who are trying to work. We want to work; give us time, give us three or four years, and we will prove it. To the people who didn't vote for us, we will prove that we will bring goodness and prosperity to all Indonesians. As I've said, we must provide food for all our children, including those in Aceh, including those in West Sumatera” (Prabowo, as cited in Metro TV, 2024, 0.41-1.20)

The statement above was conveyed by Prabowo at the National Coordination Meeting of the National Mandate Party (Partai Amanat Nasional/PAN) on May 23, 2024. This mirrors Machiavelli's thought on how opposition must be eliminated to ensure power stability (Machiavelli, 2006; Quaglioni, 2014; Qomariyah, 2023). However, Viroli (2017) warned that power without control from the opposition would lead to the formation of a corrupt government. In sum, the door for the demonstration of abuse of power is wide open.

The case of Tom Lembong, a former trade minister and notable figure in business and politics, centered on accusations of fraud and corruption linked to a property project. The legal proceedings drew considerable public attention, as many public figures and legal experts expressed skepticism about the charges due to the strong appearance of political motives to eliminate the opposition (Muhid, 2025; Sari & Belarminus, 2025). The absence of a clear financial motive or personal gain for Lembong led to broad speculation that the case was politically driven. After receiving a presidential pardon, Lembong himself stated that the legal action was not about a crime but was, in fact, part of a larger political dynamic and motive (Shihab, 2025). According to a common assumption regarding the political motive behind this case, it is evident that a Machiavellian approach was employed (Machiavelli, 2006; Qomariyah, 2023). The potential rebellion from Lembong was not neutralized by co-opting him into the cabinet or government. Instead, the law was used—according to the opinions from some law experts—to eliminate that potential, ensuring the security of the throne.

Prabowo has never explicitly stated that he follows Machiavelli's philosophy. However, his political maneuvers and views on opposition closely mirror the Western philosopher's thought. Therefore, his argument that toppling opposition is a Western cultural practice lacks a strong theoretical and conceptual foundation, particularly when analyzed through a Machiavellian perspective. This is especially true since

Machiavelli, in most of his writings, advocates against tolerating opposition (Machiavelli, 2006; Quaglioni, 2014; Campos, 2025).

Moreover, this perspective can enrich Machiavelli's theory, particularly in analyzing modern Indonesian politics. This pattern was previously employed by President Jokowi during his second term when he invited Prabowo to join his cabinet (Benarrivo, 2024). This move ended the intense rivalry between the two figures. However, it resulted in Jokowi's second term as president having almost no significant opposition (Efriza, & Suryadinata, 2022). This situation was markedly different from his first term, when Prabowo and his party, Gerindra, represented a strong opposition force (Hamid, 2025).

Prabowo followed Jokowi's approach, even stating that Jokowi is his political mentor (Guritno & Rastika, 2023). Consequently, he surpassed his mentor by forming a much larger cabinet, justifying it with the reasoning that Indonesia, as a vast country, requires a substantial cabinet (TvOneNews, 2024). However, from a Machiavellian perspective, this expansive cabinet was established to fulfill the political motive of securing stable power without disruption.

Reviewing Prabowo's View On Opposition Through The Lens Of Benedict Anderson

In order to understand the view of Benedict Anderson, perhaps it is necessary to understand the background. Benedict R.O. Anderson was a scholar who, according to himself, came from a Western background, including his education, but then spent much of his life trying to understand society in Asia (Anderson, 1990). This is particularly important to note because Anderson never made any claim that he is “free” from his Western background in examining events in Asia. On the other hand, his work has been particularly critical of how the “Western perspective” can be starkly different from the Asian perspective (Anderson, 1990).

One of Anderson's works highlights how the concept of “power” in Indonesian politics is inherently different from the concept of “power” in Western tradition (Anderson, 1990). This does not mean that one concept is better than the other, but to highlights the differences based on the historical and cultural context. Power itself in most literature is perceived as one of the central pillars of politics.

In Indonesia, he argues, the political culture has been very much influenced by Javanese culture (Anderson,1990). Being the largest ethnic group in Indonesia that also has a long history of major kingdoms, it is not surprising that Javanese culture became an integral part of Indonesian culture. Yet this is also where it becomes very interesting.

Benedict Anderson (1990) argues that Javanese culture profoundly shapes Indonesian politics through its traditional concepts of power and social organization, which influence political behavior and authority. In Javanese culture, power is not merely theoretical but a tangible experience embedded in social and cultural practices, characterized by enduring patrimonial patron-client relationships from pre-colonial times that continue to impact Indonesia's political system. Anderson further highlights that the New Order regime leveraged Javanese cultural traditions and rituals to legitimize its authority, projecting an image of cultural stability and order. While this Javanese-centric approach—influenced by the Javanese background of Indonesia's presidents—intertwined political power with cultural symbols, Indonesian national culture remains dynamic, shaped by multiple influences and ongoing contestations beyond a singular Javanese framework.

Returning to the notion of opposition, like any other literature, Power is an absolute concept in Indonesian politics, yet it also means that not everyone has that privilege. In the traditional Javanese kingdom, there was no democracy, as perhaps what the Greeks envisioned, or a collective agreement found in Arab tribes. Javanese kings rule with absolute power; therefore, the history of the kingdoms often records wars and internal struggles between rulers that are often blood-related. Therefore, arguably, there is no official concept of opposition in the Javanese concept

Although up to today there has been no known official statement from Prabowo regarding the idea of opposition, after he regains power, his unspoken communication may convey certain interesting points. During his campaign, Prabowo has been known to prefer a solid, single-person leader image. He is known for his strong rhetoric and statements.

Being a former military officer, this is not surprising. The military across the world has a similar culture of absolute obedience to the chain of command. There's no democracy in military culture, well, at least in the general views, as there is some

literature that states certain units in the military may have a different culture where soldiers can question the directives from their officers. Nevertheless, this is known to exist in very specific units, and generally military culture does not accommodate for open debate in modern democracies. So, from this context, just like what Anderson has already stated, there is no official statement regarding opposition in the current Indonesian political arena.

Prabowo's View On Opposition Through The Lens Of Bourdieu's Capital And How It's Related To His Political Public Relations Activities

Prabowo Subianto had a strong military background. After graduating from the Indonesian Military Academy in 1974, Prabowo swiftly advanced within the elite special forces (Komando Pasukan Khusus/KOPASSUS) and became its commander in 1995. He was also involved in several military operations, especially in Timor-Leste (East Timor, at that time) and Papua (Nielsen, 2025). In military culture, obedience is a key virtue, as soldiers are trained to obey orders without hesitation (Wolfendale, 2007). This means we can assume that there is no room for opposition in the military, as strict adherence to the chain of command is essential for discipline and operational success.

Prabowo often glorified that background. At one moment, for instance, he stressed that he is more TNI (Tentara Nasional Indonesia/Indonesian National Armed Forces) than the TNI itself (Andayani, 2019). It illustrates how this background has a strong influence on Prabowo, particularly on how he views himself. Not only that, but Prabowo's leadership style in governing is also widely regarded as heavily militaristic (Habir & Negara, 2025). It's inherent in what Wolfendale (2007) explained about how soldiers adhere to this key virtue.

The moment Prabowo asked the opposition to be good spectators illustrates how his military background influences him a lot, particularly in managing his government (Metro TV, 2024). From Wolfendale's lens (2007), Prabowo stressed that "instruction" because he wants all the government elements to support him. He doesn't want to see the disobedience, because in a military background, this situation is not ideal. However, in a democracy—which is culturally different from the military—Prabowo couldn't totally apply that approach. The moment he urged all political parties, whether inside or outside the government coalition, to provide criticism and

corrections to strengthen democracy and to achieve the goal of public welfare is a prove that he realized that he is now in a different field (Basyari et al, 2025).

Prabowo's knowledge and experience in military service are regarded as his cultural capital. Cultural capital refers to qualities inherent to an individual, encompassing their education, behaviour, and manner of communication (Bourdieu, 1985; Martono, 2012). According to Bourdieu's framework, Prabowo's leadership style and political strategies stem from his military education and experience. These experiences form his habitus—a set of internalized dispositions, values, and ways of thinking—that guide how he navigates and competes within the political arena (Bourdieu, 1984; Richardus, 2020). However, we should also address the formation of Prabowo's stance in politics—including his opposition views—through his social and symbolic capital, other kinds of capital in Bourdieu's framework. Prabowo is the son-in-law of Soeharto, the second president of the Republic of Indonesia. He is also the son of a key economist under Presidents Sukarno and Suharto, and a grandson of the Indonesian National Bank (Bank Negara Indonesia/BNI 46) founder. The conditions that placed Prabowo in a strong social capital position, which are strongly related to his prestigious family ties and network (Bourdieu, 1994; Martono, 2012; Richardus, 2020). Thus, these familial ties provide him with influence and legitimacy in Indonesia's political and social spheres.

Prabowo also has a very close relationship with President Jokowi. The fact that Gibran accompanies Prabowo as his vice president proves this, as this move is considered to contain Jokowi's political agenda (Santika, 2024). Moreover, Prabowo at one moment declared that Jokowi is his political mentor (Guritno & Rastika, 2023). In forming his cabinet, Prabowo also seems to follow the footsteps of President Jokowi by embracing all political parties to join the government coalition (Kurniawan, 2024). This mirrors Bourdieu's framework about how social capital can give a significant influence on how an individual plays the game in the social—and political—context (Bourdieu, 1984). In sum, Prabowo's military knowledge and experience cannot be seen as the sole determining factor here.

Moreover, Prabowo is now the President of the Republic of Indonesia. Previously, he served as the Minister of Defence of the Republic of Indonesia. He also retains his position as the Chairman of Gerindra Party, one of the most powerful

parties according to the 2024 election's result (CNN Indonesia, 2024). From Bourdieu's perspective, this new social and political status significantly increases Prabowo's symbolic capital. Symbolic capital is a form of legitimate capital that includes prestige and reputation and serves to reproduce symbolic domination in various fields (Bourdieu, 1985). By becoming the president of the largest country in Southeast Asia, Prabowo not only increases his prestige but also enlarges his domination, specifically within the field of Indonesian politics, as capital accumulation is directly correlated with one's mastery of a field (Richardus, 2020). This means that the more capital a person possesses, the more advantageous their position becomes.

Prabowo understands the advantage he holds and leverages it by redefining the concept of Indonesian politics, including building the narrative that our political culture does not recognize the concept of opposition. Grusendorf (2016) explained that symbolic capital is controlled by the authority. In this context, Prabowo holds authority as the president, which he manifests by forming a large cabinet (Habir & Negara, 2025).

“The risk is that because I want to form a strong national unity government, the coalition has to be large, and later people will say, 'Oh, Prabowo's cabinet is bloated, too big.' Well, our country is vast. Our country's size is equivalent to Europe. Europe has 27 countries; we are one country. Embracing all groups, there must be representation—representation from Eastern Indonesia, Western Indonesia, Central Indonesia, from tribe A, tribe B. This is Indonesia, and indeed, our work is heavy” (Prabowo as cited by TvOneNews, 2024, 0.51-1.47).

The statement above was Prabowo's explanation regarding the big composition of his cabinet. This statement indicates that Prabowo knows his political action attracted a lot of public attention, as the media coverage was also massive. Through the lens of public relations, the action could be seen as the president's attempt to gain the people's understanding and support (Kriyantono, 2017). Thus, by gaining this support, it is expected that any public unrest can be mitigated, thereby reducing potential instability at the beginning of his administration.

Meanwhile, from a Machiavellian perspective (2006), this could all be seen as Prabowo's move to reduce pressure from the opposition. By weakening the opposition, the stability of power can be maintained. Therefore, Prabowo's explanation above should not be interpreted merely as a statement about the heavy burden of

government duties, but also as an effort to maintain the stability of his political power as a president.

CONCLUSION

The statement by Prabowo that opposition is not an Indonesian but a Western culture lacks a strong conceptual foundation. However, if this statement is viewed through Benedict Anderson's lens on the concept of Power in Javanese culture, what Prabowo said could be argued to have conceptual support. Moreover, as Anderson argued, Indonesian politics is heavily influenced by Javanese culture.

However, if Prabowo's statement is viewed through a Machiavellian lens, a contradiction arises. Machiavelli was a renowned Western political philosopher. His ideas regarding the maintenance of power are widely considered radical—as his monumental work, *The Prince*—shows that he is against the concept of opposition, as opposition or rebellion is something that must be eliminated to maintain power. Therefore, here, Prabowo's argument that opposition originates from Western culture is practically refuted. The authors argue that Prabowo's view on opposition is inseparable from the accumulation of capital he possesses—especially social, cultural, and symbolic capital—rather than stemming from a strong conceptual foundation.

Prabowo's justification for his large cabinet is that Indonesia is a vast country with a heavy workload, and thus, a large cabinet is needed. From a political public relations standpoint, this justification is merely Prabowo's effort to gain public support for his actions. Meanwhile, when this argument is critically examined through the ideas of Anderson and Machiavelli, all of this is simply his effort to maintain the stability of his power.

REFERENCES

- Andayani, D. (2019, March 30). Prabowo: Saya lebih TNI dari banyak TNI. Detik. <https://news.detik.com/berita/d-4490504/prabowo-saya-lebih-tni-dari-banyak-tni>
- Anderson, Benedict R. O'G. *Language and Power: Exploring Political Cultures in Indonesia*. The Wilder House Series in Politics, History, and Culture. Cornell University Press, 1990.
- Basyari, I., Harbowo, N., Anugrahanto, N., Salam, H., & Ritonga, M. W. (2025, August 12). Presiden Prabowo minta parpol koalisi berani mengkritik

- pemerintah. Kompas. https://www.kompas.id/artikel/prabowo-minta-parpol-koalisi-berani-mengkritik-pemerintah?utm_source=twitter&utm_medium=video&utm_campaign=soc_hari_ankompas_polhuk_traffic
- Benarrivo, R. (2024). From minister to president: Mearsheimerism in Indonesia's defense diplomacy under Prabowo Subianto administration. *Jurnal Dinamika Global*, 9(2), 224–240. <https://ejournal.fisip.unjani.ac.id/index.php/jurnal-dinamika-global/article/view/3030>
- Bourdieu, P. (1984). *Distinction: A social critique of the judgement of taste* (R. Nice, Trans.). Harvard University Press. (Original work published 1979)
- Bourdieu, P. (1985). The social space and the genesis of groups. *Theory and Society*, 14(6), 723–744. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/657373>
- Campos, A. S. (2025). The negative legislator: Machiavelli's popular epistemocracy in the Discourses on Livy. *Jus Cogens*, 7, 75–96. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s42439-025-00103-z>
- CNN Indonesia. (2024, February 25). Real count KPU 63 persen: PDIP menang, PKB masuk empat besar. CNN Indonesia. <https://www.cnnindonesia.com/nasional/20240225075804-617-1066950/real-count-kpu-63-persen-pdip-menang-pkb-masuk-empat-besar>
- Creswell, J. W. (2012). *Educational Research: Planning, conducting, and evaluating quantitative and qualitative research*. Pearson.
- Detik. (2024, October 24). Kata-kata Prabowo soal kabinet berisi 48 menteri dianggap besar. Detik. <https://news.detik.com/berita/d-7603707/kata-kata-prabowo-soal-kabinet-berisi-48-menteri-dianggap-besar>
- Di Pierro, M. (2023). Niccolò Machiavelli. In *Claude Lefort's political philosophy* (pp. 103–126). Palgrave Macmillan, Cham. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-36378-8_6
- Dirgantara, A., & Prabowo, D. (2024, October 22). Prabowo resmiumumkan Gibran Rakabuming Raka jadi cawapres. Kompas. <https://nasional.kompas.com/read/2023/10/22/19422101/prabowo-resmi-umumkan-gibran-rakabuming-raka-jadi-cawapres>

- Efriza, & Suryadinata, R. (2022). Analisis perbandingan pengelolaan koalisi dan kinerja kepemimpinan antara Presiden Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono dan Presiden Joko Widodo. *Jurnal Adhikari*, 2(2), 341–353. <https://doi.org/10.53968/ja.v2i2.69>
- Erwanti, M. O. (2019, October 24). Jokowi: Di Indonesia tak ada oposisi, demokrasi kita gotong royong. *Detik*. <https://news.detik.com/berita/d-4758805/jokowi-di-indonesia-tak-ada-oposisi-demokrasi-kita-gotong-royong>
- Fathonah, A. (2024, October 25). Petualangan politik Cak Imin, rival di pilpres hingga jadi menteri Prabowo. *Tempo*. <https://nasional.tempo.co/read/1933083/petualangan-politik-cak-imin-rival-di-pilpres-hingga-jadi-menteri-prabowo>
- Grusendorf, S. (2016). Bourdieu's field, capital, and habitus in religion. *Journal for the Sociological Integration of Religion and Society*, 6(1), 1–13. <https://sociologyandchristianity.org/index.php/jsc/search/search>
- Guritno, T., & Rastika, I. (2023, July 6). Jokowi, dari rival, kini jadi mentor dan konsultan politik Prabowo. *Kompas*. <https://nasional.kompas.com/read/2023/07/06/06464051/jokowi-dari-rival-kini-jadi-mentor-dan-konsultan-politik-prabowo>
- Habir, M., & Negara, S. D. (2025). Prabowo's first 100 days and beyond as president: A security-focused economic agenda. *Bulletin of Indonesian Economic Studies*, 61(1), 3–37. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00074918.2025.2483310>
- Hamid, R. A. (2025). Indonesia's political shifts: From opposition to coalition in 2014–2024 elections. *Jurnal Ilmu Kepolisian*, 19(1), 121–135. <https://doi.org/10.35879/jik.v19i1.620>
- Helms, L. (2021). Introduction: The nature of political opposition in contemporary electoral democracies and autocracies. *European Political Science*, 20, 569–579. <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41304-021-00323-z>
- Komisi Pemilihan Umum. (2023, October 19). Bakal capres-cawapres, Anies-Muhaimin daftar ke KPU. *KPU*. <https://www.kpu.go.id/berita/baca/12005/bakal-capres-cawapres-anies-muhaimin-daftar-ke-kpu>
- Kriyantono, R. (2017). *Teori-teori public relations perspektif barat dan lokal: Aplikasi*

- penelitian dan praktik (2nd ed.). Kencana Prenada Media.
- Kurniawan, W. (2024, September 21). Pemerintahan Prabowo berpotensi koalisi gemuk: Apa jadinya negara tanpa oposisi? *The Conversation*.
<https://theconversation.com/pemerintahan-prabowo-berpotensi-koalisi-gemuk-apa-jadinya-negara-tanpa-oposisi-232926>
- Kuswarno, E. (2013). Manajemen komunikasi pengemis. Dalam D. Mulyana & Solatun (Eds.), *Metode penelitian komunikasi: Contoh-contoh penelitian kualitatif dengan pendekatan praktis* (Cetakan ke-3). PT Remaja Rosdakarya.
- Lucchese, F. D. (2014). Machiavelli and constituent power: The revolutionary foundation of modern political thought. *European Journal of Political Theory*, 16(1), 3–23. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1474885114544911>
- Machiavelli, N. (2004). *Discourse on the first decade of Titus Livius* (N. H. Thomson, Trans.). Project Gutenberg. <https://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/10827>
- Machiavelli, N. (2006). *The Prince* (W. K. Marriott, Trans.). Project Gutenberg. (Original work published 1532) <https://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/1232>
- Martono, N. (2012). *Kekerasan simbolik di sekolah: Sebuah ide sosiologi pendidikan Pierre Bourdieu*. Rajawali Pers.
- Metro TV. (2024, May 24). *Prabowo: Kalau tak mau kerja sama, jangan ganggu!* [Video].
- YouTube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SPkQoqeUSvo>
- Mubin, I. S. (2023). Pandangan hukum dan HAM Joko Widodo dan Prabowo Subianto pada debat capres pertama 2019: Sebuah analisis wacana kritis Norman Fairclough. *Prosiding Konferensi Linguistik Tahunan Atma Jaya 21*, 150–155.
- Muhid, H. K. (2025, July 26). Mahfud MD bilang kasus Tom Lembong terkesan dipolitisasi. *Tempo*. <https://www.tempo.co/hukum/mahfud-md-bilang-kasus-tom-lembong-terkesan-dipolitisasi-2051166>
- Muliawati, A. (2024a, August 27). Prabowo sebut oposisi bukan budaya RI: Kita harus kerja sama, kolaborasi. *Detik*. <https://news.detik.com/berita/d-7511967/prabowo-sebut-oposisi-bukan-budaya-ri-kita-harus-kerja-sama-kolaborasi>
- Muliawati, A. (2024b, October 16). NasDem tegaskan sepenuh hati ke Prabowo meski tak ada kader dipanggil. *Detik*. <https://news.detik.com/berita/d->

7590835/nasdem- tegaskan-sepenuh-hati-ke-prabowo-meski-tak-ada-kader-
dipanggil

Nielsen, T. (2025, August 4). Prabowo Subianto: From general to president, the rise of Indonesia's new strongman. Seven Stones Indonesia.

<https://sevenstonesindonesia.com/blog/prabowo-subianto-from-general-to-president-the-rise-of-indonesias-new-strongman/>

Nugrahaeny, D. E., & Meiliana, D. (2024, April 13). Silaturahmi politik Prabowo lewat momen Idul Fitri dan belum pastinya sikap PDI-P.

Kompas. <https://nasional.kompas.com/read/2024/04/13/08034011/silaturahmi-politik-prabowo-lewat-momen-idul-fitri-dan-belum-pastinya-sikap?page=all>

Nugroho, N. A. (2024, August 28). Prabowo sebut oposisi bukan budaya Indonesia, ajak elite partai kolaborasi. Tempo.

<https://nasional.tempo.co/read/1909344/prabowo-sebut-oposisi-bukan-budaya-indonesia-ajak-elite-partai-kolaborasi>

Panuju, R. (2019). The comparison of Jokowi and Prabowo Subianto exposed on YouTube. *Jurnal Ilmu Sosial dan Ilmu Politik*, 22(3), 245–258.

<https://doi.org/10.22146/jsp.33172>

Pratama, M. I., & Annissa, J. (2021). Analisis framing berita terpilihnya Prabowo Subianto sebagai Menteri Pertahanan pada masa Kabinet Kerja Presiden Jokowi periode 2019–2024. *Propaganda*, 1(1), 35–43.

<https://doi.org/10.37010/prop.v1i1.255>

Putri, D. L., & Nugroho, R. S. (2024, April 24). Jejak Prabowo di pilpres, akhirnya jadi presiden usai 3 kali kalah. Kompas.

<https://www.kompas.com/tren/read/2024/04/24/120804065/jejak-prabowo-di-pilpres-akhirnya-jadi-presiden-usai-3-kali-kalah?page=all>

Qodar, N. (2024, April 25). HEADLINE: KPU tetapkan Prabowo-Gibran presiden dan wapres terpilih 2024–2029, merangkul yang kalah? Liputan 6.

<https://www.liputan6.com/news/read/5580495/headline-kpu-tetapkan-prabowo-gibran-presiden-dan-wapres-terpilih-2024-2029-merangkul-yang-kalah?page=3>

Qomariyah, N. (2023). Perspektif ideologi dan kekuasaan (Telaah historis pemikiran

- Niccolò Machiavelli). Herodotus: Jurnal Pendidikan IPS, 6(3), 352–360.
<https://doi.org/10.30998/herodotus.v6i3.15729>
- Quaglioni, D. (2014). Machiavelli, the Prince and the idea of justice. *Italian Culture*, 32(2), 110–121. <https://doi.org/10.1179/0161462214Z.000000000027>
- Richardus, W. N. C. (2020). Ruang sosial Bourdieusian. In W. Udasmoro (Ed.), *Gerak kuasa: Politik wacana, identitas, dan ruang/waktu dalam bingkai kajian budaya dan media* (pp. 293–316). KPG (Kepustakaan Populer Gramedia).
- Rishan, I. (2020). Risiko koalisi gemuk dalam sistem presidensial di Indonesia. *Jurnal Hukum IUS Quia Iustum*, 2(7), 219–240.
- Safitri, R. D. (2024, October 28). Prabowo sebut oposisi budaya Barat: Kalau RI dapat berkolaborasi. *Tirto*. <https://tirto.id/prabowo-sebut-oposisi-budaya-barat-kalau-ri-dapat-berkolaborasi-g3az>
- Saini, A. (2024, October 20). Prabowo umumkan susunan menteri, dinamai Kabinet Merah Putih. *BBC Indonesia*.
<https://www.bbc.com/indonesia/articles/c70z2q77p2wo>
- Santika, A. A. (2024). Studi kasus pesan perlawanan Jokowi dalam Pilpres 2024: Perspektif tir dan etika Jawa. *Common*, 8(1), 1–13.
<https://doi.org/10.3410/common.v8i1.12560>
- Sari, H. P., & Belarminus, R. (2025, July 21). Pakar hukum: Kasus Tom Lembong dan Hasto adalah persidangan dengan motif politik. *Kompas*.
<https://nasional.kompas.com/read/2025/07/21/14191091/pakar-hukum-kasus-tom-lembong-dan-hasto-adalah-persidangan-dengan-motif>
- Sari, H. P., & Maullana, I. (2024, October 12). PKS merapat ke Prabowo, sinyal masuk kabinet Prabowo Gibran? *Kompas*.
<https://nasional.kompas.com/read/2024/10/12/08210371/pks-merapat-ke-prabowo-sinyal-masuk-kabinet-prabowo-gibran>
- Satriawan, B. H., & Purwaningsih, T. (2021). Political marketing Prabowo Subianto and Sandiaga Salahuddin Uno in the 2019 presidential election. *Jurnal Ilmu Sosial dan Ilmu Politik*, 25(2), 127–143. <https://doi.org/10.22146/jsp.53688>
- Shihab, N. (2025, August 13). Tom Lembong bicara abolisi, Prabowo & Jokowi: Mungkin pendukung saya kesal dengar ini | Mata Najwa [Video]. YouTube.
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=E1O_kFeuHzE

- Trantidis, A. (2017). The problem of constitutional legitimation: What the debate on electoral quotas tells us about the legitimacy of decision-making rules in constitutional choice. *Constitutional Political Economy*, 28(2), 195–208. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10602-016-9233-7>
- TvOneNews. (2024, October 15). Soal kabinet gemuk, Prabowo: Negara kita besar bung!| Kabar Petang tvOne [Video]. YouTube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pKzWHGi7oIU>
- Viroli, M. (2017). Realism and prophecy in Machiavelli and in Italian political culture. *The Italianist*, 37(3), 308–323. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02614340.2017.1409311>
- Widodo, A. S., & Dhani, R. (2023). When the president endorses the nation's next leader: Detecting the concept of power in Javanese culture through presidential communication. *WARTA Ikatan Sarjana Komunikasi Indonesia*, 6(1), 94–106.
- Wolfendale, J. (2007). Obedience in the military. In *Torture and the military profession* (pp. 77–97). Palgrave Macmillan UK. https://doi.org/10.1057/9780230592803_5