

REACTUALIZING THE VALUE OF SOCIAL JUSTICE AS AN ETHICAL GUIDELINE FOR POLITICAL CONDUCT IN INDONESIA

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ABSTRACT

This study examines how the value of social justice in Pancasila can function as an ethical guideline for political conduct in Indonesia. The study responds to a gap in earlier discussions that often treat social justice as a normative ideal without linking it to empirical problems in governance. A qualitative library research design was used. The analysis combined normative political theory, Pancasila studies, methodological literature on document analysis, and recent empirical indicators on corruption, inequality, electoral violations, and political participation. The findings show that social justice requires more than distributive welfare. It also requires equal political voice, accountable public authority, recognition of vulnerable groups, and fair access to public resources. In Indonesian politics, the main barriers are corruption, nepotistic recruitment, elite domination, transactional electoral practices, unequal access to public services, and low political literacy. The novelty of this article lies in an integrative framework that connects Pancasila social justice, political ethics, and empirical governance indicators to assess political conduct. This framework positions social justice as an operational ethical standard for public officials, political parties, voters, and civil society. Reactualization must therefore focus on political education, transparent financing, merit based recruitment, stronger law enforcement, and participatory policy making.

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INTRODUCTION

Social justice is a fundamental principle in Indonesia's national and state life, as stated in the fifth principle of Pancasila: "Social Justice for All Indonesian People." This principle does not only refer to economic equality. It also concerns the fulfillment of citizens' basic rights, including education, health care, decent employment, legal protection, and equal political participation. In Rawls's view, social justice requires equal basic liberties for every individual, while social and economic inequalities can only be justified when they benefit the least advantaged groups (Rawls, 1971). Rawls's theory is relevant to the value of social justice in Pancasila because both emphasize substantive

justice, namely justice that can be experienced by all citizens. From the Pancasila perspective, social justice requires the state and citizens to act fairly in material and spiritual life, in a proportional and impartial manner (Mansir et al., 2022).

This theoretical foundation shows that social justice has two connected roles in political life. First, it functions as an ethical principle that guides public officials so they do not abuse authority. Second, it functions as a political principle that directs the state to ensure equal opportunities, reduce social inequality, and protect vulnerable groups. Therefore, corrupt, discriminatory, elitist, and non-transparent political practices represent deviations from the value of social justice in Pancasila. Social justice also requires citizen participation because people should not only become objects of policy. They must be involved in political decision-making. Political participation can be strengthened through civic education that emphasizes digital literacy, inclusivity, and ethical discourse (Sekarsari et al., 2025).

The link between theory and political reality becomes important because the implementation of social justice in Indonesia has not fully reflected these normative ideals. In practice, the value of social justice is often weakened by political, economic, and power interests of certain groups. Social justice should not be limited to the equal distribution of economic resources. It should also include equal distribution of capabilities, access, and opportunities for every citizen to develop (Stiglitz, 2014). This means that the state must not only distribute resources fairly, but also ensure equal access to education, health services, decent employment, legal protection, and political participation.

Empirically, Indonesian political life still faces corruption, elitism, transactional politics, and discrimination against vulnerable groups. Corruption damages governance, causes state financial losses, and weakens the fair distribution of public resources. State financial losses caused by administrative errors still require accountability from public officials, while the recovery of state losses does not automatically remove criminal liability (Hukunala et al., 2023). This condition shows that abuse of authority in bureaucracy can block the realization of a just and accountable government. Efforts to combat corruption also face internal obstacles, such as slow disbursement of funds for prevention programs, and external obstacles, such as low public understanding of corruption (Waspada, 2021). Thus, social justice requires good policies, strong law enforcement, public awareness, and the integrity of state officials.

The gap between the ideal of social justice and political practice also appears in the weak bargaining position of poor communities, women, Indigenous communities, persons with disabilities, and other marginalized groups. Fukuyama (2014) notes that inequality in the distribution of power and resources can undermine political legitimacy and worsen social disparities. When power is concentrated in the hands of elites, public policy tends to move away from the interests of society and favor groups that have political and economic access. Public political participation is also shaped by political literacy, economic conditions, ideology, religion, and social and psychological factors (Sistyawan, 2024). In line with this, participation can be strengthened through village government programs that are communicative, participatory, and aligned with community needs (Patmisari, 2020).

These empirical conditions indicate that the discussion of social justice needs to move beyond abstract theory. Social justice must become an operational ethical standard for assessing political conduct. In a democratic state, the principle of social justice should not only guide policymaking. It should also guide transparency, accountability, and fair public participation in all forms of political behavior. Habermas (2013) argues that democratic legitimacy depends on public participation and rational communication. Therefore, social justice should serve as an ethical guideline in political decision-making to prevent the neglect of citizens' rights and to avoid politics that only serves elite interests.

Based on this condition, the main gap in previous studies lies in the limited integration between Pancasila social justice, political ethics, and empirical governance indicators. Many studies discuss political ethics, corruption, public participation, or Pancasila values separately. However, fewer studies place social justice as a practical framework for evaluating the conduct of public officials, political parties, voters, and civil society. This article addresses that gap by offering an integrative framework that connects normative Pancasila values with concrete political practices. The novelty of this article lies in positioning social justice not only as an ideological principle, but also as an ethical measure for assessing whether political behavior supports transparency, accountability, merit-based recruitment, fair law enforcement, and participatory policymaking.

This study aims to examine the importance of reactualizing the value of social justice as an ethical guideline in political behavior in Indonesia. It identifies the challenges faced in implementing social justice in political life and explains the relationship between social justice and political ethics. This study also provides recommendations for creating political behavior that is more ethical, transparent, accountable, and just. The application of social justice as an operational ethical standard is expected to improve Indonesia's political system and support a more equitable distribution of public welfare.

METHOD

This study uses a qualitative library research design. The method is appropriate because the article examines concepts, arguments, legal values, and empirical reports rather than measuring individual behavior through field surveys. A literature review can map the development of a concept, compare theoretical positions, and build a structured argument from existing sources (Snyder, 2019). Document analysis also supports qualitative inquiry because official reports, policy documents, and scholarly texts can be treated as data when they are selected, interpreted, and compared systematically (Bowen, 2009).

The sources were selected through four criteria. First, the source had to discuss social justice, political ethics, Pancasila, democracy, corruption, inequality, or political participation. Second, theoretical sources had to come from established political philosophy or public policy literature. Third, empirical sources had to come from official institutions or recent studies on Indonesian politics. Fourth, sources that were unrelated to the topic were excluded. This revision removed earlier references on financial distress, civil servant work motivation, and Arduino microcontrollers because they do not support a study on political ethics or social justice.

The analysis followed three steps. The first step identified the meaning of social justice in Pancasila and major political theories. The second step compared those norms with empirical indicators on corruption, inequality, electoral violations, elite domination, and political literacy. The third step synthesized the findings into practical strategies for reactualizing social justice in political conduct. The coding categories were distributive justice, recognition, participation, integrity, accountability, and protection of vulnerable groups. This procedure follows qualitative data analysis principles that require data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing (Miles et al., 2014).

RESULT AND DISCUSSIONS

Social Justice as a Fundamental Value in Politics

Social justice, as explained by Rawls (1971), consists of two main principles that are relevant to Indonesian political life. The first is equal basic liberty. The second is the difference principle, which allows inequality only when it benefits the least advantaged groups. These principles help clarify the ethical meaning of the fifth principle of Pancasila. Social justice is not only a distributive ideal. It is also a standard for evaluating whether public authority protects citizens who face poverty, unequal access, and weak political representation.

In Indonesia, this principle appears in social protection policies such as the Program Keluarga Harapan (PKH), food assistance, and progressive fiscal instruments. These policies show that the state has tried to translate normative justice into public intervention. However, empirical data show that the problem is not merely the existence of welfare programs. Statistics Indonesia recorded 24.06 million poor people in September 2024, equal to 8.57 percent of the population. Rural poverty remained higher than urban poverty, namely 11.34 percent compared with 6.66 percent (BPS, 2025a). At the same time, the national Gini Ratio reached 0.381 in September 2024, with urban inequality higher than rural inequality (BPS, 2025b). These data indicate that social justice must be assessed through policy outcomes, not only through policy design.

This finding strengthens the argument of (Stiglitz, 2014) that justice requires equal capabilities, access, and opportunities, not only equal distribution of resources. PKH can reduce the immediate burden of poor households, but it will not automatically create social justice if beneficiaries still face weak public services, low-quality education,

limited employment opportunities, and unequal access to political voice. Therefore, the ethical value of social justice requires a broader evaluation. A just policy must be targeted accurately, delivered transparently, monitored by citizens, and connected with long-term empowerment.

The Indonesian case also shows that social justice cannot be separated from power relations. Fukuyama (2014) argues that unequal distribution of power and resources can weaken political legitimacy. In Indonesia, this problem appears when public resources are captured by political elites, bureaucratic networks, or groups with strong economic access. Dworkin (1986) also reminds that inequality in opportunities can reduce public trust in political institutions. Thus, the central issue is not only whether the state has welfare programs. The deeper issue is whether political institutions distribute authority, information, and public resources in a fair and accountable way.

From this perspective, social justice becomes a practical political criterion. It requires policies that benefit vulnerable groups, but it also requires fair procedures, transparent decisions, and inclusive participation. Habermas (2013) emphasizes that democratic legitimacy depends on public communication and participation. This means that social justice in Indonesia must be evaluated through two dimensions. The first is substantive justice, which concerns poverty reduction, public service access, and protection for vulnerable groups. The second is procedural justice, which concerns transparency, accountability, and citizen involvement in policy making. Both dimensions must operate together if politics is to serve the public good (Tunisa et al., 2024).

Political Ethics and the Moral Responsibility of Public Officials

Political ethics refers to moral standards that guide public officials when they use public authority. In classical political thought, politics should pursue the common good rather than private gain (Dwihantoro, 2013). In Indonesia, this ethical demand is closely related to honesty, integrity, transparency, accountability, and responsibility to citizens. These values are not abstract. They can be measured through the way officials manage budgets, design programs, recruit public officers, and respond to public criticism.

Recent governance data show that ethical problems in public office remain serious. The Corruption Perceptions Index describes corruption in the public sector on a scale from 0, meaning very corrupt, to 100, meaning very clean. Transparency International Indonesia reported that the CPI remains a central indicator for assessing corruption in public institutions (Transparency International Indonesia, 2026). KPK data also show that corruption is not limited to isolated individual behavior. By the end of 2025, KPK statistics recorded 1,782 investigations since 2004. The largest case types were bribery or gratification with 1,100 cases and procurement-related corruption with 446 cases (KPK, 2025). These figures show that corruption directly affects public procurement, licensing, budgeting, and service delivery. In other words, corruption weakens social justice because it diverts public resources away from citizens who need them most.

The ethical problem also appears in electoral governance. Bawaslu recorded 1,023 registered reports and findings of alleged violations in the 2024 election. Of these, 479 were categorized as violations, including administrative violations, alleged election crimes, code of ethics violations, and other legal violations (Bawaslu, 2024). These findings show that political ethics must also regulate political parties, candidates, campaign teams, voters, and election organizers. Money politics, non-neutrality, and misuse of authority reduce the quality of democracy because they change citizens from equal political subjects into objects of transaction.

Therefore, the moral responsibility of public officials must be understood institutionally. It is not enough to ask officials to be honest. Political institutions must create incentives that make integrity possible and corruption risky. This requires transparent campaign financing, open procurement, strong asset reporting, conflict-of-interest rules, merit-based recruitment, and public access to government information. The reactualization of social justice therefore becomes a reform agenda. It connects individual morality with institutional control. In this context, political education based on ethical values can strengthen public awareness and improve supervision of public officials (Puspita, 2024). The argument is clear: social justice will remain weak if political ethics is treated only as personal virtue and not as a system of public accountability (Setiawan & Saputri, 2020).

The Relationship Between Social Justice and Political Ethics

Social justice and political ethics are interdependent. Social justice provides the purpose of political power, while political ethics provides the rules for using that power. Mubyarto (1999) views social justice as equal opportunity and fair distribution of resources. This view shows that policies cannot be called ethical when they only benefit elite groups, party networks, or a small number of actors with access to power. Ethical politics must direct state resources toward citizens who face the greatest barriers in education, health, employment, legal protection, and political participation.

The relationship between the two concepts can be seen in three ways. First, social justice gives political ethics a substantive orientation. Public officials should not only obey formal procedures. They must also consider whether their decisions reduce or reproduce inequality. Second, political ethics gives social justice an operational mechanism. Values such as transparency, accountability, and participation turn social justice into measurable public conduct. Third, both concepts strengthen democratic legitimacy. When citizens see that policies are fair and officials can be held accountable, trust in political institutions becomes stronger.

This synthesis also clarifies the limits of welfare policy. Social assistance can support poor households, but it does not automatically produce justice if distribution is influenced by political patronage or if beneficiaries cannot participate in policy evaluation. (Suharto, 2006) emphasizes that social policy must protect vulnerable groups. Yet protection must be combined with recognition and empowerment. This means that affirmative policies in education, health, and economic access must also create political space for marginalized groups to express their needs, criticize public services, and monitor public budgets.

Social justice also requires sensitivity to Indonesia's social and cultural diversity. (Kuntowijoyo, 1995) argues that justice is not limited to economic equality, but also concerns recognition of plural identities. This point is important because marginalized groups do not experience injustice in the same way. Poor households may need economic support. Indigenous communities may need protection of land and cultural rights. Persons with disabilities may need accessible public services and political facilities. Women may need stronger protection from exclusion in political recruitment. Therefore, social justice as political ethics must be contextual. It must identify who is excluded, how exclusion occurs, and what institutional correction is needed.

Based on this analysis, the relationship between social justice and political ethics should be framed as an evaluative framework for political conduct. Public officials can be assessed from how they allocate resources. Political parties can be assessed from how they recruit candidates and finance campaigns. Voters can be assessed from whether they reject money politics. Civil society can be assessed from how it monitors policy and defends vulnerable groups. This framework makes social justice operational because it moves the concept from normative discourse into concrete indicators of political behavior.

Challenges in Realizing Social Justice in Politics

The implementation of social justice in Indonesian politics faces structural and cultural challenges. The main problem is not only that political actors sometimes ignore ethical principles. The deeper problem is that political institutions often allow unequal access to power, weak accountability, and transactional practices. Three challenges are central: corruption and nepotism, the dominance of political elites, and low political literacy.

1. Corruption and Nepotism

Corruption remains a direct obstacle to social justice because it reduces the resources available for public services and weakens the credibility of government. KPK statistics show that corruption cases are concentrated in strategic sectors such as bribery, gratification, and procurement (KPK, 2025). This pattern is important because procurement and budgeting are the channels through which welfare programs, infrastructure, education, and health services reach citizens. When these channels are corrupted, vulnerable groups experience the greatest loss because they depend more heavily on public services.

The impact of corruption is therefore distributive and moral at the same time. It creates distributive injustice because public money that should support citizens is diverted. It creates moral injustice because officials violate the public trust attached to their office. This explains why corruption cannot be treated only as a legal violation. It must

also be treated as a failure of political ethics. (Habbe et al., 2024) shows that nepotism can also be justified culturally as loyalty to family, but in public office it damages meritocracy and narrows access for qualified citizens. (Hasanudin et al., 2023) further shows that oligarchic power can consolidate business and political interests. The synthesis is that corruption, nepotism, and oligarchy work together. Corruption extracts public resources, nepotism controls access to office, and oligarchy protects elite interests.

For this reason, the reactualization of social justice must focus on institutional correction. Anti-corruption policy should not only punish individual offenders after violations occur. It should also reduce opportunities for abuse through open contracting, transparent social assistance databases, public complaint mechanisms, digital budget monitoring, and protection for whistleblowers. Merit-based recruitment is also essential because social justice requires equal opportunity in access to public office. Without these mechanisms, social justice will remain a slogan rather than an ethical standard in governance.

2. The Dominance of Political Elites

The dominance of political elites creates another structural obstacle. Democratic institutions formally provide equal political rights, but unequal access to money, networks, party nomination, and media exposure often gives elites stronger influence over policy. (Hadiz, 2010) explains that political power in post-authoritarian Indonesia has often been shaped by old and new oligarchic interests. This condition affects social justice because policy agendas may reflect elite bargaining rather than the needs of poor citizens, rural communities, workers, women, Indigenous communities, and persons with disabilities.

The 2024 election provides an empirical example. Bawaslu reported 1,023 registered reports and findings of alleged violations and identified 479 as violations (Bawaslu, 2024). These violations show that electoral competition still faces problems of ethics, neutrality, administration, and law enforcement. The study by Aspinall and Berenschot, as cited by (Okthariza, 2020), also shows that patronage and vote buying are common in local politics. This means that elite dominance is not only visible in formal institutions. It also appears in transactional relationships between candidates and voters.

A critical reading of this problem shows that elite dominance weakens social justice in two ways. First, it narrows representation because parties may prioritize electability, financial resources, or family networks over public commitment and competence. Second, it weakens accountability because voters are encouraged to exchange votes for short-term benefits rather than evaluate programs and integrity. Social justice requires the opposite. It requires political parties to recruit candidates based on merit, ideology, public service capacity, and commitment to vulnerable groups. It also requires campaign financing that can be audited by the public. Without these reforms, democratic procedures may continue to operate while substantive justice remains weak.

3. Low Political Literacy

Low political literacy limits citizens' ability to evaluate programs, reject manipulation, and participate in policymaking. This issue becomes more complex in the digital era. The government noted that Indonesia's digital literacy score in 2022 was 3.54 out of 5.00, which shows that public capacity to process digital information still needed improvement (Kominfo, 2024). Although digital literacy is not identical to political literacy, it affects citizens' ability to recognize misinformation, understand campaign messages, and access public information. This is relevant because political communication increasingly takes place through digital platforms.

Earlier studies also show that many citizens, especially in remote areas, have limited understanding of the roles of state institutions (Noor, 2016). This limited understanding makes citizens vulnerable to money politics, populist promises, and identity-based mobilization. Public political participation is influenced by political literacy, economic conditions, ideology, religion, and social-psychological factors (Sistyan, 2024). Therefore, low political literacy cannot be solved only through election socialization before voting day. It requires continuous civic education that connects rights, duties, public ethics, and policy monitoring.

Political literacy also has a justice dimension. Citizens with higher education, stronger internet access, and better economic resources usually have more capacity to influence policy. Citizens in poor and remote areas often have fewer channels to express demands or monitor government programs. This produces unequal political voice. In

this context, social justice requires participatory policy making at the local level. Village forums, public consultations, complaint systems, and community-based monitoring can reduce the distance between citizens and the state. Programs that are communicative, participatory, and aligned with community needs can improve political participation (Patmisari, 2020).

The discussion above shows that the main challenge is not a lack of normative values. Indonesia already has Pancasila, constitutional commitments, democratic procedures, and welfare programs. The problem lies in the weak translation of these values into political conduct. Therefore, the reactualization of social justice must combine value education and institutional reform. Political education should build ethical awareness. Transparent financing should reduce elite capture. Merit-based recruitment should open fair access to public office. Law enforcement should create deterrence. Participatory policy making should give citizens power to shape and evaluate policies. This synthesis is the core contribution of this article: social justice becomes meaningful when it operates as a measurable ethical standard for public officials, parties, voters, and civil society.

Political Ethics and the Moral Responsibility of Public Officials

Political ethics refers to a set of moral norms and principles that regulate the behavior of public officials in carrying out their duties and authority. In classical political theory, Aristotle emphasized that politics must be oriented toward the common good. Aristotle stated that politics is not merely a means of gaining power or personal advantage, but should be used to achieve collective welfare. Political policies and decisions made by public officials must reflect the interests of all people, not merely those of a small elite or particular group (Dwihantoro, 2013). In Indonesia, political ethics includes key principles such as honesty, integrity, transparency, accountability, and moral responsibility. Every decision made by public officials must be accountable to the people and must be based on the public interest, not personal interests or the interests of the ruling group. State power originates from the consent of the people; therefore, policies must be oriented toward public welfare and must be transparent and accountable. However, in Indonesian political practice, many policies neglect these ethical principles. Corruption, collusion, and nepotism remain practices that hinder the achievement of social justice in Indonesia.

According to Setiawan in the article “Corruption Practices and Their Impact on Social Justice in Indonesia,” corruption among public officials damages government integrity and obstructs the fair distribution of wealth, resulting in increasingly severe social inequality. In addition, money politics, which frequently occurs in elections and other political decision-making processes, creates injustice in the democratic process. Such practices not only ignore the principle of social justice, but also undermine the very foundation of democracy itself (Setiawan & Saputri, 2020). When the system of government is controlled by corrupt elites, the quality of the resulting policies will decline, and the government will lose legitimacy in the eyes of the public. A study titled “The Impact of Nepotism on Democracy in Indonesia” states that political elites who dominate government often create policies that favor the interests of their own groups rather than the interests of the wider public. The reactualization of the value of social justice in political behavior is very important for improving the integrity of public officials and strengthening accountability in decision-making. The article “Political Education and Its Role in Increasing Political Awareness in Indonesia” emphasizes that political education based on ethical values, which prioritizes the common interest and reduces the abuse of power, can help improve the political behavior of public officials (Puspita, 2024). In this context, political education based on the principle of social justice can help increase public awareness of political rights and strengthen oversight of the behavior of public officials.

The Relationship Between Social Justice and Political Ethics

Social justice and political ethics have a very close relationship in creating a democratic and just government. According to Mubyarto (1999), social justice is a principle that prioritizes equal opportunity and the fair distribution of resources within society. In this regard, good political ethics emphasizes the importance of policies that support the principle of social justice by paying special attention to the groups most in need, such as the poor, women, and other marginalized groups. Political ethics that includes the principle of social justice requires that the policies produced should not only benefit elite groups or a small number of individuals, but must also consider the welfare of all levels of society. In this context, political ethics must ensure that state policies can reduce social and economic gaps between

groups by providing greater space for marginalized groups. This is in accordance with the concept of social justice expressed by Soerjono Soekanto (2017), who states that social justice is the achievement of collective welfare based on the principle of fair and equitable distribution.

Furthermore, if political policies are oriented toward social justice, they are expected to create an inclusive government that pays attention to the rights and interests of marginalized groups. This is in line with the view of Suharto (2005), who emphasizes that state policies should not only benefit a few parties, but must side with those who are most vulnerable in society. Social justice, in this sense, becomes the foundation for achieving equitable social welfare, reducing inequality, and providing equal access for every individual, especially those who have long been marginalized (Suharto, 2006). For example, the implementation of affirmative policies in various sectors, such as education, health, and the economy, is one concrete effort to realize social justice in politics. According to Arief (2018), affirmative policies that provide greater opportunities for disadvantaged groups can help address existing social inequalities. Such policies create fairer access for marginalized groups and facilitate their ability to obtain the basic rights they should receive. In this regard, social justice is not only a matter of distribution, but also of recognition and empowerment of the rights of marginalized groups.

The implementation of political ethical principles based on social justice must also include support for the social and cultural diversity that exists in society. As stated by (Kuntowijoyo, 1995), social justice in political ethics does not only focus on economic equality, but also on the recognition of the plurality of identities within society. Therefore, policies that support social justice must accommodate ethnic, religious, and cultural diversity, as well as fight for the rights of every group without discrimination. Thus, the relationship between social justice and political ethics is fundamental in creating a just and democratic government. Political ethics based on social justice not only advocates the fair distribution of resources, but also pays attention to diversity and the rights of marginalized groups. Through inclusive and fair policies, the state can create a more prosperous society in which every individual, regardless of social, cultural, or economic background, can obtain equal opportunities in life.

Challenges in Realizing Social Justice in Politics

The implementation of social justice in political practice in Indonesia still faces various challenges. Therefore, realizing social justice in the political sphere in Indonesia is a constitutional ideal embodied in the Preamble to the 1945 Constitution. However, in practice, the realization of this value still faces various structural and cultural obstacles. Several main challenges that arise in the context of Indonesian politics include the following:

1. Corruption and Nepotism

Corruption remains a significant obstacle to achieving equitable welfare and social justice in Indonesia. Based on the Transparency International report (Sinaga & Agus, 2026), Indonesia's Corruption Perceptions Index score, which only reached 34 out of 100, indicates that corrupt practices remain deeply rooted in the political and governmental system. This irregularity not only reflects poor governance, but also has a direct impact on the unequal distribution of resources. As a result, poor communities and other vulnerable groups become increasingly marginalized, while access to basic services such as education, health care, and employment becomes highly limited. These impacts worsen existing social inequalities, create a deeper gap between the rich and the poor, and hinder efforts to build a more just and prosperous society (Habbe et al., 2024).

In addition, nepotistic practices further worsen this situation. In many cases, strategic positions in government and political parties are often filled based on family ties or political connections rather than through meritocracy, which should prioritize individual ability and achievement. Nepotism creates an isolated and exclusive layer of government, which not only reduces the effectiveness of public policy but also prevents the emergence of leaders who truly represent the interests of the people. This leads to the formation of political oligarchies that narrow public access to fair political and economic opportunities. Such oligarchies further intensify social injustice by consolidating power in the hands of a small number of individuals or groups close to power, while the broader public remains marginalized from decision-making processes that should include the common interest (Hasanudin et al., 2023).

The continued existence of corruption and nepotism in Indonesia's political system requires serious attention and concrete measures to eradicate them. A government system that is transparent, accountable, and based on the

principle of meritocracy will make it more possible to achieve an equitable distribution of resources and opportunities. This is not only important for improving people's quality of life, but also for strengthening the foundations of Indonesian democracy, thereby creating a more just government that prioritizes the welfare of all citizens.

2. The Dominance of Political Elites

A democratic system that should provide space for broad participation from all levels of society is, in reality, often distorted by the dominance of a small number of political elites who control resources and have great influence in decision-making. This elitist practice creates inequality in the political process, where the interests of ordinary people are often neglected or even marginalized, while the policies produced tend to favor the interests of capital-owning groups or parties with dominant political power (Hadiz, 2010). In many cases, government policies do not reflect the needs of the general public, but instead reflect the interests of elites who control resources and political decisions. This creates an increasingly wide gap between the ruling upper class and the marginalized lower classes.

As a result of this inequality, politics no longer functions as a forum for advocating public interests, but has turned into an arena for power transactions, where political decisions are often driven by the personal or group interests of those with influence. In such a situation, public political participation becomes very limited, and the voices of ordinary people are no longer prioritized in the decision-making process. For example, a study by Aspinall and Berenschot (2019), as cited in (Okthariza, 2020), shows that political patronage and vote-buying practices have become very common phenomena in local politics in Indonesia. These practices illustrate how politics has shifted into a pragmatic transaction, where people's votes can be bought with empty political promises and temporary benefits.

This phenomenon further worsens the quality of democracy in Indonesia, because the principles of social justice that should serve as the foundation of the political process are increasingly neglected. These practices show how political relations, which should be based on public interest, are now more dominated by transactional relationships that benefit a small elite. This not only reduces public trust in the political system, but also weakens democratic principles that should uphold equal opportunity and justice for all citizens. Therefore, efforts are needed to strengthen an inclusive democratic system that does not only provide opportunities for political elites, but also gives greater space for active public participation in the political process, while ensuring that the policies adopted can provide fair benefits for all levels of society.

3. Low Political Literacy

Political literacy in Indonesia, particularly among poor communities and rural societies, remains relatively low, which becomes one of the main obstacles to strengthening public political participation. This low level of political literacy is reflected in the limited public understanding of political rights, existing democratic mechanisms, and political decision-making processes that should involve all elements of society. This condition prevents many citizens from effectively accessing political information and engaging in substantive political processes, such as elections or development planning forums (*Musrenbang*). According to a LIPI survey cited in (Noor, 2016), most Indonesians, especially those in remote areas, have only a limited understanding of the functions and roles of state institutions such as the legislative and executive branches.

This condition makes society vulnerable to political manipulation by ruling elites. The practices of money politics and populist promises, which often occur at certain moments such as before elections, further worsen this situation. Political elites who control information and resources often take advantage of public ignorance to gain votes through promises that do not address the people's long-term needs. Money politics, as a common form of abuse of power, benefits only a small number of people, while the majority of society remains trapped in poverty and political powerlessness. This phenomenon further weakens Indonesian democracy, because citizens who should be the main actors in deliberative democracy instead become victims of such practices.

Low political literacy also worsens the inequality of power that exists in Indonesia. Without adequate understanding, society cannot optimize its rights within the democratic system, causing people to lose opportunities to criticize policies or participate in policymaking processes that could improve their lives. This strengthens oligarchic domination, where only a small number of elites have power and access to public policy, while the people remain marginalized and isolated from the political process. Mietzner (2015) explains that the political powerlessness of the

people further worsens social and economic inequality and distances Indonesia from the ideals of a just democracy. Therefore, it is important to improve political literacy among the public, especially in less accessible regions, so that people can actively participate in democracy and effectively fight for their rights.

To realize social justice in politics, an inclusive approach is needed through political education based on the values of justice and public ethics. This education must instill critical awareness, anti-corruption attitudes, concern for vulnerable groups, and active citizen participation. These values need to be taught from an early age through formal education and strengthened within the community. Political parties and state institutions need to include ethical training in cadre development to prevent the entry of political actors who are oriented toward personal interests. In addition, regulations that guarantee political transparency, such as openness in campaign financing and public participation, must be strengthened. The role of civil society, the media, and academics is very important in shaping a political culture that is fair and has integrity. Thus, society can become an active actor in democracy, encouraging politics that is more just and civilized.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that the reactualization of social justice as an ethical guideline in Indonesian political conduct is essential for strengthening substantive democracy. Social justice should not only be understood as a normative principle within Pancasila, but also as an operational standard for assessing political behavior, public policy, and institutional accountability. The findings show that corruption, elite domination, weak political literacy, and unequal access to public resources remain structural obstacles that limit the realization of social justice in Indonesian politics.

Theoretically, this study contributes to the discourse on political ethics by integrating Pancasila-based social justice with democratic accountability and civic participation. This integration shows that ethical political conduct must be measured not only through individual morality, but also through the extent to which political institutions protect vulnerable groups, distribute opportunities fairly, and provide equal space for public participation. Thus, social justice becomes a bridge between moral principles and practical governance.

Practically, the findings imply that the reactualization of social justice requires concrete institutional reform. Political education must strengthen citizens' critical awareness and anti-corruption attitudes. Political parties need to apply transparent financing and merit-based recruitment. State institutions must strengthen law enforcement, public accountability, and participatory policy making. These steps are important to ensure that political decisions do not merely serve elite interests, but also respond to the needs of marginalized communities.

This study has limitations because it uses a library research approach and relies on secondary sources. Therefore, it has not yet examined the direct experiences of public officials, political parties, civil society organizations, or citizens in implementing the value of social justice in political practice. Future studies are recommended to use empirical methods, such as interviews, surveys, or case studies, to examine how social justice is applied in specific political institutions, electoral processes, and public policy practices in Indonesia.

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