

# PERSPECTIVE

RESEARCHERS AT ISEAS – YUSOF ISHAK INSTITUTE ANALYSE CURRENT EVENTS

Singapore | 22 February 2021

## Dynastic Politics in Indonesia's Tangerang Selatan Triumphs

*Syafiq Hasyim\**



Posters of candidates during the Tangerang Selatan mayoral election held in December 2020. Dynastic politics remains powerful in this region, and in fact the mayoral position in this region has been in the hands of dynastic politics since the reform era. Source: Syafiq Hasyim, author.

\* Syafiq Hasyim is Visiting Fellow at the Indonesia Studies Programme of ISEAS – Yusof Ishak Institute and Director of Library and Culture of Indonesian International Islamic University (UIII), Jakarta.

## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

- The persistent and dominant presence of dynastic politics remained an interesting phenomenon in the regional elections recently held at provincial and district levels in 270 regions in Indonesia.
- Tangerang Selatan, in Banten province, is a vibrant administrative city. Dynastic politics remains powerful in this region, and in fact the mayoral position in this region has been in the hands of dynastic politics since the reform era.
- The persistence of dynastic politics in Tangerang Selatan indicates that voters there do not consider it to be a crucial issue.
- Dynastic politics also reflects the failure of democracy in this region, and the lack of open and inclusive participation in elections. Stakeholders such as political parties and also civil society organisations in Tangerang Selatan bear responsibility for this situation.

## INTRODUCTION

Notwithstanding public warnings against the holding of *Pilkada Serentak 2020* (simultaneous regional elections) during a pandemic, President Joko Widodo insisted on them being held in December 2020. And so it came about that on 9 December 2020, *Pilkada Serentak* took place, simultaneously at provincial and district level across 270 regions.<sup>1</sup>

Many observers have since stated that *Pilkada Serentak 2020* was relatively well managed. What has caught the attention of observers, however, are the persistence and manifestation of dynastic politics in some regions. Some contenders have blood connections to either political elites in Jakarta or in their regions. Gibran Rakabuming Raka<sup>2</sup> (Jokowi's son) and Bobby Nasution (Jokowi's son-in-law) were nominees and both won their seats in Solo and in Medan respectively.<sup>3</sup>

This article argues that dynastic politics is a serious matter and should not be taken lightly. In particular, it focuses on Tangerang Selatan, Banten. The *Pilkada* there provides a strong example of dynastic politics at work; all the mayor candidates—first pair Muhamad-Sarawasti, second pair Azizah-Ruhamaben, and third pair Benyamin-Pilar—had political family backgrounds.

## POLITICS IN TANGERANG SELATAN

Banten was part of West Java province until two years after Suharto's resignation in 1998. The demand of Banten to become an independent province began already in 1953 at the time when the *daerah istimewa* (Special Region) status was being given to Yogyakarta and Aceh. Banten argued then that it was also a city with *keistimewaan* (privileges) and should therefore be given the status Yogyakarta and Aceh were receiving. This was denied them by the central government.<sup>4</sup>

Banten was finally separated from West Java province in 2000. Tangerang Selatan, however, did not immediately become an independent administrative city but was instead merely part of Tangerang. That status came only in 2008, and Tangerang Selatan has since developed into a vibrant city. It has seven *Kecamatan* (sub-districts), 57 villages, 3844 *Rukun Tetangga* (sub-village) and 735 *Rukun Tetangga* (sub-sub village), and is home to 1,747 906 residents, most of whom commute to Jakarta to work.

Gender	Tangerang Selatan Population by Gender		
	2019	2018	2017
Female	868 205	842 295	816 507
Male	879 701	854 013	828 392
Total	1 747 906	1 696 308	1 644 899

Source: <https://tangseltkota.bps.go.id>.

Tangerang Selatan has 50 seats in DPRD-II (Dewan Perwakilan Rakyat Daerah, the regional parliament). The political parties that seized seats for Tangerang Selatan in the 2019 general elections are shown below:

Political Party	Number of Parliament Members (DPRD) in Tangerang Selatan by Political Party and Gender		
	Male	Female	Total
	2019	2019	2019
Indonesian Democratic Party of Struggle (PDI-P)	5	3	8
Indonesian Solidarity Party (PSI)	3	1	4
National Awakening Party (PKB)	3	1	4
Prosperous Justice Party (PKS)	4	4	8
People's Conscience Party (HANURA)	1	-	1
The Golkar Party	8	2	10
Great Indonesia Movement Party (GERINDRA)	5	3	8
The Democratic Party	3	2	5
National Mandate Party (PAN)	2	-	2
<b>Total</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>50</b>

Source: <https://tangseltkota.bps.go.id/indicator/40/111/1/jumlah-anggota-dprd-kota-tangerang-selatan-menurut-partai-politik-dan-jenis-kelamin.html>

In the mayoral election of Tangerang Selatan 2020, all these winning parties nominated their respective candidate pair: Muhamad-Saraswati was supported by PDIP, Gerindra, PSI and PAN, and Azizah-Ruhamaben was backed by PKS, PKB and Demokrat. Golkar, the political party holding the largest number of seats in DPRD chose Benyamin-Pilar as its candidate pair.

## **REGIONAL DYNASTY VS NATIONAL DYNASTY**

Tangerang Selatan's dynastic politics did not originate purely from Tangerang Selatan itself. In all likelihood, it sprung from the overall political traditions of Banten province, and has therefore been an important factor in the power structure of the administrative city for the last two decades.

Almost all political leaders of the districts and administrative cities in Banten province have connections within "a network of family politicians", especially those related to Haji Chasan Sohib.<sup>5</sup> Haji Chasan Sohib was the most influential figure in Banten during his lifetime (1930-2011).<sup>6</sup> He was the most respected figure of *jawara*<sup>7</sup> (literally meaning a swordsman or a whiz) and had access to all leaders in the central government (eg: Suharto, Abdurrahman Wahid, Megawati and also Susilo Bambang Yudoyono). His family's influence continues, with the current second and third generations now exercising power in most regions of Banten, including Tangerang Selatan.<sup>8</sup>

Interestingly, the three pairs of candidates all had political dynastic ties. The first was Muhammad-Saraswati. Rahayu Saraswati is the daughter of Hashim Djojohadikusumo, the younger brother of Prabowo Subianto, the present Minister of Defence.<sup>9</sup> She is seen to represent Prabowo's family. By putting forth Saraswati in Tangerang Selatan's mayoral election, Gerindra was hoping to consolidate its support in the region. With the eight seats the party won in 2019, it has the second largest number of representatives in the DPRD.

The second candidate pair was Nur Azizah-Ruhamaben. Nur Azizah is the daughter of Vice President Ma'ruf Amin. Strangely, during the campaigning, few seemed able to recognize her as such, and the campaign photo seeking to highlight her relationship to Ma'ruf was not always visible. A capable civil servant in the Ministry of Religious Affairs, Azizah was recruited by the party-coalition of PKS, Demokrat, PKB and PKPI, largely because of her father. Ma'ruf Amin, however, did not step forth to campaign for his daughter, as some may have expected. Grassroots support from PKS was strong, and Azizah for mayor (supported by her powerful father) with Ruhamaben as her second seemed promising. Furthermore, a coalition made up of an Islamist party (PKS), a religious party (PKB) and a nationalist party (Demokrat) appeared perfect. Ma'ruf Amin was actually born in Tanara, in Banten, although he does not have strong grassroots connections there. Although Azizah lost, gaining 20% of the votes was not a bad result for a newcomer.

The third candidate pair was Benyamin Davnie and Pilar Saga Ichsan. Pilar represents a long political dynasty in Banten. He is the son of Ratu Tatu, the daughter of Haji Chasan Shohib. Haji Chasan Shohib's family members have been key politicians and businessmen in most districts and administrative cities in Banten for a long while.

The main political battle was thus between Benyamin-Pilar and Muhamad-Saraswati; Azizah-Ruhamaben were not really in the running for top position. Benyamin was formerly vice mayor of Tangerang Selatan, while Muhamad was the city's regional secretary and therefore was well

known among its bureaucrats. Benyamin, being direct successor to Airin, a two-term leader, was also no stranger to civil servants and voters.

The Pilkada of Tangerang Selatan was therefore a battle between political dynasties at the regional and national levels. Muhammad-Saraswati and Azizah-Ruhmaben reflected national-level dynastic politics while Benyamin-Pilar represented Banten dynastic politics.

The final victory by Benyamin-Pilar illustrates the triumph of local dynastic politics over national dynastic politics. Challenges to the dominance of the Haji Chasan family have been failing ever regional elections began to be held in Tangerang Selatan. In the first such election, in 2009, Airin Rachmi Diany and Benyamin Davnie won against Arsid-Andreas Taulany and Yayasan Sudrajat-Norodom Sukarno.<sup>10</sup> What was unique about 2009 was the fact that it underwent a second round of elections due to a Constitutional Court decision to cancel the victory of Airin Rachmi Diany and Benyamin Davnie following an election fraud claim filed by the other candidates. The alleged culprit was Asda I Pemkot Tangsel Ahadi, who was Airin's staff at that time in the Tangerang Selatan government. Just three days before election day, he had circulated a letter to all civil servants in the city to be neutral in the upcoming election. This was deemed as election fraud by the MK. In the rematch, Airin-Benyamin emerged victorious anyway, and they succeeded again in 2014.

## **BANTEN'S UNCHALLENGED LOCAL DYNASTY**

When Benyamin-Pilar were declared the winner in Tangerang Selatan by KPU (Komisi Pemilihan Umum, General Election Committee),<sup>11</sup> many immediately considered it a continuation of the power of the political dynasty in Banten. All winning candidates in Tangerang Selatan since 2009 have come from the family of Haji Chasan. Benyamin had devoted much of his political career in support of the leadership of that family, and many observers believe that supporting him for mayor was the family's way of showing him appreciation. The family may also expect Benyamin to be an effective mentor for Pilar and that he would prepare the latter for future leadership of Tangerang Selatan.

The Benyamin-Pillar victory was in line with results from several quick counts.<sup>12</sup> Muhamad-Saraswati were seen to have some chance of winning, enjoying as they did strong party support from the two largest parties in Indonesia, PDIP and Gerindra, as well as the young progressive party, PSI. But that did not prove sufficient.

Muhamad was assumed by many to have credibility due to his impressive track record as regional secretary of Tangerang Selatan and chief of the sub-district of Ciputat.<sup>13</sup> While he was depicted as a progressive future leader, Benyamin was portrayed as a loyalist of the Haji Chasan family. In turn, Saraswati was seen as a very popular and was young, and a progressive politician from Gerindra; Prabowo's popularity in Tangerang Selatan was also expected to directly transfer into support for Saraswati.

Muhamad-Saraswati was seen by many as a chance for Tangerang Selatan to free itself from the Haji Chasan family. Some groups felt that Tangerang Selatan would fare better if the influence of that family could be limited. Corruption in high places had in fact set in, and this was evident in the case of Atut Ratu Chosiyah<sup>14</sup> and his younger brother Tubagus Chaeri

Pradana Wawan.<sup>15</sup> In fact, Muhamad-Saraswati had corruption as one of their campaign themes.

The victory of Benyamin-Pilar also reflects voter approval of the effective leadership of the previous Mayor, Airin, who was part of the Banten dynasty. The notion that Benyamin-Pilar is a continuation of dynastic politics in Banten was in fact advertised in their tagline wish “to continue” (*melanjutkan*) the legacy of Airin in Tangerang Selatan.

Other issues that could have boosted Benyamin-Pilar was the inability of the other candidate pairs to mobilise supporters during election day. Voter turnout was around 70 %, and Golput (golongan putih, abstainers) made up as much as 40,01 %.<sup>16</sup> In Indonesia, one can abstain actively by staying absent, or passively by getting the voting process wrong or by punching the white space on the ballot to disqualify one’s own vote.

Democracy in essence, keeps the opportunity of becoming leaders open to all citizens, regardless of family background, ethnicity, religion and gender. One should in that sense say that the proliferation of political dynasties in Tangerang Selatan hinders democracy in that it reserves political positions for a particular lineage.

## CONCLUSION

Many factors sustain dynastic politics—in Tangerang Selatan and in Indonesia as a whole. There are two ways to alleviate the effects of dynastic politics. First, one could drive the influential families to embrace democracy and meritocracy, and second, one could strengthen democracy literacy among voters and among Indonesians in general.

It appears that voters in Tangerang Selatan in 2020 did not consider dynastic politics when casting their votes. Benyamin-Pilar’s victory is also an indication that voters there wished to retain the stable leadership offered by people associated with the local dynasty.

Just as interestingly, one could consider the dynamics of how having more established political dynasties can be part of an advancing democracy; this can be seen in the politics of India and the US respectively. Resolving this long-standing issue lies within the responsibility of both political parties and civil society organisations. These should invest in educating future generation of voters to be knowledgeable and objective in their selection of leaders.

- <sup>1</sup> <https://wartakota.tribunnews.com/2020/12/09/pilkada-rabu-9-desember-2020-catat-daftar-lengkap-270-daerah-peserta-pemilukada-di-tengah-pandemi>.
- <sup>2</sup> <https://www.bisnis.com/topic/43793/Gibran-Rakabuming-Raka>, viewed on 17 December 2020.
- <sup>3</sup> <https://nasional.kompas.com/read/2020/12/09/18391771/gibran-dinasti-politiknya-sebelah-mana-saya-bisa-menang-atau-kalah?page=all>, <https://www.tribunnews.com/nasional/2020/12/10/bobby-nasution-unggul-di-pilkada-medan-2020-ini-profil-dan-kekayaan-sang-menantu-jokowi>, viewed on 13 December 2020.
- <sup>4</sup> <https://biroumum.bantenprov.go.id/berdirinya-banten>, viewed on 10 December 2020.
- <sup>5</sup> Syamsuddin Haris, *Partai, Pemilu, Dan Parlemen Era Reformasi* (Jakarta: Buku Obor, 2014) p. 256.
- <sup>6</sup> <https://nasional.tempo.co/read/519657/silsilah-dinasti-banten-abah-chasan-dan-para-istri/full&view=ok>, viewed on 24 December 2024.
- <sup>7</sup> <https://www.tribunnews.com/nasional/2013/10/18/pengamat-chasan-sochib-disokong-kyai-dan-ulama>, viewed on 24 December 2020.
- <sup>8</sup> <https://banten.idntimes.com/news/banten/khaerul-anwar-2/nama-nama-dinasti-ratu-atut-di-banten/4>, viewed on 24 December 2024.
- <sup>9</sup> <https://www.tribunnews.com/pilkada-2020/2020/07/25/menguak-sosok-keponakan-prabowo-rahayu-saraswati-yang-maju-pilkada-tangsel-sempat-dimarahi-ayah>, viewed on 24 December 2020.
- <sup>10</sup> <https://news.detik.com/berita/d-1521713/kalah-di-mk-airin-siap-di-putaran-ulang-pilkada-tangsel>, viewed on 9 December 2020.
- <sup>11</sup> <https://megapolitan.kompas.com/read/2020/12/17/13241141/benyamin-pilar-saga-menangi-pilkada-tangsel-dengan-perolehan-235734-suara?page=all>, viewed on 19 January 2021.
- <sup>12</sup> <https://megapolitan.kompas.com/read/2020/12/09/20500261/hasil-akhir-quick-count-2-lembaga-di-pilkada-tangsel-benyamin-pilar?page=all>, viewed on 12 December 2020.
- <sup>13</sup> <http://tangerangnews.com/tangsel/read/2631/Mantan-Camat-Gandeng-Akrie-Patrio-di-Tangsel>, viewed on 24 December 2020.
- <sup>14</sup> <https://news.detik.com/berita/d-3567351/terbukti-korupsi-alkes-ratu-atut-divonis-55-tahun-penjara>, viewed on 24 December 2020.
- <sup>15</sup> <https://nasional.tempo.co/read/1366004/kasus-korupsi-alat-kesehatan-wawan-divonis-4-tahun-penjara/full&view=ok>, viewed on 24. December 2020.
- <sup>16</sup> <https://tirto.id/pemenang-pilkada-tangsel-medan-surabaya-dan-depok-golput-f8fb>, viewed on 18 January 2021.

<p><i>ISEAS Perspective</i> is published electronically by: <b>ISEAS - Yusof Ishak Institute</b></p> <p>30 Heng Mui Keng Terrace Singapore 119614 Main Tel: (65) 6778 0955 Main Fax: (65) 6778 1735</p> <p>Get Involved with ISEAS. Please click here: <a href="https://www.iseas.edu.sg/support">https://www.iseas.edu.sg/support</a></p>	<p>ISEAS - Yusof Ishak Institute accepts no responsibility for facts presented and views expressed.</p> <p>Responsibility rests exclusively with the individual author or authors. No part of this publication may be reproduced in any form without permission.</p> <p>© Copyright is held by the author or authors of each article.</p>	<p>Editorial Chairman: Choi Shing Kwok</p> <p>Editorial Advisor: Tan Chin Tiong</p> <p>Managing Editor: Ooi Kee Beng</p> <p>Editors: William Choong, Malcolm Cook, Lee Poh Onn, and Ng Kah Meng</p> <p>Comments are welcome and may be sent to the author(s).</p>
--	---	---