

Bourdieu's capital accumulation: Exploring efforts to strengthen President Joko Widodo's political legitimacy

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this article is to analyze the behavior of President Joko Widodo (Jokowi) in strengthening his political legitimacy based on Pierre Bourdieu's perspective. This article contributes to the development of Bourdieu's capital accumulation model in a factual context, especially by identifying the behavioral patterns of politicians in strengthening their political legitimacy. This article uses a qualitative research method through literature studies through various conceptual approaches and cases presented with analytical descriptions. This article begins the research by outlining Bourdieu's concept of capital accumulation and continues to analyze various types of capital in Jokowi's behavior. The findings of this article show that Jokowi's behavior in accumulating his capital to strengthen his political legitimacy began before his candidacy as President and continued to be strengthened during his term as President. Jokowi has a unique habitus compared to other politicians. This habitus is used to build cultural capital and strengthen social capital to build a national political network. Economic capital is slowly built through various policies that provide political legitimacy. Each of these capitals is accumulated into symbolic capital that provides a strong image as a popular leader. As a result, Jokowi succeeded in dominating the political arena and paving the way for power for his family, culminating in the election of Gibran as Vice President for the 2024-2029 period, despite various controversies and criticisms for weakening democracy.

Keywords:

capital accumulation; political legitimacy; Pierre Bourdieu

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INTRODUCTION

This article examines President Joko Widodo's (Jokowi) behavior in attempting to strengthen his capital to secure political legitimacy. The article focuses on Jokowi's two terms, or ten years, in office, from 2014 to 2024. During his presidency, he implemented various behaviors, both through policies and through his authority, as well as through

everyday behavior. It is important to examine how Jokowi's behavior maintains his strong political influence. This context can be analyzed using Pierre Bourdieu's theory of capital accumulation.

Discussing Jokowi's capital accumulation strategy is crucial to assess his success in gaining legitimacy. Jokowi is known for his simple figure and closeness to the people as limitless as other political elites rarely do (Andayani, 2022). His career started from the bottom as a timber entrepreneur, Mayor of Solo for 2 (two) periods, won the 2012 Jakarta Regional Election by becoming Governor, until finally he was elected President for 2 (two) periods. At the beginning of his career, Jokowi was characterized by a "*blusukan*" style to enter the culvert when he was the Governor of DKI Jakarta (Probel, 2024). The capital of simplicity, people, and coming from the middle class led him to be trusted by the majority of the people to lead the region to the country.

Jokowi's success in winning the political stage with a win rate of 100% (one hundred percent) without defeat. Despite many criticisms of his policies, based on a survey of political indicators, 75% (seventy-five percent) of the public is satisfied with Jokowi's performance (Ulya & Ihsanuddin, 2024). This success is certainly achieved through various massive infrastructure developments and social assistance programs targeting various segments of society. This success is also inseparable from Jokowi's various behaviors through his simple and down-to-earth habitus, which is considered different from many other politicians. Jokowi is an anomaly compared to other politicians who tend to be exclusive, not down-to-earth, and too much rhetoric without real action.

Jokowi is not just a political figure, his existence is able to change the political map of power that used to be controlled only by the elite. Such a condition is interesting to discuss in the perspective of Pierre Bourdieu who accumulates three important sectors, namely habitus, capital and arena (Bourdieu, 1997). Examining Jokowi's habitus is important to see how his social identity and life background in interacting with state power generate strong legitimacy. Likewise, the accumulation of capital carried out by Jokowi during his tenure both in the context of economic, social, cultural and symbolic capital. Furthermore, Jokowi managed to fight in the arena or field by utilizing his habitus and capital to maintain his power.

Many articles use Bourdieu's approach, but few discuss Jokowi's behavior from a Bourdieu perspective. Even articles that examine the relationship between behaviors holistically within the context of national politics are limited. For example, research by Zerri et al. focused on Jokowi's creative politics in interpreting political situations (Venerial et al., 2024). The article showed how Jokowi creatively conveyed his political message. This article had the limitation of focusing solely on Jokowi's political communication methods without considering other, more influential behaviors. This article differs significantly by focusing on examining Jokowi's behavior in a more holistic context, encompassing habitus, capital accumulation, and the arenas in which he maintains power. This article discusses Jokowi's various behaviors, including his interactions and communication, political policies, and political networks.

Based on the foregoing, this article will discuss two main topics. First, it outlines Pierre Bourdieu's theory, which focuses on habitus, capital accumulation, and the arena. Second, it will present the relationship between Jokowi's behavior and his habitus, capital accumulation, and the arena. This article will address the issue of how Jokowi can build strong political legitimacy, even after his presidency ends.

In simple terms, this article aims to compare how Bourdieu's theory of capital accumulation applies in factual conditions, namely to Jokowi's behavior. Implementing theory in real-world contexts is crucial to assessing whether a theory is effective or faces

obstacles to its impact. Furthermore, this article can serve as a reference for politicians to understand how Jokowi accumulates capital to build political legitimacy. Therefore, this article is not only theoretically useful but can also serve as a practical reference for politicians seeking legitimacy.

METHOD

This article employs a qualitative method with a conceptual and case-based approach (Northcutt & McCoy, 2004). This method is relevant because it will holistically investigate the relationship between theory and the phenomena under investigation. Primary data comes from official state documents, policies, or laws established by state institutions. Secondary data, on the other hand, comes from books, journals, news, magazines, and other sources relevant to this research. Data and information will be obtained through a literature review that has at least international and national accreditation (Mahmud, 2011). Furthermore, the obtained data and information will be analyzed descriptively and analytically to illustrate the relationship between Jokowi's practices and the perspective developed by Bourdieu. This article focuses on Jokowi as an individual to examine his habitus and capital. Furthermore, a focus on Jokowi's policies needs to be further emphasized to examine his various methods of accumulating capital and winning the arena. This article focuses on Jokowi's presidency, from 2014 to 2024. This period was chosen because, as president, Jokowi had the power to create policies that benefited him and wielded significant influence through his various political networks. However, this article does not rule out the possibility of going beyond the period before Jokowi's presidency to examine his habitus. This is because habitus cannot be viewed as a quick event, but rather as a relatively long period of formation.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Study of Capitalism in Bourdieu's Perspective

Pierre Bourdieu was born on August 1, 1930 in Denguin, France with a working-class family background. He studied at the École Normale Supérieure in the 1950s and studied philosophy with Louis Althusser (Wirawan, 2012). After graduating, Bourdieu taught at Moulins before finally serving in Algeria and conducting ethnographic research on the Kabyle people. After that, he briefly headed the Centre de Sociologie Européenne and later served as chairman of the sociology department at the Collège de France (Martono, 2012). His thinking was widely developed in analyzing social inequality, power, culture, education and politics which made him an influential figure in the context of capitalism and symbolic domination. Bourdieu is a French sociologist and critical thinker who is famous for his concepts of habitus, capital and arena in explaining how social structures and individual practices relate (Mustikasari et al., 2023). In fact, according to Bourdieu, the position of actors or individuals in the social space is not determined through class, but rather emphasizes the ownership of economic, social, cultural and symbolic capital (Wuriyani, 2020).

First, habitus. According to Bourdieu, habitus is a disposition system that shapes individual characteristics through various social experiences and socialization processes that have been carried out before, so that it is often perceived as a natural thing of every individual (Kambie & Latief, 2025). Furthermore, George Ritzer stated that habitus is a mental or cognitive structure owned by individuals and used in dealing with social life, so habitus can be produced and produced by social life (Wihardjo et al., 2024). In this context, on the one hand habitus is a structuring structure of social life and on the other hand habitus is a structured structure which is meant to be a structure that is structured by the social world. So that habitus can be interpreted as the result of practical actions that are not always

realized which are then believed to be natural and continuously developed actions in a certain environment that makes habitus the driving source of individual behavior, image and ideas (Fatmawati & Sholikin, 2020).

Second, capital capital. Capital is an important thing for actors or individuals to have in order to fight in the arena. Bourdieu provides 4 (four) capital that can be accumulated by individual actors, namely economic capital, social capital, cultural capital and symbolic capital (Takwin, 2003). Economic capital is the most obvious form among other types of capital. Bourdieu views economic capital in relation to the Marxian tradition that focuses on economic domination (Haerussaleh & Huda, 2021). This capital can be in the form of material assets such as money, property, and other financial resources that can meet needs and strengthen their social position. Then cultural capital. Cultural capital has a more complex discussion. At least cultural capital can be categorized into institutionalized cultural capital, realized cultural capital, and objectified cultural capital (Farid et al., 2021). Cultural capital is in the form of individual expertise which includes behavioral attitudes, speaking styles, appearance, way of getting along, and educational background related to the actor's personnel (Umanailo, 2018).

Next, social capital. Social capital is a relationship between individuals or groups that can be used to maintain or even improve their social position (Haerussaleh & Huda, 2021). Social capital has an important position to achieve a goal because it can be used to support economic capital and cultural capital. Social capital focuses on relationships, trusts and the various ways that actors use to strengthen, utilize and maintain these relationships. Social capital appears to explain the influence of social relations on the capital obtained by individuals. This concept sees individuals with the same economic and cultural capital acquire different capital because they take advantage of social relations. This can be found in social relations in the context of family, political parties, school alumni or certain communities.

Finally, symbolic capital. This capital is a resource related to prestige, honor or representation of individuals that can affect other individuals (Haerussaleh & Huda, 2021). Symbolic capital is often associated with symbolic power which is the ability to gain influence equivalent to physical or economic power with social recognition. This capital will increase trust, shape perceptions and change the view of the reality that occurs. That is, this capital is the accumulation of position, honor that is used to strengthen one's power.

Third, the arena. Bourdieu used the term arena (field) to replace the term society. He argues that social space consists of many arenas that intersect, face each other and have their own hierarchy and rules (Kambie & Latief, 2025). Each arena has its objective structure in the form of rules, convention positions, and visible interests in daily practice. This arena is a place of interaction between individuals to fight and compete for resources and capital.

Bourdieu argues that there are two forms of arenas, namely the arena of struggle and the arena of power (Kambie & Latief, 2025). The arena of struggle or field of struggles is an arena in which there is a fight between individuals in controlling capital and resources, so that large capital owners will tend to be dominant. The arena of power or field of forces is the arena of power relations that face each other and form a hierarchical position. Each arena has rules and resources that influence individuals in gaining or maintaining their power. These three things will be the knife of analysis of how Jokowi maintains his power.

President Jokowi's Strategy in Maintaining Legitimacy According to Bourdieu's Perspective

Jokowi comes from a humble background. His habits were formed in a middle-class environment that differed significantly from those of other political elites. Jokowi grew up

as a person like many in society, so his behavioral patterns tend to be similar to those of many in the middle class, characterized by simplicity, closeness to the people, and informal communication. This environment is an important starting point for gaining public trust, as the public feels they have a leader who comes from a background not far removed from the general public. Early in his career, after winning the 2014 election against Prabowo Subianto, Jokowi's face appeared on the cover of The New York Times magazine, with the phrase "a new hope" (Yatim, 2015). This wasn't just a magazine cover; it was Jokowi's identity that distinguished him from the political landscape dominated by a handful of elites. Therefore, his *habitus* creates a distinct image from many other leaders.

On the political stage, Jokowi cultivated a unique *habitus* by conducting "blusukan" (informal visits), a narrative of simplicity and unique media use rarely found in politicians. Jokowi began to build a narrative of simplicity by visiting markets, slums, and even entering sewers, a practice rarely seen in many other politicians. Jokowi's behavior aimed to build public trust and strong popular legitimacy (Venerial et al., 2024). Public hope was rekindled by the discovery of a figure who differed from other politicians born into upper-middle-class families who tended to be exclusive.

Jokowi's *habitus*, which has been going on since becoming the Mayor of Solo with the support of the PDIP Party, was actually attacked at the beginning of his leadership when he became President. The narrative built is that the Jokowi-Jusuf Kalla government is a puppet government, because of the statement of PDIP Chairperson Megawati who stated that Jokowi is a party officer or "*petugas partai*" (Istiningdias & Argenti, 2019). Jokowi countered this statement when he was nearing the end of his term as President. His support for Presidential Candidate Prabowo Subianto and Vice Presidential Candidate Gibran who are opposite to the candidates promoted by PDIP, namely Ganjar Pranowo and Mahfud MD, shows that he is not a 'party officer' who submits to the party's orders (Santika, 2024). In fact, these opposite conditions formed an open conflict between Jokowi and his family and the PDIP elite with acts that attacked each other and even tried to criminalize PDIP Secretary General Hasto Kristiyanto (Hamdi et al., 2024). The *habitus* formed and impersonated to Jokowi as a party officer is refuted by his actions. In this context, Jokowi has managed to build his *habitus* which is done naturally (both consciously and unconsciously) and continues to be done until the end of his term.

Jokowi's *habitus* cannot stand alone without actions that strengthen his capital. Jokowi also strengthens this capital, which he can potentially leverage to gain strong political legitimacy. At the very least, Jokowi strengthens this capital through his various privileges as President of Indonesia, which afford him various political powers and influence. Jokowi utilizes these privileges to strengthen his economic, social, cultural, and symbolic capital.

First, economic capital. The economic capital carried out by Jokowi is difficult to detect scientifically, but his various policies related to the economic realm tend to be appropriate if they are linked in the context of social capital. For example, by passing the Job Creation Law in various ways to using the Perpu to ratify the Job Creation Law. This is because Jokowi tends to develop social capital and symbolic capital to influence economic capital in maintaining his power. In the context of economic capital, Jokowi has an increase in wealth of around 66 billion Rupiah during his tenure as President from 2014-2024 (Muhid, 2024). This is seen in 2014, Jokowi's wealth was only 29.8 billion rupiah and then increased at the end of 2023 by 95.8 billion rupiah. However, the act of strengthening economic capital is not only seen from increasing wealth. Furthermore, there are many allegations that Jokowi uses state finances to finance his political campaign. In the 2019 election, the massive use of Social Assistance (*Bansos*) was carried out to encourage Jokowi's electability as an incumbent candidate. At least this can be seen that the increase in social

assistance that occurred in 2016 was only budgeted at 49.06 trillion Rupiah, while in 2018 it reached 83.91 trillion Rupiah. This is directly proportional to the increase in the electability of the President (Firmansyah et al., 2021).

The same scheme was also carried out when towards the end of his second term, Jokowi strengthened economic capital by utilizing Social Assistance to support his son who became Vice President. In 2022, the social assistance budget is only 460 trillion Rupiah, then in 2023 it will rise to 476 trillion Rupiah, and in 2024 it will rise to 496.8 trillion Rupiah. The use of social assistance is focused on areas with many voters, especially in political areas controlled by political opponents with the strategy of providing social assistance also focused ahead of the election (Syahadat et al., 2024). The politicization of Social Assistance became an interesting discourse in the Presidential General Election Results Dispute hearing and became the dissenting opinion of Constitutional Judge Saldi Isra against the alleged politicization of Social Assistance by Jokowi (Wicaksono, 2024). The politicization of social assistance continues to be carried out in almost every visit made by Jokowi when approaching the campaign period.

Second, cultural capital capital. Jokowi has built cultural capital in a structured and massive manner. Building on his middle-class roots, Jokowi has positioned himself as a humble and down-to-earth leader (Susilawati, 2014). During his tenure in the executive position, Jokowi tended to conduct *'blusukan'* to various parts of the country (Anggraeni, 2017). This was done to build a character close to the people. This style has been consistently employed, not just during election campaigns. This is demonstrated by his consistent visits to Papua 18 times during his ten-year administration (Setiawan, 2024). His focus on the development of underdeveloped regions has further strengthened his political legitimacy. With this strategy, Jokowi has succeeded in building legitimacy as a leader who is close to the people. Massive infrastructure development and development priorities during his reign resulted in strong legitimacy (Arini, 2024). One of the policies that dared to be taken in strengthening its legitimacy as the 'father of infrastructure' was to move the country's capital to East Kalimantan, which was named "Ibu Kota Nusantara" (Tim Detikcom, 2022). The cultural capital built by Jokowi has become a legitimacy received during his leadership as evidenced by a significant public satisfaction index.

Third, building social capital. Social capital is a capital that Jokowi possesses and has built well and has a significant influence on his efforts to maintain his political legitimacy. At the beginning of his administration in 2014, Jokowi strengthened the stability of his government by expanding his governing coalition, marked by the joining of the Golkar Party, PAN, and PPP (Efriza & Suryadinata, 2022). Efforts to strengthen the governing coalition are crucial to maintaining the stability of his power. This also continued in his second term, Jokowi expanded his power network by joining the Gerindra Party and Prabowo, who were previously his political competitors. This left the political parties outside the governing coalition only remaining the Democratic Party and PKS, and finally the Democratic Party joined Jokowi's government at the end of his leadership. Even his youngest son (Kaesang Pangarep), after only two days as a member of the Indonesian Solidarity Party (PSI), immediately became the party's general chairman (Rahayu, 2023). Jokowi's family also demonstrated its presence in the political arena, both regionally and nationally. At the regional level, Jokowi increased his political network through political dynasties with his son Gibran becoming the Mayor of Solo and his son-in-law (Bobby Nasution) becoming the Mayor of Medan (Fatimatuzzahra & Dewi, 2021). Even his brother-in-law, Anwar Usman became the chairman of the Constitutional Court who succeeded in changing the age limit provisions which resulted in the fulfillment of Gibran's administrative requirements as a

Vicepresidential candidate. Although the Decision resulted in various ethical violations committed by Constitutional Judges.

Jokowi's network and political power are strengthened and expanded by placing his confidants in strategic positions such as the TNI/Polri (Febrian, 2023). Furthermore, political networking is carried out at the local level with the appointment of Acting Regional Heads to fill vacancies that tend to be full of interests in expanding grassroots political networks (Aji, 2023). Jokowi's grassroots politics is also carried out by taking care of his political volunteers by providing positions in the government sector and state companies (Saragih & Sardini, 2024). His relationship with religious organizations also provided strength in mobilizing the masses to elect his son as Vice President. This success was then countered by Jokowi by granting mining concession permits to religious organizations which were considered as patronage politics (Suheri, 2025).

Every ruler will always have difficulty in dealing with the oligarchy. Even Winters thinks it's difficult to eradicate oligarchs (Winters, 2013). Although Jokowi has a habitus from the middle class and is considered simple, before entering the political stage, Jokowi was a businessman. His closeness to various conglomerate entrepreneurs is also shown through his various actions by implementing PIK-2 as a National Strategic Project with all the consequences of accelerating development that threatens the rights of the community (Siregar & Roestamy, 2024). Furthermore, Jokowi built relationships with entrepreneurs by opening up as much investment space as possible. This can be seen when Law Number 11 of 2020 concerning Job Creation was passed, which was later declared conditionally unconstitutional by the Constitutional Court due to the non-compliance with formal procedures in the implementation of public participation (Constitutional Court Decision No. 91/PUU-XVIII/2020). Instead of improving the process, Jokowi issued Perpu Number 2 of 2022 concerning Job Creation which tends to benefit entrepreneurs and ease of investment (Prasetyo et al., 2022). This is in line with the large amount of support from businessmen for Prabowo-Gibran in the 2024 election (Marison, 2024). In fact, this is in line with the acquisition of campaign funds which reached 207 billion Rupiah and was dominated by the private sector (Anugrah et al., 2025).

Fourth, strengthening symbolic capital. Symbolic capital can be interpreted as a conversion of the previous three capitals that provide social recognition in the form of prestige, honor or individual image (Roger, 2023). Jokowi's symbolic capital is built consistently and massively. At the beginning of his leadership, he was known as a figure who was close to the people, simple and a figure who was different from other political elites. He showed this in various ways, such as his informal way of communication, his blususu style and his appearance in public spaces. Jokowi uses the media to build his positive image in the public space. In 2019, Jokowi described himself as a gentle, humble, and warm person who attracts public sympathy (Adila & Eddyono, 2025). In Mietzner's analysis, Jokowi is referred to as a technocratic populist leader (Mietzner, 2015). He tried to combine his populist image of being close to the people, simple and anti-oligarchic with a more technocratic approach by trying to improve public services and reform bureaucracy.

Then by having a unique habitus and having strong capital capital, Jokowi must face the arena. Bourdieu considers the arena to be a social space used to fight for something to achieve its goal. The arena as a social space has its rules of the game and the actor can change the structure of the arena that he feels is beneficial to him with the authority he has (Wihardjo et al., 2024). Jokowi entered the arena with adequate capital. He departed not as part of the elite, but positioned himself as an ordinary person, simple and close to the people by utilizing his symbolic capital. Jokowi with all his capital won the arena easily. Jokowi's

second term came to power almost without any opposition in parliament. He embraced his political opponents and managed to control parliament up to 81.9% (Pahlevi, 2022).

Furthermore, Gibran's candidacy was previously a legal problem that based on the old rules did not meet the age limit requirements. Then the Constitutional Court issued Decision Number 90/PUU-XXI/2023 which changed the age limit requirements so that Gibran could advance as a Vice Presidential candidate (Aziz, 2023). The verdict was produced by various ethical violations committed by Constitutional Judges, especially Constitutional Judge Anwar Usman (Jokowi's brother-in-law). By collecting economic capital (distribution of social assistance), cultural capital (simplicity, proximity to the people, success in building infrastructure), social capital (political networks and oligarchs) and symbolic capital (technocratic populist leaders), Jokowi won the national arena for 2 (two) periods for him and 1 (one) period for his son.

Jokowi's efforts to dominate the arena have not been without obstacles. Numerous controversies stemming from his policies have impacted vulnerable communities. While the context of these controversies is difficult to substantiate legally, numerous studies and critical accounts from researchers and activists have examined Jokowi's work during his decade-long leadership of Indonesia. Despite these limitations, this remains a relevant discussion to examine some of the civil resistance to Jokowi's controversial policies. For example, the case of the bener dam in Purworejo which did not involve community participation resulted in a rejection movement on the grounds of spatial injustice experienced by the Wadas community (Wardana, 2022). The community is a victim of government policies that focus on fulfilling development targets for Jokowi's image in building infrastructure. Furthermore, Jokowi experienced an attack on his institutional cultural capital related to allegations of fake diplomas (Hidayat et al., 2025). Even now, this allegation is still a public issue that has not found the truth. Jokowi's success in building cultural capital has not been successful for activists and civil society organizations. This is shown through various statements by activists and civil society organizations who consider Jokowi a human rights violator and a corrupt leader (Pengurus YLBHI, 2025). Various problems were made by Jokowi that became a criticism of civil society, ranging from political dynasties, the entry of the TNI in the civilian realm, the weakening of democracy, the Papuan conflict, the weakening of the KPK, the poor management of the state budget, to criminalization and weakening of civil liberties (Aisyah et al., 2024). Activists and civil society organizations criticized the Jokowi government, which is increasingly distancing itself from democracy and getting closer to the oligarchy.

CONCLUSION

Based on Bourdieu's thinking, Jokowi's strategy in strengthening his legitimacy tends to be successfully mobilized by systematically converting his capital. His simple and populist habitus through his blusukan approach and narrative of simplicity became the foundation for his capital accumulation, which successfully provided strong public legitimacy. Economic capital, cultural capital, and social capital generated symbolic capital that Jokowi successfully accumulated and utilized to dominate the national political arena. Jokowi not only succeeded in securing his power during his two terms of leadership, but also succeeded in opening access to power for his son, although accompanied by many controversies and ethical issues. Although many limitations in proving its legal truth, this article attempts to explore how Jokowi's strategy in strengthening his political legitimacy by analyzing it based on Bourdieu's approach. This remains relevant in the scientific realm to see the implementation of Bourdieu's approach in the context of social reality by politicians. Therefore, this article will enrich political analysis in efforts to strengthen political legitimacy.

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