

The Politics of Age : An Important Key to Understanding Power Relation in Indonesia Culture

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Abstract

This article explores how age politics serve as a key factor in understanding power relations within Indonesian cultural society. Age-based stereotypes determine an individual's position within organizational structures and social classes. Through the use of Critical Discourse Analysis, this study examines various daily communication interactions. Through the use of Critical Discourse Analysis, this study examines various everyday communication interactions in families, communities, and institutions. Findings reveal that age politics systematically reinforce discriminatory practices, deeply rooted in social morality and institutional norms. Although there is a strong tendency to respect seniority, this dynamic is beginning to shift, especially in technology and creative fields, influenced by modernization and global values. Unfortunately, age-based stereotypes remain largely unchallenged in Indonesia.

Keywords: *Politics of Age; Power Relations; Indonesian Culture.*

INTRODUCTION

Age has become the cause of prejudice and discriminatory practices (Budi Irwanto; 2013). In fact, the way of judging someone based on age is as dangerous as racism. In Indonesia's diverse society, age is not just a number but also a symbol of status and power. Seniority based on age is often associated with authority and wisdom. This power is not only seen in the family but also in customary, governmental, and religious structures. (Anderson: 1990). In most families in Indonesia, age determines the hierarchy and distribution of power. Parents and older family members usually have greater authority in decision-making (Turner: 1998). Important decisions tend to be made by the oldest family members, reflecting the concept of 'elders know best'. In politics, age is also a requirement to occupy certain positions. This reflects the belief that age brings the experience and maturity needed for leadership (Engel: 1980).

The latest phenomenon on the issue of age is the determination of President Jokowi's eldest son, Gibran Rakabuming Raka as a vice presidential candidate. This has become a very big public issue. Apart from his process of entering the national political stage which is considered to have overhauled constitutional rules, his young age is the root of all public controversies. Many senior political figures

consider Gibran to be just a child who can't do anything. Being too young has become the cause of prejudice and discriminatory practices (Budi Irwanto; 2013).

A young individual is often considered to be inexperienced, unwise, and full of risk because there is no reliable evidence. On the other hand, an old individual is often considered slow, outdated, and weak against rapid adaptation and change. This age-based perspective is called Ageism, first introduced by Robert Neil Butler in 1969 in his writing, "Age-ism: Another form of bigotry" to show discrimination against those who are old. There are three elements, according to Butler, that are linked to ageism. First, prejudice against people who are old or elderly and the aging process. Second, various practices of discrimination against the elderly. Third, various institutional practices and policies that continue to perpetuate stereotypes against the elderly (Robert: 1969).

Although Butler's ideas relate to the older age group, his insight into age as the cause of prejudice and discriminatory practices can also be applied to young people. This is because young people are often attached to prejudice and experience discrimination precisely because of their "youth" (Budi Irwanto; 2013). This age politics runs in two directions, First, discrimination of older individuals towards younger individuals. Second, discrimination of younger individuals towards older individuals. However, sociological facts show that social organizations, government institutions, and many traditional and cultural organizations are controlled by older individuals, so that the values of "old people" remain dominant and young individuals remain objects that are regulated and engineered.

However, as time goes by, there is a different interest that develops to understand generational differences (Howe & Strauss, 2007). Although tradition still highly respects age, modernization and globalization have brought changes. Young people, especially in cities, may have different views on age and authority. This is because there are differences in knowledge in each era and differences in how to access that knowledge, which Foucault calls Episteme. There are different forms of knowledge that have been established as meanings for certain situations in each era, and are seen as typical knowledge dispositions, or as something normal. This authoritative and legitimate knowledge structure influences individual social practices, both in terms of thinking, speaking, and acting in a knowledge regime (Foucault, 1980). This study aims to explore more deeply how age politics determines the position of individuals in families, communities, and institutions? And why is age politics not too much of a problem?.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study uses a descriptive qualitative method with Norman Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis approach. Researchers will collect data at three levels, namely: family, community, and institution. For these three levels, data is obtained through direct observation and in-depth interviews as well as written documents and norms that live in the midst of society. The material of the data in question is language or text and its use in the practice of age politics. Technically, this Critical Discourse Analysis is operated in three stages. First, selecting the text that is the object of analysis. In this case, the language or text that is practiced in the family, community and institution.

Second, analyzing the form and production of language or text in discourse practices, such as how texts are produced, distributed, and consumed. Third, analyzing power relations in social practices, such as power relations, ideology, discourse hegemony, and examining the ways in which texts express traditions in a culture. Critical Discourse Analysis in the context of age politics will systematically explore the often blurred causal and deterministic relationships between (a) discursive practices, events and texts, and (b) broader social and cultural structures, relationships, and processes; to investigate how such practices, events and texts emerge ideologically shaped by power relations and power struggles (Fairclough: 1995).

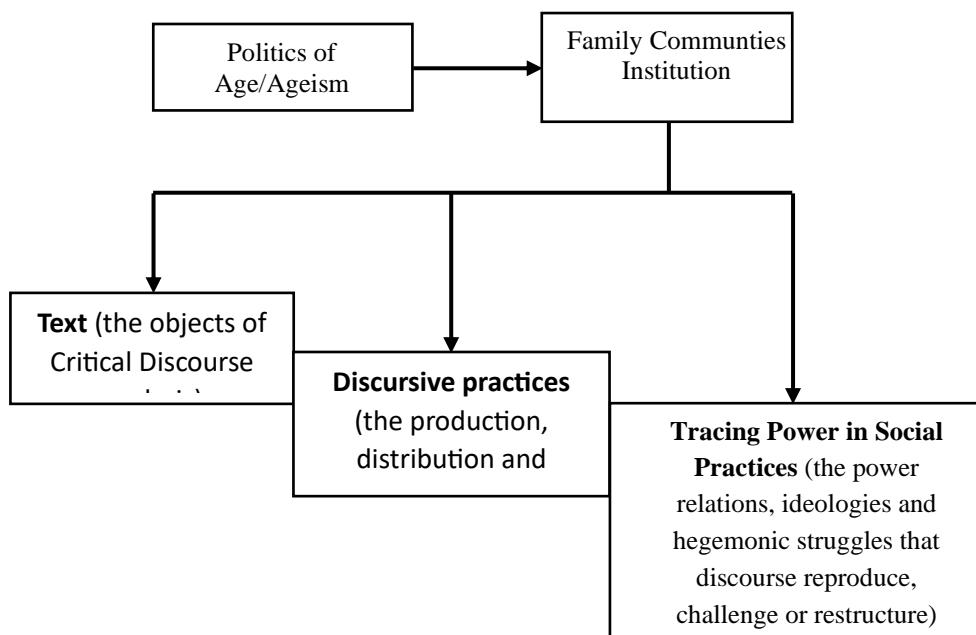


Figure 1: Adapted Norman Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis framework

Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis involves a multi-step methodological process. First, Textual Analysis: This step involves a close reading of the text, analyzing its linguistic features, such as word choice, sentence structure, and rhetorical devices. Second, discursive practice analysis: This step examines how the text is produced, distributed, and consumed. It considers how the text relates to other texts and discourses, exploring its intertextual relationships and the social practices with which it

engages. Third, social practice analysis: This final step places the text within its wider social and cultural context. It looks at how the text contributes to the maintenance or challenge of existing power relations and ideologies (Fairclough: 1995).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

RESULTS

Family

Age plays an important role in determining the dynamics of power in the family, especially in traditional societies. In Indonesian society, the elderly in the family are the center of everything, the authoritative figure, and the decision maker. In many cultures, the older generation is respected for their wisdom, experience, and emotional and economic stability. This often translates into a hierarchical structure where older family members, especially grandparents and parents, hold significant authority. Visually, the hierarchy of authority in Indonesian families can be observed during family meals. The plate and glass for the father are always more prominent with a larger size than the other family members. Likewise with the sitting position, the father and mother will be in a prominent position. The layout of the food menu is also the same, the main dish must be close to the father's reach. Even in families that are still very traditional, usually the father just opens his mouth and spoons food into his mouth because his plate is already filled with food. Old men often have more authority than old women or young men (Brenner: 1996).

Socio-cultural norms also further solidify the position of elders in the family, strengthening their position. Disrespecting parents can be considered a serious offense, resulting in social and even spiritual consequences. For example, disobeying parents' orders is often called "Durhaka", and this will befall the child throughout his life if he does not apologize. If one day the child gets an unfortunate fate, people will bring up that it was because he had disobeyed his parents.

Roles and responsibilities within the family are also divided by age. Parents, as primary caregivers, typically hold authority over their children. This authority is often justified by the parents' perceived responsibility for their children's well-being and future. The hierarchy among children is also divided by age. Older siblings may have some degree of authority over younger siblings, especially in terms of guidance and protection.

In the next stage in the development of children's growth and development to become independent individuals, the word "Parents' Blessing" must be obtained first. To choose a study program at college or choose a life partner, a child must get Blessing. In many Indonesian families that are still traditional, the issue of Blessing is the determinant of approval of the child's choice. Blessing is also usually very complicated because it does not only come from biological parents but also from the extended family. A comparison of the communication culture styles of eastern families can be compared with western families, as in the table below:

Table 1
Comparison of family communication styles in western and non-western cultures

Aspect	Western Cultures	Non Western Cultures
Communication Style	Direct and Individual focused	Indirect and family oriented
Decision Making	Individual autonomy	Family consensus

Community

Age significantly influences an individual's authority within a community or social organization. This influence varies across cultures and historical periods, but in general, older individuals are often perceived as having greater wisdom, experience, and stability. In traditional societies, older people are often considered centers of wisdom, with elders revered as repositories of knowledge, customs, and spiritual wisdom. Their age and experience give them significant authority and respect. Older individuals also take on decision-making roles, being consulted, especially on matters of cultural significance or conflict resolution.

In a community or social organization, such as a student organization, the hierarchy based on age is very prominent, this is often called seniority. Seniors are important figures, a place to ask and seek guidance on many things. Seniors are also hierarchically divided into several levels, and each level is a measure of how much influence they have, as in the picture below:

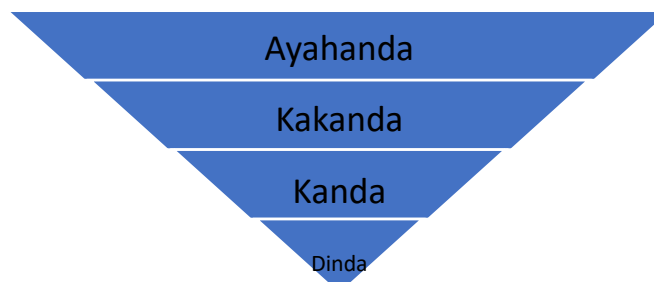


Figure 2: Hierarchy based on age and influence in a community or social organization

Ayahanda in the big dictionary of the Indonesian language literally means father, but the use of the word ayahanda in organizations, such as the Islamic Student Association (HMI) in Indonesia can mean a super senior figure. Ayahanda can mean a senior who is old and has a high political position. Ayahanda is often called to give an opening speech at big events of the community or organization. Meanwhile, Kakanda is a senior who is one level below the father. Kakanda is an important figure who may be holding an important political position but with fewer flying hours than the father. Next, Kanda, this figure is a senior who is still active in the organization, usually has a high position in the organization and has direct interaction with Dinda. And Dinda is the lowest hierarchy in the organization.

Institution

The influence of age in an institution reflects how individuals interact, make decisions, and navigate relationships. For example, younger individuals typically have less power and authority due to their lower position in the Institution's hierarchy. Younger individuals are more likely to have to take a back seat to those with more experience, contributing to a more top-down decision-making process. Meanwhile, older individuals with years of experience tend to hold more power, especially in senior or leadership roles. Their decisions and influence are shaped by their accumulated experience and knowledge, which often translates into greater authority, respect, and decision-making power.

Older individuals are often associated with experience, which can bring stability, wisdom, and the capacity to make better decisions. However, in some contexts, age can be associated with resistance to change or a preference for established ways of doing things, which can limit flexibility or innovation. Meanwhile, younger individuals are often more likely to be innovative or open to new ideas, which can give them influence in areas of change or technology adoption. However, they may not have the influence or credibility needed to put those ideas into practice without the support of their more senior superiors. Younger individuals need to work harder to build credibility and influence, often being overlooked or underestimated compared to their older counterparts.

DISCUSSION

Family

It was found that in Indonesian families, old age is often correlated with prestige, authority, and respect. Important decisions tend to be made by the oldest family members, reflecting the concept of 'elders know best'. In some cases, this reinforces the patriarchal structure, where the oldest male head of the family dominates important decisions, from children's education to choosing a spouse.

Table 2

Critical Discourse Analysis of Power Relations in the Family

Textual Fitur	Discursive practice	Social practice
Durhaka	Judgment of defiance of the expectations of parents as the owners of authority.	This reinforces the status quo of older individuals continuing to dominate and hinders the growth of an egalitarian culture within society.
Restu	Mandatory permission for children before deciding on important choices in their lives	This strengthens the authority of older individuals in limiting and inhibiting the independence of adult individuals in making choices.

Textual Analysis

The words “Durhaka and Restu” are an indication of how absolute the power of parents is over their children, and also a reflection of the condition of traditional society that still strongly relies on joint decisions rather than individual autonomy. There is also no text or vocabulary or social justification and public defense of the violation. The existing texts, such as Malingkundang, actually strengthen their older status quo. Unlike in the Western tradition, the culture of resistance has become a literary canon and a deeply rooted intellectual spirit.

In an egalitarian society, these two words do not become everyday discourse practices. Durhaka has no equivalent word and loses its sociological context. The closest is the word “insubordinate” or “not obedient”. However, this word is more suitable for the social context of someone who does not obey formal law. Likewise with the word Restu, the equivalent word is “approval” which has a more neutral meaning with a broader social context. The perception of both of these things refers to what the discourse system is like that is embedded in society (episteme), which has different meanings due to the different knowledge regimes that are in power at a certain time (archeology of knowledge) (Foucault: 1980).

Discursive Analysis

How are the words “Durhaka dan Blessing” produced, distributed, and consumed? Discourse according to Foucault is the ways in which knowledge is structured, disseminated, and received in society. It regulates what can be said and thought. For example, respect for elders in one society and egalitarian culture in another are ways in which knowledge is structured, disseminated, and received in society (Foucault: 1970).

Table 3
Discursive practices of power relations in the family

Who produced the discourse?	Target audience	Intertextuality
Parent	Young people	Durhaka and Restu will draw other texts as justification. For example, the text of the holy verse.
Young people	Parent	Older people are slow, less innovative, and tend to resist change.

Who produced the discourse? The origin of the text is certainly from older people, addressed to those who are younger, and vice versa. And often in its application it draws on other texts that have

ideological implications (see table 3). For example, in Islam, texts such as, "heaven is under the soles of the mother's feet" or "Allah's pleasure depends on the pleasure of both parents and Allah's wrath depends on the wrath of the parents", and many others, are justifications to strengthen the authority and position of those who are older. This intertextuality leads to absolutism, and does not give space to those who are young to be right, and in many cases, not all choices and decisions of those who are young are wrong, what happens is the opposite.

Social Practice Analysis

At this stage, Critical Discourse Analysis tries to understand the broader social, cultural, and historical context that influences the discourse (Durhaka and Restu). In addition to theological factors, patriarchal cultural and political economic factors also contribute and benefit those who are older. There are many cases of those who are younger trying to resist the "blessing of parents", but do not get a positive response and public support. Instead, they will be ostracized from the social interactions of the extended family. For example, the word "Silariang", which means a young couple who choose to marry without the blessing of the family must bear social and cultural punishment.

In the context of Western society, those who are young and independent do not need to ask for permission to make important choices in their lives, they do not know the word blessing. Instead, they see such things as shackles. As the German philosopher Immanuel Kant said, adults no longer need to be guided, either in thought, belief, and life choices. The weakness of individual autonomy in our society provides a way for those who are old to establish hegemony, and this hegemony is instilled even more strongly through culture and social norms. Interestingly, this ageism is not a problem in society, it is actually normalized as a standard of ethics and social norms.

Social change about ageism at the family level is also very slow. Indeed, many new generations have received higher education and liberal, secular, and left-wing thinking, but their numbers are too small. However, egalitarian culture is often not accepted in traditional cultures, so that those who are young when appearing in public with an egalitarian spirit will be considered ethically impolite by those who are older. If someone is too liberal, they are labeled as westernized, if someone is too left-wing, they are labeled as communist. Westernization and communism in Indonesian history are two things that are difficult to accept.

Community

If we look at Indonesian, also regional languages, there are many terms for older people. The words "Kanda, Kakanda, and Ayahanda" for example, refer to older people without any biological ties. This fact is not found in English, to refer to the same reality with only one word "brother". This fact underlines that communication events cannot be separated from cultural aspects.

Table 4

Critical Discourse Analysis of power relations practices in communities/organizations

Textual Fitur	Discursive practice	Social practice
Ayahanda	The word father in community or organizational discussion practices is attached to a super senior figure who is a former high-ranking politician.	Fathers are often examples and role models of success for new members of a community or organization. Fathers are usually regular contributors to the organization, and are often invited to open major events for the organization. In communication interactions, Fathers are difficult for Adinda to access directly, usually communication is established through staff or personal aides.
Kakanda	In the practice of community or organizational discussions, a brother is someone who temporarily holds a high political position, such as a minister or regional head.	Kakanda often becomes a regular contributor to every community or organization activity. Kakanda also often interacts directly with Adinda because he has a direct interest in her political position. And Kakanda is also often needed by Adinda for job vacancies
Kanda	Kanda in community or organizational discussion practices tends to be closer to Adinda because they are in the same management period.	The word Kanda in social practice is a figure who is still starting his career and often needs Adinda's help in many things.
Dinda	In the practice of community or organizational discussions, Dinda becomes the lowest caste, often ordered, directed, and even mobilized for the interests of Kanda, Kakanda, and Ayahanda.	Dinda said in her social practice often becomes a follower of interests, can be claimed as social capital by Kanda and Kakanda. But all of that is not free. On the contrary, Adinda also gets direct and indirect benefits from the existence of Kanda and Kakanda in political careers.

At the community level, older leaders are often seen as sources of wisdom and guidance. Age is associated with life experience, and therefore, older individuals have significant influence in community decision-making. Various community institutional practices and policies continue to perpetuate age-based stereotypes, both spontaneously and systematically. While we often hear older people say that the youth are the golden generation of the future, it is still the older people who have power in the community. This reflects the social belief that age brings the experience and maturity necessary for leadership (Willson: 2007).

History records that when the old leaders of a tribe or community declare war, it is the young who go to the battlefield to meet a tragic death. If within the community there are young people who advocate change and modernization, tension will immediately arise between tradition and innovation. A young individual is often considered to be inexperienced, unwise, and full of risk because there is no

reliable evidence. On the other hand, an old individual is often considered slow, outdated, and weak against rapid adaptation and change.

Institutions

In government and business institutions, age is often a prerequisite for certain positions, with the assumption that older age indicates experience and maturity. This creates an age-based hierarchy that can influence decision-making processes and the distribution of power. Great authority is the domain of the older, while minor technical matters are the domain of the younger. This hierarchy is often shaped by formal rules (e.g., seniority-based promotions) and informal cultural norms (e.g., respect for the elderly, generational gaps in values and communication styles). Foucault emphasized that knowledge and power are intertwined and mutually reinforcing. In his view, social institutions such as hospitals, prisons, and schools function as centers of knowledge that also reinforce social power (Foucault: 1980). According to Foucault, knowledge not only enlightens but also constrains and defines the boundaries of what is considered normal and abnormal.

Table 5

Critical Discourse Analysis of the practice of power relations in institutions

Textual Fitur	Discursive practice	Social practice
Senior Perspektif		
Senior vs. Junior Roles	The practice of discourse about senior vs junior discourse in the culture of many institutions is two things that negate each other. Seniors are the source of all exemplary behavior, while good juniors are those who always follow and take examples from seniors.	<p>Formal Hierarchical Structure in many organizations, age correlates with seniority. Older individuals typically occupy higher-ranking positions (e.g., executive, manager, senior professor, or senior physician), while younger individuals fill entry-level or junior roles (e.g., assistant, trainee, or associate). This age-based system often determines who makes decisions, who has the authority to lead, and who is expected to follow.</p> <p>Power dynamics Older individuals, with more experience, are generally viewed as having more authority and influence. They are entrusted with decision-making responsibilities and are often the ones who mentor or supervise the work of younger employees.</p>

Experience as a Marker of Authority	The practice of discourse on Experience as a Marker of Authority is a discourse that is almost accepted by all parties. In many job vacancies, experience is always required. Accepting experienced people is believed to be more profitable than those who do not have it. Although there are many facts that those who are young and beginners are more competent than those who are experienced.	<p>Expertise: Older employees often have more work experience, which can be seen as a major source of their authority. Experience is generally considered a valuable asset in many institutions, and the longer someone has been with an organization, the more respect they receive. This is especially true in professions such as academia, medicine, law, and engineering, where seniority and knowledge are inextricably linked.</p> <p>Tendency to be resistant to change: While experience is valued, it can also lead to a certain resistance to new ideas or practices. Older individuals may be less open to adopting innovative approaches or technologies, especially if they perceive these changes as undermining their authority or established practices. This can create tensions, especially in institutions that need to adapt to changing social or technological contexts.</p>
Mentorship and Knowledge Transfer	The practice of discourse on Guidance and Knowledge Transfer from the elderly to the young is a routine ritual in the work culture of many institutions. The senior is the source of knowledge and the junior is an empty vessel to be filled.	<p>Mentoring Role: Older employees are often expected to mentor younger coworkers. This reinforces the hierarchical structure because it places older, more experienced workers in positions of power over those newer to the organization or profession. Younger individuals rely on the wisdom, guidance, and connections of older individuals to advance their careers.</p> <p>Knowledge Transfer: In institutions where knowledge and expertise are critical (e.g., law, medicine, engineering, academia), older generations play a key role in transferring knowledge to younger generations. These relationships reinforce the power held by older workers while also ensuring that knowledge and practices are passed on to maintain institutional continuity.</p>
Cultural Norms and Respect for Elders	The practice of discourse on Cultural Norms and Respecting Parents is a discourse that is deeply rooted in social norms.	In many cultures, there are strong social norms that link age to respect and authority. In such environments, hierarchical relationships between

Not respecting parents is a big mistake that will invite public anger. In an institutional ceremony, for example, the names of seniors will be called first, followed by the names of juniors.

older and younger individuals are reinforced by cultural expectations, not just formal organizational structures.

Respect for Elders: Many cultures place a high value on respect for older individuals, especially in contexts such as family-run businesses, religious institutions, or traditional professions. Age-based respect can translate into an assumption that older individuals have more wisdom, experience, and, by extension, greater power.

Generational Conflict: However, respect for elders can sometimes create tension between generations. Younger employees may feel frustrated at being overlooked or undervalued because they are perceived as lacking the experience or authority that comes with age. On the other hand, older employees may feel that the younger generation is challenging traditional norms or disrespecting established practices.

**Junior
Perspektif**

Generational Differences in Work Styles

Generational Differences in Work Style in discourse practice are often a source of tension. The older generation always likes formality, while the younger generation prefers a relaxed work environment.

Older Generations: Older individuals may value stability, hierarchy, and experience-based expertise. They may be more inclined toward a top-down management style, where deference to authority and clear role delineation are emphasized.

Younger Generations: Younger workers, especially Millennials and Gen Z, may prioritize flexibility, inclusivity, and collaborative work environments. They may challenge traditional hierarchies and expect more autonomy in decision-making.

Younger generations may be more familiar with modern technology, communication tools, and innovative work practices, which can give them influence in institutions undergoing digital transformation or

		modernization. However, older generations may resist or feel less comfortable with change.
Age Discrimination and Bias	Discrimination and Age Bias in public discourse practices are never questioned like racism. Old people always get support from social norms. While the young do not get support from it.	Ageism In some institutions, age-based hierarchies can perpetuate ageism, where older individuals may be dismissed or overlooked in favor of younger, more “tech-savvy” employees. Conversely, younger individuals may face challenges in being taken seriously or promoted due to their perceived lack of experience. For example, in higher education, senior lecturers may be assigned classrooms on the first floor because it is physically too difficult for them to get to the third floor. Interestingly, the ones who typed the room assignment rules are young academic staff. Older workers may be stereotyped as resistant to change, slow to adopt new technologies, or lacking in energy. Younger workers, in turn, may be seen as inexperienced, entitled, or lacking in work ethic. These stereotypes can shape power dynamics and affect opportunities for career advancement, hiring, or promotion.
Leadership Tradition	In the public space, the practice of discourse on leadership remains dominated by those who are older. Although there is often a discourse that develops that the elderly are slow and difficult to adapt to change, the fact is that the older generation still holds control. And there is too much social capital and theological justification that supports the older generation in terms of leadership.	In institutions with strong age-based hierarchies, younger workers may find it difficult to move up the ranks quickly, especially if promotions are based primarily on seniority rather than merit. Conversely, older individuals may hold positions of power for long periods, delaying opportunities for younger employees to advance. When older employees retire or leave an institution, there may be significant changes in the organizational hierarchy. The transition of power from older to younger leaders can disrupt established norms, especially in institutions traditionally dominated by the older generation. This generational shift can sometimes cause tension, especially if younger leaders

seek to change long-standing practices.

Age-based hierarchies are embedded in many institutional structures, often shaping power dynamics, career progression, and organizational culture. While older generations typically have more power due to their experience and seniority, younger generations bring new perspectives, innovation, and technological fluency. These generational dynamics can create tensions, especially when new ideas clash with established norms. However, the ability to navigate and balance age-based hierarchies can lead to more effective institutions that value experience while embracing change. Recognizing the complexities of age-based power structures is key to fostering inclusivity and ensuring that all members of an institution, regardless of age, have an equal opportunity to contribute and advance.

On the other hand, certain sectors, particularly in tech and creative, tend to value innovation more and are therefore more open to leadership by younger generations. Modernization, urbanization, and global influences have begun to change this perception, with some individuals and groups pushing for assessments based more on competence than age alone. Research has found that while old traditions remain strong, there are signs of a shift in some groups, especially in large cities and among younger generations, toward egalitarian, merit-based power structures. Power is increasingly decentralized in modern societies, allowing for more individual decision-making (Foucault, 1978).

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study shows that traditional values that respect older age are deeply embedded in Indonesian culture. This creates an environment where age is not only a biological factor but also a key factor in understanding social structures and power. Age politics becomes very powerful because it intertextually calls on other texts to reinforce it. Although there is a strong tendency to value seniority, this dynamic is beginning to change with the influence of modernization and global values. Power is increasingly decentralized in modern societies, allowing for more individual decision-making. This study suggests that a better understanding of how age affects power can help shape more inclusive and dynamic policies and practices in the future.

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