

LEGAL REVIEW OF ELECTIONS REGARDING THE MECHANISM FOR ELECTING MEMBERS OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES IN INDONESIA

Desi Natalia Sihombing

Universitas Pertahanan RI, Indonesia. E-mail: desihombing05@gmail.com

Abstract

This study examines legal challenges in Indonesia's legislative elections by focusing on three interrelated issues: the crisis of meritocracy in political recruitment, the high cost of politics, and the application of the electoral threshold. From a constitutional law perspective, elections serve as a constitutional mechanism for realizing popular sovereignty as mandated by Article 1 paragraph (2) of the 1945 Constitution of the Republic of Indonesia. However, this study finds that the implementation of electoral regulations has not fully embodied the fundamental principles of elections that are honest, fair, transparent, and provide equal opportunities, as stipulated in Law Number 7 of 2017 on General Elections. Using a normative legal research approach incorporating statute, conceptual, and comparative analyses, this study assesses the relationship between electoral regulatory design and political actors' behavior. The findings indicate that legislative candidate recruitment remains largely dependent on personal loyalty and financial capacity, thereby undermining meritocratic principles and electoral justice. High political costs further limit political access for non-elite groups, weaken electoral integrity, and increase reliance on external funding. Additionally, the 4 percent electoral threshold, intended to streamline the party system, has reduced political representation and intensified tensions between systemic efficiency and the protection of citizens' political rights. This study concludes that these factors collectively shape a procedural form of democracy that falls short of the substantive ideals of representative democracy, offering a legal and policy-based contribution to evaluating Indonesia's democratic quality.

Keywords: *Democracy; Elections; Electoral Threshold; Financing; Meritocracy.*

1. INTRODUCTION

The development of the legislative body cannot be separated from the dynamics of the political system in Indonesia, which has continued to undergo changes since the beginning of independence. The establishment of the legislative body is based on the constitutional provisions in the 1945 Constitution of the Republic of Indonesia (UUD 1945), particularly Article 1 paragraph (2) on the sovereignty of the people, Articles 2 and 3 on the People's Consultative Assembly (MPR), and Articles 19 to 22 which regulate the functions, authority, and structure of the People's Representative Council (DPR). Because the DPR and MPR had not yet been formed at the beginning of independence, the legislative function was temporarily carried out by the Central Indonesian National Committee (KNIP) based on the Transitional Provisions of Article IV of the 1945 Constitution and the Vice President's Proclamation Number X of 1945, which granted temporary legislative authority.



The change in the form of the state in 1949-1950 through the 1949 Constitution of the Republic of the United States of Indonesia (RIS) gave birth to a bicameral legislative system with the formation of the RIS Senate and DPR. After returning to a unitary state through the 1950 Provisional Constitution, the legislative body operated under a parliamentary system until the Presidential Decree of July 5, 1959, which reinstated the 1945 Constitution and formed the DPR and MPRS without elections, strengthening the executive's dominance over the legislature. During the New Order era, the legislative institutions were stabilized through the 1945 Constitution and Law No. 16 of 1969 on the Structure and Position of the MPR, DPR, and DPRD, but in practice, the DPR remained subordinate to the President. The 1999 reforms fundamentally changed the legislative structure through four amendments to the 1945 Constitution (1999-2002), strengthening the authority of the DPR and forming the Regional Representative Council (DPD) as a representation of the regions. The position and authority of the legislative body were then confirmed through Law No. 17 of 2014 on the MPR, DPR, DPD, and DPRD (MD3 Law) as amended by Law No. 13 of 2019.

Indonesian political history shows that these institutions have often failed to consistently perform their ideal functions. During the Old Order, the legislative institutions were often under the domination of the executive branch, so they did not play an effective role as a control institution. During the New Order era, a similar situation

occurred on a more structured level, where the legislative function was weakened through centralist and authoritarian political mechanisms. Entering the Reform era, although democratization brought a new spirit of independence to the legislative body, various fundamental problems remained and hindered the realization of a strong, accountable, and representative legislative body.¹

The reform agenda has resulted in the strengthening of the legal framework for the legislature, but the implementation of the constitutional functions of the House of Representatives (DPR) has not yet shown the effectiveness mandated by the 1945 Constitution. Article 20 of the 1945 Constitution stipulates that the DPR holds the power to formulate laws; Article 23 of the 1945 Constitution gives the DPR the authority to determine the state revenue and expenditure budget together with the government; and Article 20A paragraph (1) of the 1945 Constitution affirms that the DPR has legislative, budgetary, and supervisory functions. However, this normative mandate has not been fully realized in institutional practice.

Various performance indicators show that the quality of legislation and oversight remains at an alarming level. Findings from the Setara Institute (2023) indicate that the achievement of the National Legislation Program (Prolegnas) during the last three periods has never exceeded 35%, raising questions about the capacity for legislative planning and completion. The DPR Performance Report (2024) also shows that of the 51 laws passed

¹ Sumardi, *Pengantar Ilmu Pemerintahan (Konsep, Teori, dan Aplikasinya)* (Tahta Media Group, 2025).



in the 2019-2024 period, 68% originated from government proposals. This situation shows that the DPR acts more as a *legislative endorser* than a *legislative initiator*, meaning that its constitutional power to formulate laws is not being exercised substantively.

The problems in the performance of the legislature show that the issue does not stem solely from internal weaknesses within the institution, but also from the upstream political process that produces the composition of the DPR. In other words, the quality of the legislative institution is largely determined by the quality of the political recruitment process through legislative elections as a constitutional mechanism for forming representation. Therefore, a critical assessment is needed of the extent to which the design and practice of legislative elections are able to respond to the institutional challenges faced by the DPR. Legislative elections, which are actually intended to strengthen the role and legitimacy of representative institutions, have in fact not been able to provide a solution to these institutional weaknesses. Instead of improving the quality of political representation, the various legislative elections held after the reform have actually shown a pattern of repeated failure. Many elected legislators lack the substantial capacity to carry out legislative and oversight functions, and the practice of money politics, which undermines democratic principles, remains strong.² This phenomenon shows that the

implementation of legislative elections in Indonesia has not effectively encouraged the formation of a legislative body that functions optimally as an instrument of people's sovereignty.

This phenomenon is marked by the fact that the public distrusts legislative institutions in Indonesia, as well as the failure of members of the House of Representatives (DPR) to carry out their legislative and oversight functions. According to the *Global Corruption Barometer* (GCB) survey compiled by *Transparency International*, the DPR is viewed by the Indonesian public as the most corrupt state institution. This survey was conducted in 2016, involving 1,000 respondents aged 18 to 55 years old spread across 31 provinces. The survey results show that 65% of Indonesians believe that the level of corruption has increased in the last 12 months. In the previous GCB survey conducted in 2013, the police were considered the most corrupt by respondents, while the DPR was ranked second.³ This assessment is influenced by the number of corruption cases involving legislators, both at the regional and central levels, as well as intense media coverage of these cases.

The high number of corruption cases in the legislature has a negative impact on public trust. Data from *Indonesia Corruption Watch* (ICW) shows that from 2004 to 2023,

² Tim Peneliti PUSaKO, *Konstitusionalitas dan Kerangka Hukum Pemilu 2024* (PUSaKO Universitas Andalas, 2021).

³ Transparency International Indonesia “DPR Paling Korup Menurut Persepsi Masyarakat Indonesia?,” *TI Indonesia*, 30 Oktober 2025, <https://ti.or.id/dpr-paling-korup-menurut-persepsi-masyarakat-indonesia/>.



there have been 76 corruption cases involving members of the House of Representatives. In addition, 61% of members of the House of Representatives for the 2024-2029 term have backgrounds as both politicians and businesspeople, which has the potential to cause conflicts of interest and *rent-seeking* practices.⁴ Meanwhile, after the enactment of Law Number 17 of 2014 concerning the MPR, DPR, DPD, and DPRD (MD3) as amended by Law Number 13 of 2019, there have been several waves of demonstrations directed at the legislative body. The waves of demonstrations, compiled based on the issues and scale of conflict intensity, can be presented as follows:

Table 1 Data on Waves of Demonstrations Directed at Legislative Institutions (2017-2025)

Year	Main Issue/DPR Policy	Type of Action & Scale	Number/Impact	Resolution/Response of the House of Representatives	Reason
2017	Corruption Issues and Regional Policies (Regional House of Representatives)	Local sporadic actions (anti-corruption, regional budget issues)	Not recorded nationally	Partial legal resolution at the regional level	The DPR has not yet addressed internal integrity; many DPRD members are implicated in corruption
2018	Discussions on revising the KPK Law and the Corruption Eradication Commission Various controversial bills	Limited student demonstrations	<500 participants per city	No follow-up from the DPR	The proposed revision of the KPK is considered to weaken the Corruption Eradication Commission
2019	Revision of the KPK Law and the Criminal Code Bill	Protests in Jakarta and 12 major cities	Thousands of demonstrators, dozens injured, hundreds arrested	The House of Representatives postponed the Criminal Code but passed the revision of the KPK Law	Revision deemed to weaken the KPK; legislation rushed and closed
2020	Job Creation Law (Omnibus Law)	National action (October 6-8) by workers and students	Approximately 5,918 arrested, > 200 injured	The House of Representatives passed the law; objections were submitted to the Constitutional Court	The law is considered to favor employers and weaken workers

⁴ Indonesia Corruption Watch, “61 Persen Anggota DPR 2024-2029 Merupakan Politisi Pebisnis?,” *Antikorupsi.org*, 30 Oktober 2025, https://antikorupsi.org/id/61-persen-anggota-dpr-2024-2029-merupakan-politisi-pebisnis?utm_



2021	Judicial review of the Job Creation Law at the Constitutional Court	Follow-up actions by workers/students	Decreasing scale (hundreds of cities)	Constitutional Court declares law "conditionally unconstitutional"; House of Representatives makes limited revisions	House of Representatives deemed not to have made substantial corrections
2022	Discussions on extending the presidential term / postponing elections	National action "April 11, 2022" (BEM SI, students)	Thousands of participants in Jakarta and other cities	No official decision from the House of Representatives; issue suppressed politically	The House of Representatives is considered indecisive in rejecting the idea of a third term
2023	Demands for wage increases and labor law reform	Labor demonstration in front of the House of Representatives (August 10)	Thousands of workers (KSPI Union)	House of Representatives promises to review the Job Creation Perppu	No concrete policy implementation
2024	Regional Election and Local Election Bill	Protests against the Regional Election Bill in Jakarta and several other regions	Dozens arrested, minor clashes	House of Representatives continues discussion with minor revisions	The House of Representatives is considered to be limiting local democracy
2025	Increase in House of Representatives allowances & the Penjompongan incident	Large-scale "17+8 Demands" protest, thousands of people nationwide	1 dead (Affan Kurniawan), dozens injured	The House of Representatives and the government reduced salaries from 104 million to 65.5 million and froze benefits	Inequality and public ethics

Source: Compiled by the author⁵

The recurring waves of demonstrations against the Indonesian House of Representatives (DPR RI) from year to year show the growing crisis of public trust in this representative institution. The increasing resistance of the community reflects the perception that the DPR has not carried out its functions of representation, legislation, and oversight in an accountable manner as required by Law Number 17 of 2014 concerning the MPR, DPR, DPD, and DPRD (MD3 Law) as amended by Law Number 13 of 2019, as well as in the provisions of Articles 20 and 20A of the 1945 Constitution. This crisis of confidence is evident in the public's rejection of a number of policies that

⁵ Menghimpun data dari; (Amnesty International, 2020), (Bawaslu, 2021), (CNN Indonesia, 2023), (Detik.com, 2024), (The Guardian, 2025), (Hukumonline, 2020), (Hukumonline, 2021), (Indikator Politik Indonesia, 2023), (Kompas TV, 2025), (Limputan6.com, 2023), (Mahkamah Konstitusi Republik Indonesia, 2021), (Reuters, 2025), (Tempo.co, 2022), (Universitas Gadjah Mada, 2020).



are considered not to reflect the aspirations of the people. The revision of Law Number 30 of 2002 concerning the Corruption Eradication Commission through Law Number 19 of 2019, the ratification of Law Number 11 of 2020 concerning Job Creation (and its amendment through Law Number 6 of 2023), and the polemic surrounding the policy to increase the allowances of members of the House of Representatives in 2025, are all indicators that the ongoing legislative process has not fully met the principles of openness, meaningful participation, and public accountability.

The main problems of this failure can be traced to three crucial aspects, namely the political recruitment mechanism, high political costs, and the application of the *electoral threshold*. The process of recruiting legislative candidates in Indonesia is still dominated by a system of patronage and political pragmatism, where loyalty and financial strength are prioritized over the competence and integrity of candidates.⁶ On the other hand, the increasing cost of politics has made legislative elections an exclusive arena for groups with large resources, creating inequality in political access. In addition, the application of the electoral threshold, which was intended to simplify the party system, has had an exclusive effect on small parties and minority groups, narrowing the space for political representation in parliament.⁷

Various previous studies have examined these aspects separately. For example, research by Firdaus & Rudiadi shows that the mechanism for recruiting legislative candidates in Indonesia is still not running ideally as stipulated in the political parties' Articles of Association and Bylaws (ART). In practice, the recruitment process often does not take into account the personal qualities and political competence of candidates, but rather emphasizes financial capital and personal proximity to party elites.⁸ Furthermore, Muslimin Ritonga and Raegen Harahap found that the change in the parliamentary threshold to 4% triggered new strategies by political parties in the process of recruiting legislative candidates, especially by involving celebrities (artists, musicians, and popular public figures).⁹ In addition, Ella and Wardani show that the need to win and retain seats through elections has made election campaigns more individualistic and expensive,¹⁰

⁶ Muhamad Nastain dan Catur Nugroho, "Relasi dan Suara: Politik Patron Klien Pada Pilkada Langsung di Kabupaten Grobogan 2020," *POLITIKA: Jurnal Ilmu Politik* 13, no. 1 (2022): 167-184, <https://doi.org/10.14710/politika.13.1.2022>.

⁷ Fikri Hadi dan Farina Gandryani, "Penguatan Kaderisasi Partai Politik Melalui Pemberlakuan Syarat Masa Keanggotaan Partai Politik dalam Pemilihan Legislatif," *Majalah Hukum Nasional* 54, no. 2 (2024): 157-180, <https://doi.org/10.33331/mhn.v54i2.400>.

⁸ Firdaus dan Rudiadi, "Rekrutmen Calon Anggota Legislatif oleh Partai Politik (Kajian tentang Kualitas dan Profesionalitas Anggota Legislatif di Parlemen)," *Eksekusi: Journal of Law* 5, no. 2 (2023): 203-219, <http://dx.doi.org/10.24014/je.v5i2.26284>.

⁹ Muslimin Ritonga dan Raegen Harahap, "Keterlibatan Selebriti Pasca Parliementary Threshold dalam Kontestasi Politik Elektoral di Indonesia," *Jurnal Pemerintahan dan Politik* 8, no. 3 (2023): 238-245, <https://doi.org/10.36982/jpg.v8i3.3320>.

¹⁰ Allen Hicken dan Joel W. Simmons, "The Personal Vote and the Efficacy of Education Spending," *American Journal of Political Science* 52, no. 1 (2008): 109-124, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/25193800>; I. Gede Sthitaprajna Virananda, Teguh Dartanto, dan Bintang Dara Wijaya, "Does Money Matter for Electability? Lesson Learned From the 2014 Legislative Election in Indonesia," *Sage Open* 11, no. 4 (2021): 1-14, <https://doi.org/10.1177/21582440211054492>



while parties tend to prioritize candidates who are likely to win, those who have strong financial capital and established social and political networks, rather than building organic capacity.¹¹ However, there are still few studies that attempt to link these three issues in an integrated analytical framework to explain why legislative elections have failed to strengthen the institutional function of the legislature in Indonesia. This is where the research gap lies, which is the basis for the importance of this paper.

This study offers a comprehensive analysis of the problems of legislative elections through an institutional approach, highlighting how the interaction between political recruitment, political costs, and electoral thresholds impacts the effectiveness of legislative functions. Thus, this study not only contributes to the development of electoral democracy studies in Indonesia, but also provides conceptual input for policymakers in improving the electoral system to be more equitable and functional for strengthening legislative institutions. Based on the above description, the research questions in this paper are: why have legislative elections in Indonesia not been able to strengthen the legislative institution, and how are legislative elections related to political recruitment, political costs, and electoral thresholds that contribute to this problem?

2. METHODS

This research is normative legal research that focuses on analyzing the norms, principles, and legal provisions of the 1945 Constitution (¹²) that regulate the implementation of legislative elections in Indonesia, as well as their implications for the functions of the legislative institution. This type of research was chosen because the main objective of the study was to examine and interpret the relationship between political recruitment mechanisms, political costs, and electoral thresholds within the framework of the legal and political institutional system in Indonesia.

The research approaches used are the *statute approach*, *conceptual approach*,¹³ and *comparative approach*.¹⁴ The statute approach is used to examine various legal provisions governing the legislative election system, the recruitment of legislative candidates, and rules regarding parliamentary thresholds. The conceptual approach is used to understand theoretical concepts related to electoral democracy, political institutions, and legislative representation. Meanwhile, the comparative approach is used to compare similar practices in several other democratic countries as material for reflection on the conditions in Indonesia.

The legal materials used in this study consist of primary, secondary, and tertiary legal materials.¹⁵ Primary legal materials are authoritative legal materials, meaning they

¹¹ Westminster Foundation for Democracy, *The Cost of Politics in Indonesia* (Westminster Foundation for Democracy, 2024).

¹² Muhaimin, *Metode Penelitian Hukum* (Mataram University Press, 2020).

¹³ Peter Mahmud Marzuki, *Penelitian Hukum* (Penerbit Kencana, 2007).

¹⁴ Muh Apar, *Metode Penelitian Hukum* (Universitas Sembilan Belas November, 2015), 15.

¹⁵ Johnny Ibrahim, *Teori & Metodologi Penelitian Hukum Normatif* (Bayumedia Publishing, 2007),

have authority or can be interpreted as the main source of legal materials used in this study:¹⁶

1. The 1945 Constitution of the Republic of Indonesia, particularly the provisions concerning people's sovereignty, elections, and the functions of representative institutions;
2. Law Number 7 of 2017 on General Elections, as the main legal basis for the implementation of legislative elections;
3. Law Number 2 of 2011 on Political Parties, related to cadre recruitment and party functions;
4. Law Number 17 of 2014 on the MPR, DPR, DPD, and DPRD (MD3 Law) and its amendments, which regulate the functions, authorities, and membership of the DPR;
5. General Election Commission Regulations (PKPU) and Bawaslu Regulations governing legislative candidacy, political funding, and parliamentary thresholds; and
6. The Articles of Association/Bylaws (AD/ART) of political parties as internal norms that influence political recruitment patterns.

Meanwhile, secondary legal materials are legal materials that can provide explanations regarding primary legal materials in the form of scientific literature, previous research results, journal articles, and books discussing the party system, electoral democracy, and legislative institutions. Tertiary legal materials are in the form of legal dictionaries, encyclopedias, and other supporting sources that provide additional understanding of the terms and concepts used.

The technique for collecting legal materials was conducted through library research, by searching various written legal sources and academic literature.¹⁷ Data was collected systematically to identify legal norms, principles, and practices relevant to the research topic. The technique for analyzing legal materials used descriptive qualitative analysis methods.¹⁸ All legal materials collected were analyzed in depth to describe, interpret, and connect the aspects of political recruitment, political costs, and electoral thresholds within the framework of the legislative election system in Indonesia. The results of the analysis were then compiled argumentatively to answer the research questions and draw conclusions about the extent to which legislative elections contribute to the strengthening or weakening of the legislative institution in Indonesia.

3. ANALYSIS OR RESULTS

3.1 The Crisis of Meritocracy and Electoral Oligarchy in the Political Recruitment Mechanism of Legislative Members

One of the fundamental problems in legislative elections in Indonesia lies in the political recruitment mechanism, which is not yet fully oriented towards meritocracy

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ Nur Solikin, *Pengantar Metodologi Penelitian Hukum* (Penerbit Qiara Media, 2021), 122.

¹⁸ Irawan, *Logika dan Prosedur Penelitian: Pengantar Teori dan Panduan Praktis Penelitian Sosial bagi Mahasiswa dan Peneliti Pemula* (STIA-LAN, 1999), 60.



and representative capacity. In the Indonesian party system, the process of recruiting legislative candidates tends to be closed, elitist, and oriented towards the short-term interests of political parties. This is in line with the provisions of Article 172 of Law Number 7 of 2017 in conjunction with Law Number 7 of 2023 concerning General Elections, which stipulates that political parties are the participants in elections for members of the DPR, provincial DPRD, and regency/city DPRD. As a democratic country, Indonesia does indeed mandate political parties as the main entities in the recruitment process for prospective representatives. However, in practice, this mechanism often strengthens the dominance of party elites rather than expanding inclusive political participation.

Within the framework of legal and institutional theory, political parties should ideally function as arenas for political education, interest aggregation, and the regeneration of future national leaders. This role is normatively emphasized in Law No. 2 of 2011 on Political Parties, particularly Article 1 point 4 and Article 11, which regulate the obligations of parties in carrying out democratic regeneration. Conceptually, political parties are *mirrors of democracy*, reflecting the political aspirations and social diversity of society. However, in reality, the recruitment of legislative candidates is carried out through a closed mechanism dominated by personal connections, political loyalty, and financial contributions. This condition reveals a deviation between normative ideals and the institutional practices of parties.¹⁹ Most political parties in Indonesia recruit legislative candidates based on personal connections, political loyalty, and financial contributions, rather than on the candidates' abilities, integrity, or representative track records.²⁰ As a result, this process fails to produce legislative cadres who truly understand the needs of their constituents. The candidate selection mechanism is often not in line with the aspirations of the people and instead highlights the interests of the party.²¹ This condition illustrates a deeper structural problem, namely the strengthening of oligarchy within political parties. Referring to the analysis by Hadiz and Robison,²² regarding oligarchy in Indonesia, the structure of parties is influenced by elites who control political and economic resources, so that recruitment authority is used to maintain their dominance. From a legal perspective, this indicates a violation of the principles of internal party democracy that should be enshrined in the party's statutes and bylaws, as required by Articles 19 and 20 of Law No. 2 of 2011. The party's AD/ART should

¹⁹ Moch. Nurhasim, "Potensi Pelanggaran Etik Pada Pemilu Paralel 2024," *Jurnal Etika dan Pemilu* 7, no. 1 (2021): 25-45.

²⁰ Sri Purwanti Budi Utami, "Peran Partai Politik Lokal dalam Membangun Otonomi Khusus Papua Pasca Putusan Mahkamah Konstitusi Nomor 41/PUU-XVII/2019 tentang Pembentukan Partai Politik Lokal," *Cita Hukum Indonesia* 1, no. 1 (2022): 16-31, <https://doi.org/10.57100/chi.v1i1.6>.

²¹ Irma Dwi Fahriyani dan Suranto, "Pelaksanaan Undang-Undang Nomor 7 Tahun 2017 tentang Pemilihan Umum Terkait dengan Rekrutmen Calon Legislatif oleh Partai Politik di Kabupaten Sukoharjo," *Res Publica: Jurnal Hukum dan Kebijakan Publik* 3, no. 1 (2019): 63-75, <https://doi.org/10.20961/respublica.v3i1.45594>.

²² Vedi R. Hadiz dan Richard Robison, "The Political Economy of Oligarchy and the Reorganization of Power in Indonesia," *Indonesia*, no. 96 (2013): 35-57, <https://doi.org/10.5728/indonesia.96.0033>.



be a normative instrument for regulating cadre development, candidate selection, and democratic decision-making, but its implementation tends to be formalistic and does not bind the party elite. In this framework, political parties are no longer an arena for competition between ideas and national concepts, but rather a venue for negotiations between elites based on patron-client logic and the accumulation of political capital.

The impact of this elitist recruitment pattern is very significant for the quality of representative democracy. Legislative members who are born out of the patronage system tend to have short-term political orientations and low commitment to the interests of their constituents. They are more loyal to party structures and political sponsors than to the public mandate they carry. As Mietzner²³ points out in his study on democratization in Indonesia, weak party regeneration has resulted in a parliament filled with politicians with low capacity and high dependence on party elites, which ultimately hinders effective oversight and legislative functions. This phenomenon shows that the crisis of meritocracy within parties is not only an internal organizational problem, but also has direct implications for the overall quality of democratic governance.

In addition, the open proportional election system that has been implemented since 2009 has exacerbated costly intra-party competition. In this system, legislative candidates compete not only between parties, but also with their own party colleagues to obtain the most votes. According to a survey by Perludem (Association for Elections and Democracy),²⁴ this system has triggered a significant increase in campaign costs, strengthened politicians' dependence on external funding sources, and weakened the function of ideological regeneration. In this context, Indonesian democracy faces a paradox: procedurally, it appears inclusive and competitive, but substantively, it actually strengthens oligarchy and narrows the space for meritocracy. The structural conditions that exacerbate this political recruitment problem cannot be separated from the institutional design of elections and the requirements for political party participation set by the General Elections Commission (KPU). As the institution authorized to organize elections, the KPU stipulates that political parties participating in elections must have leadership structures in all provinces, in at least 75% of regencies/cities, and 50% of subdistricts, as well as permanent offices and membership spread nationwide. These provisions, as stipulated in Law Number 7 of 2017 and KPU Regulation Number 4 of 2022, are intended to ensure the professionalism and capacity of political parties at the national level. However, in reality, these requirements have significant structural and economic implications: political parties need enormous financial resources and organizational infrastructure

²³ Marcus Mietzner, "Party Financing in Post-Soeharto Indonesia: Between State Subsidies and Political Corruption," *Contemporary Southeast Asia* 29, no. 2 (2007), 238-263, <https://doi.org/10.1353/csa.2007.0030>.

²⁴ Perludem, "Evaluasi Sistem Pemilu Proporsional Terbuka di Indonesia dan Dampaknya terhadap Fragmentasi Partai di Pemilu 2024," *Jurnal Politik Indonesia* 11, no. 1 (2022): 79-95, <https://doi.org/10.20473/jpi.v11i1.71891>.



to meet all of these administrative requirements.²⁵

This phenomenon also explains why reform-era parties based on values, such as the Labor Party or the Ummat Party, have struggled to win seats in parliament, while parties inherited from the New Order, such as Golkar, PDIP, and Demokrat, continue to dominate the national political structure. According to data from the General Elections Commission,²⁶ of the 18 parties that participated in the 2024 elections, only nine passed the 4% parliamentary threshold, and all of them were old parties that were

already financially and structurally established.²⁷ The phenomenon of the dominance of old parties in the 2024 election results empirically shows that the political recruitment system in Indonesia is still trapped in a narrow elite circulation.

Furthermore, this reality weakens the essence of substantive democracy, which demands fair, participatory, and idea-based political competition. When political parties transform into pragmatic vehicles oriented towards electability and capital accumulation, political idealism and the process of cadre development, which should be the spirit of democracy, are marginalized. Normatively, the articles of association () of every political party in Indonesia are required to have AD/ART as the legal basis of the organization, as stipulated in Articles 19 and 20 of Law Number 2 of 2011 concerning Political Parties. The AD/ART should be an ethical and structural guideline for the implementation of cadre recruitment, democratic decision-making, and leadership regeneration within the party. However, when compared with the empirical results of the 2024 elections, in which nine old parties continued to dominate parliament, it is clear that the normative substance of the AD/ART is often not implemented substantively, but only administratively and symbolically.

Most major parties, such as PDI Perjuangan, Golkar, Gerindra, and Demokrat, formally include commitments to internal democracy, transparency, and meritocratic cadre development in their AD/ART. For example, the PDI Perjuangan AD/ART (Congress V, 2019)²⁸ emphasizes the importance of "tiered and continuous cadre development based on the ideology of Pancasila 1 June 1945." Similarly, the Golkar Party in its 2020 AD/ART²⁹ states that the recruitment of administrators and legislative candidates must be "based on achievement, dedication, loyalty, and integrity." However, in practice, the selection process for legislative candidates often shifts into a transactional and elitist process, where personal connections, political patronage, and

²⁵ Keputusan Komisi Pemilihan Umum Nomor 1204 Tahun 2024 tentang Penetapan Ambang Batas Perolehan Suara Sah Secara Nasional.

²⁶ Komisi Pemilihan Umum Republik Indonesia, "Verifikasi Partai Politik Peserta Pemilu 2024," diakses pada 30 Oktober 2025, <https://www.kpu.go.id/berita/baca/8705/verifikasi-partai-politik-peserta-pemilu-2024>.

²⁷ Komisi Pemilihan Umum Republik Indonesia, "Hasil Pemilu 2024: Partai Lama Masih Kuat," diakses pada 30 Oktober 2025, <https://www.kpu.go.id/berita/baca/9472/hasil-pemilu-2024-partai-lama-masih-kuat>.

²⁸ Anggaran Dasar dan Anggaran Rumah Tangga Partai Demokrasi Indonesia Perjuangan Tahun 2019 (Kongres V Bali).

²⁹ Anggaran Dasar dan Anggaran Rumah Tangga Partai Golkar 2019 (Musyawarah Nasional X).



financial contributions play a greater role than the capacity and integrity of cadres.

The gap between the ideal AD/ART and oligarchic practices shows that the party's institutional structure has failed to function as a meritocratic mechanism. The results of the 2024 elections reinforce this indication: only parties with strong power networks and political capital are able to survive in parliament. Conversely, new parties such as the Labor Party and the Ummat Party, whose AD/ART³⁰ emphasizes the values of social representation and political morality, have found it difficult to break through the electoral threshold. Conceptually, this shows a negative correlation between the substantive implementation of AD/ART and the electoral strength of parties. This means that parties that strive to uphold idealistic values in recruitment often lose out in a pragmatic and costly political system. In other words, Indonesia's electoral mechanism does not provide incentives for parties to truly implement internal democracy as stipulated in their AD/ART.

According to Mietzner,³¹ and Aspinall & Berenschot,³² the weak enforcement of AD/ART within Indonesian parties is the root cause of the strengthening of party oligarchy. Internal party rules are not implemented as instruments of control over the elite, but are instead used to legitimize their dominance. As a result, large parties with significant resources are able to maintain power by ignoring the internal democratic mechanisms that should form the basis of political meritocracy. There is a strong correlation between the failure to implement party AD/ART and the crisis of meritocracy in the political recruitment of legislative members. The AD/ART, which should be an instrument of internal democratization, has instead become a formal document that is powerless against the logic of patronage and money politics. The dominance of the old parties in the 2024 election results is not merely a reflection of electoral strength, but also a direct consequence of the weak internalization of AD/ART values in the process of recruiting cadres and legislative candidates.

Legally, the open proportional election system design that has been in effect since 2009 has deepened this problem. This system requires legislative candidates to compete not only between parties but also within parties, thereby massively increasing political costs. Perludem's study notes that intra-party competition triggers dependence on external funds, weakens ideological cadre development, and exacerbates patronage practices. From the perspective of constitutional law theory, this situation contradicts the principles of elections as stipulated in Article 22E paragraph (1) of the 1945 Constitution of the Republic of Indonesia and the principles of fairness and openness in Law Number 7 of 2017.

The administrative requirements for political parties participating in elections,

³⁰ Anggaran Dasar dan Anggaran Rumah Tangga Partai Ummat Tahun 2021; Anggaran Dasar dan Anggaran Rumah Tangga Partai Buruh Tahun 2022.

³¹ Marcus Mietzner, *Money, Power, and Ideology: Political Parties in Post-Authoritarian Indonesia* (NUS Press, 2013).

³² Edward Aspinall dan Ward Berenschot, *Democracy for Sale: Elections, Clientelism, and the State in Indonesia* (Cornell University Press, 2019).



as stipulated in Law Number 7 of 2017 and detailed in KPU Regulation Number 4 of 2022, further emphasize this structural problem. The provisions regarding the obligation to have management in all provinces, at least 75% of regencies/cities, and 50% of sub-districts have significant financial and political consequences. Normatively, this rule is intended to ensure the professionalism of parties; but empirically, this provision benefits large parties with considerable resources and makes it difficult for small or new parties to compete in the context of electoral democracy. Meanwhile, established democracies such as Germany and the Netherlands implement competency-based recruitment mechanisms and internal party openness, resulting in more representative parliaments. This comparison confirms that the weak implementation of legal norms in political recruitment in Indonesia is at the root of the problems of meritocracy and representation.

The quality of democracy in Indonesia is not only determined by electoral mechanisms alone, but also by the structural configuration that shapes the political behavior of actors and institutions. In the context of legislative elections, the complexity of Indonesian democracy stems from the interrelationship between three main factors: money politics, pragmatic party recruitment, and the application of electoral thresholds. These three factors reinforce each other in forming a procedural democratic system, but one that lacks representative substance. Normatively, Indonesia's democratic system is based on the principle of "*one person, one vote*" as guaranteed in Article 22E of the 1945 Constitution and elaborated in Law Number 7 of 2017 in conjunction with Law Number 7 of 2023 concerning General Elections. However, in practice, the principle of vote equality has opened the door to *vote buying* as an effective electoral strategy.

The open proportional system strengthens intra-party competition, encouraging candidates to build direct relationships with voters through material exchanges rather than ideological ones. Thus, democracy, which is intended to expand participation, has instead turned into a transactional arena, where the people's votes are treated as a political commodity. This is a form of patron-client relationship that is not based on *programmatic* linkage, but rather on short-term transactions between candidates (patrons) and voters (clients). This pattern weakens political accountability because voters no longer assess candidates based on their policy vision, but rather on the direct benefits they receive. Structurally, this practice of money politics has implications for the degradation of the quality of representation, because those elected are not the most competent or the most honest, but those who are best able to finance their campaigns. The link between money politics and internal party recruitment mechanisms exacerbates the problem. After the reform, many political parties experienced *the oligarchization of democracy*, in which party elites controlled the recruitment process through patronage and financial power. Constitutional law research shows that this condition has an impact on the reduction of the constitutional function of parties as a means of political education (Article 1 paragraph 1 of the Political Parties Law), because the selection of legislative candidates is no longer based on meritocracy, but



rather on financial capacity and electoral appeal.

The situation is exacerbated by the parliamentary threshold as stipulated in Article 414 paragraph (1) of Law No. 7 of 2017 in conjunction with Law No. 7 of 2023, which requires a minimum of 4% of the national valid votes for a party to obtain seats in the DPR. Normatively, this policy is intended to simplify the party system and increase the effectiveness of government. However, empirically and juridically, this provision creates electoral exclusion against small parties and narrows political plurality, making democracy procedurally competitive but not substantively inclusive. In this context, the threshold provision has strengthened the dominance of large parties and limited the political rights of minority groups, an implication that raises questions about the consistency of this policy with the principle of people's sovereignty in Article 1 paragraph (2) of the 1945 Constitution.

The impact of an unequal electoral structure also affects the position of the Regional Representative Council (DPD). Constitutionally, the DPD is positioned as an independent representation of the regions (Articles 22C and 22D of the 1945 Constitution). However, in practice, DPD candidates often have to follow the logic of pragmatic and costly competition. Some even informally affiliate themselves with parties to obtain logistical support, thereby undermining the principle of regional representation guaranteed by the constitution. In other words, the electoral threshold system has strengthened the dominance of large parties and narrowed the plurality of political ideas in the representative space. Furthermore, this complex electoral structure also affects the position of the Regional Representative Council (DPD).

Constitutionally, DPD members are elected independently to represent regional interests. However, political reality shows that DPD candidates often have to adapt to the pragmatic and costly logic of legislative competition. Some of them are even affiliated with political parties, either formally or informally, in order to obtain logistical support and voter networks. This weakens the principle of *regional representation* and confirms how electoral political chaos has spread to all levels of representation.

This situation also indicates that large parties form unwritten alliances to maintain their monopoly on access to state resources and public office, while closing opportunities for small parties and civil society to compete on an equal footing. With the support of regulations such as electoral thresholds and strict party verification mechanisms, Indonesia's democratic structure indirectly institutionalizes political inequality. The implications of this configuration are profound. Indonesian democracy has become procedurally inclusive but substantively exclusive, a condition in which the people have the right to vote, but their choices have less and less influence on the outcome of representation. In such conditions, as Guillermo O'Donnell (1994) reminds us, democracy changes from a *delegative democracy* (³³) to a *delegative democracy*:

³³ G. O'Donnell, "Delegative Democracy," *Journal of Democracy* 5, no. 1 (1994): 55-69, <https://doi.org/10.1353/jod.1994.0010>.



a system in which the legitimacy of the people is only used to strengthen the power of the elite without adequate control mechanisms.

3.2 Party Pragmatism: High-Cost Politics and Electoral Thresholds

The implementation of electoral politics in Indonesia has always been closely related to transactional politics and has triggered the phenomenon of high transactional political costs. There are two main factors that cause high political costs in Indonesia during general elections. First, there are transactions between legislative candidates and the political parties that will support them, in which legislative candidates are required to contribute funds to the party in order to be nominated. Second, there is the emergence of money politics, in which legislative candidates must spend large sums of money to directly "buy" votes.³⁴

In addition to transactional politics between political parties and legislative candidates, high political costs also occur due to vote buying among voters. Although there are prohibitions and threats of sanctions in the election rules, the series of alleged vote buying that always occurs shows that such prohibitions and threats of sanctions are not effective enough.³⁵ Political costs are estimated to always increase in every general election, as follows:

Table 2 Estimated Costs Incurred by Legislative Candidates (2009-2024 Period)

Election Period	Estimated Costs Incurred
2009	Rp250,000,000.00 (Two hundred fifty million rupiah)
2014	Rp1,180,000,000.00 - Rp4,600,000,000.00 (One point eighteen billion to four point six billion rupiah)
2019	Varies, IDR 2,000,000,000.00 (Two billion rupiah) to IDR 20,000,000,000.00 - IDR 25,000,000,000.00 (Twenty billion to twenty-five billion)
2024	At least Rp200,000,000.00 (two hundred million rupiah) and at most around Rp160,000,000,000.00 (one hundred sixty billion rupiah)

Source: (Compiled by the Author, 2025)³⁶

The sharp increase in political costs in the last four election periods in Indonesia is the most concrete indication of the transformation of electoral democracy, which is increasingly being co-opted by capital forces. Based on various studies and empirical

³⁴ Neneng Rohmah, Susi Dian Rahayu, dan Chanifia Izza Millata, "Biaya Politik: Oligarki, Dinasti Politik, dan Korupsi," *Masyarakat Indonesia* 50, no. 1 (2024): 45-59 <https://doi.org/10.55981/jmi.2024.8673>.

³⁵ Almas Ghaliya Putri Sjafrina, "Dampak Politik Uang Terhadap Mahalnya Biaya Pemenangan Pemilu dan Korupsi Politik," *INTEGRITAS Jurnal Antikorupsi* 5, no. 1 (2019): 43-53, <https://doi.org/10.32697/integritas.v5i1.389>.

³⁶ Nilai tukar 1 Dolar Amerika sama dengan Rp. 15.000,- digunakan di seluruh laporan ini. Kurnia Yunita Rahayu dan Nikolaus Harbowo, "The Political Costs of Legislative Candidates Facing the 2024 Elections Are Increasing," *Kompas*, <https://www.kompas.id/baca/english/2023/12/07/en-biaya-politik-caleg-hadapi-pemilu-2024-membengkak>.



reports, the cost of nominating legislative members has increased dramatically from around Rp 250 million in the 2009 elections to between Rp 1.18 billion and Rp 4.6 billion in the 2014 elections, then jumped to between Rp 2 and Rp 25 billion in the 2019 elections, and even reached the extreme range of Rp 200 million to Rp 160 billion in the 2024 elections. This exponential increase in costs shows that political contestation in Indonesia has become capital intensive, where access to political office is determined more by financial capacity than by the representative capacity or moral integrity of candidates.

According to the Ministry of Home Affairs,³⁷ state subsidies to political parties remain stagnant at Rp 1,000 per valid vote. This amount is insufficient to finance cadre development or political education as mandated by Article 11 of Law No. 2 of 2011 on Political Parties. As a result, parties must seek alternative sources of funding through legislative candidates, businesspeople, or external sponsors. This dependence gives rise to a political patronage relationship between party elites and funders, where loyalty is exchanged for access to candidacy. A report by the North Tapanuli Regency KPU³⁸ confirms that money politics has become a common practice and is even considered a form of "affection" between candidates and voters. This phenomenon shows the normalization of electoral corruption at the grassroots level. Pragmatic voters reflect a larger structure, a system in which every aspect of politics has economic exchange value. This practice is in line with the concept of *clientelism* in Kitschelt's political theory,³⁹ namely the short-term exchange relationship between patrons (candidates) and clients (voters) that erodes programmatic accountability.

Financial pressures in the electoral system encourage political parties to choose candidates who are able to finance themselves, rather than ideological or integrity-driven cadres. This strategy is called *electoral pragmatism*, which is the rationality of parties to maximize their chances of winning at the expense of idealism. The phenomena of "single candidates" and "coalitions without ideology" in regional elections are the most obvious manifestations of this trend.⁴⁰ The rise in political costs not only affects the behavior of individual candidates, but also the structure of power and the quality of political representation.

First, there is political exclusion of non-elite groups. Data from the Indonesian Institute of Sciences (LIPI),⁴¹ shows that only about 18% of DPR members come from

³⁷ Kementerian Dalam Negeri Republik Indonesia, "Data Bantuan Partai Politik Tahun 2023 Per Provinsi Se-Indonesia," *Portal Data Indonesia (data.go.id)*, 30 Oktober 2025, <https://data.go.id/dataset/dataset/data-bantuan-partai-politik-tahun-2023-per-provinsi-se-indonesia>

³⁸ KPU Kabupaten Tapanuli Utara, *Pengaruh Politik Uang terhadap Partisipasi Pemilih dalam Pemilu* (KPU Kabupaten Tapanuli Utara, 2015).

³⁹ Herbert Kitschelt, "Linkages between Citizens and Politicians in Democratic Polities," *Comparative Political Studies* 33, no. 6-7 (2000): 845-879, <https://doi.org/10.1177/001041400003300607>.

⁴⁰ Endah Yuli Ekowati, "Pragmatisme Politik: Antara Koalisi, Pencalonan dan Calon Tunggal dalam Pilkada," *Jurnal Transformatif* 5, no. 1 (2019): 16-37, <https://doi.org/10.21776/ub.transformatif.2019.005.01.2>.

⁴¹ Lembaga Ilmu Pengetahuan Indonesia. *Peta Politik Pasca-Reformasi: Evaluasi Dua Dekade Demokrasi Indonesia* (Pusat Penelitian Politik LIPI, 2020).



non-business or non-elite backgrounds, indicating limited access for candidates without significant capital. Second, the function of political parties as "schools of democracy" has been degraded. In line with this, Jefri Kurniawan asserts that parties in Indonesia have failed to implement meritocratic regeneration as practiced in South Korea, where an open, performance-based recruitment system reduces political costs and increases accountability.⁴² In Indonesia, on the contrary, closed and transactional recruitment processes reinforce the internal oligarchy of parties. Third, high political costs create a cycle of structural corruption. Furthermore, according to the Corruption Eradication Commission (KPK), more than 82% of regional heads involved in corruption cases are related to the practice of *political repayment*, which is an attempt to return political capital through abuse of power.⁴³

This proves that high-cost politics is not only a matter of economic efficiency, but also a direct threat to the institutional integrity of democracy. The trend of rising political costs from 2009 to 2024 also confirms that Indonesian democracy is facing a deep paradox: it is becoming more open procedurally, but more closed substantively. High-cost politics has given rise to party pragmatism as a survival strategy, while parties have lost their ideological and representative functions.

In the context of political representation, *the* electoral threshold is an important instrument in Indonesia's party system, which is explicitly regulated in Law No. 7 of 2017 on General Elections and updated through Law No. 7 of 2023. Article 414 paragraph (1) of the law stipulates that political parties must obtain at least 4% of the total valid votes nationally to be included in the determination of seats in the House of Representatives.⁴⁴ This regulation was designed with the aim of simplifying the party system and creating a stable government, in line with the normative argument that excessive political fragmentation can hamper the effectiveness of policy-making in parliament.⁴⁵

However, empirically, the threshold policy has actually created a dilemma of political representation in post-reform democracy. Based on data from the General Elections Commission (Decree No. 1204 of 2024),⁴⁶ of the 18 political parties participating in the 2024 elections, only 9 parties managed to pass the 4% threshold. All of them are large parties that are structurally and financially established, such as the PDIP, Golkar, Gerindra, Demokrat, PKB, and NasDem. Meanwhile, parties that are the result of reform or value-based parties such as the Labor Party, the Ummat

⁴² Muhammad Jefri Kurniawan, "Studi Komparasi Fungsi Kepartaian di Indonesia dan Korea Selatan" (Tesis Magister, Universitas Islam Indonesia, 2023).

⁴³ "Biaya dan Mahar Politik Memicu Korupsi," Komisi Pemberantasan Korupsi, <https://aclc.kpk.go.id/aksi-informasi/Eksplorasi/20230904-biaya-dan-mahar-politik-memicu-korupsi>.

⁴⁴ Undang-Undang Nomor 7 Tahun 2023 tentang Perubahan atas Undang-Undang Nomor 7 Tahun 2017 tentang Pemilihan Umum.

⁴⁵ Scott Mainwaring, "Presidentialism, Multipartyism, and Democracy: The Difficult Combination," *Comparative Political Studies* 26, no. 2 (1993): 198-228, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0010414093026002003>.

⁴⁶ Keputusan Nomor 1204 Tahun 2024 tentang Penetapan Ambang Batas Perolehan Suara Sah Secara Nasional.



Party, and the Gelora Party failed to enter parliament. In fact, more than 12 million votes (around 10-12% of the total valid votes nationally) were not converted into seats in the House of Representatives, which means that the political representation of the people who voted for small parties was lost in the national political aggregation process.

This condition shows the tension between governmental effectiveness and representative justice, as stated by Giovanni Sartori (2005) in *Parties and Party Systems*. In party system theory, a high threshold can indeed strengthen the presidential system by reducing fragmentation, but it also risks eroding the principle of inclusiveness in representative democracy.⁴⁷ In this context, Indonesia faces a procedural democracy paradox: the electoral system is designed for political efficiency, but it marginalizes the representation of minority groups and parties based on alternative ideologies.

Furthermore, when linked to the Articles of Association and Bylaws (AD/ART) of political parties, the electoral threshold also influences internal party strategies in cadre recruitment and consolidation. Most major parties (such as PDIP, Golkar, Gerindra, and Demokrat) have adjusted their AD/ART to strengthen the centralization of decision-making in the hands of the DPP (Central Leadership Council) under the pretext of efficiency and organizational solidarity in order to face electoral pressures. For example, in the PDIP's AD/ART, it is emphasized that the determination of legislative candidates is the full authority of the DPP, taking into account the strategic ability to win elections.⁴⁸ Meanwhile, the Golkar Party's AD/ART, as amended at the 2019 National Conference, states that cadre development and candidate selection must take electoral competitiveness into account.⁴⁹ This means that the existence of the threshold not only changes the dynamics between parties but also alters the internal logic of parties, shifting from an ideological orientation to a pragmatic electoral orientation. To remain above the threshold, parties must nominate candidates who are electable, not those who are ideologically representative or highly principled.

This phenomenon is in line with Panebianco's opinion in *Political Parties: Organization and Power*, that parties in a highly competitive system tend to experience *organizational oligarchy*, namely the concentration of power in the party elite and the subordination of values to winning strategies.⁵⁰ As a result, new parties with specific social bases, such as the Labor Party representing the working class, or the Ummat Party with a moral-religious orientation, experience structural representation distortion. Despite having statutes that affirm their ideological missions (e.g., the struggle of the working class or social justice), the pressure of the threshold system

⁴⁷ Giovanni Sartori, *Parties and Party Systems: A Framework for Analysis* (Essex: ECPR Press, 2005).

⁴⁸ Anggaran Dasar dan Anggaran Rumah Tangga Partai Demokrasi Indonesia Perjuangan Tahun 2019 (Kongres V Bali).

⁴⁹ Anggaran Dasar dan Anggaran Rumah Tangga Partai Golkar Tahun 2019 (Hasil Musyawarah Nasional X).

⁵⁰ Angelo Panebianco, *Political Parties: Organization and Power* (Cambridge University Press, 1988).



forces them to allocate significant resources just to survive administratively and electorally. In the long term, this creates a cycle of political pragmatism: small parties adjust their strategies for survival (*survival politics*), while large parties strengthen their internal oligarchy in order to maintain their position above the threshold.

From a democratic theory perspective, this situation reflects what Robert Dahl (1989) calls *polyarchy imbalance*, namely an imbalance between participation and competition. Indonesian democracy is procedurally competitive but substantively exclusive because only large parties have the opportunity for representation.⁵¹ Thus, the electoral threshold, which was originally intended to strengthen political stability, has instead narrowed the space for political representation of the people. In a normative framework, Article 11 paragraph (1) of Law No. 2 of 2011 on Political Parties emphasizes that parties have a function as a means of political participation for the community. However, if the mechanism of representation is reduced by thresholds and capital-based competition, then the function of parties as a bridge for public aspirations is seriously degraded. Electoral democracy then turns into oligarchic democracy, where the representation of the people is not determined by ideological aspirations, but by the financial capacity and electoral strategies of the party elite.

Theoretically, this situation can be understood as reinforcing the concept of *cartelized democracy* proposed by Katz and Mair, in which a political cartel structure is formed and exploited by large parties to monopolize access to resources and public office. Within this framework, small parties are systematically excluded from the representative arena due to limited political space.⁵² In the Indonesian context, the electoral threshold is then positioned as a legal instrument used to maintain *the status quo* of power, which ultimately narrows ideological diversity and hinders the regeneration process of civil society-based parties. Therefore, the main challenge facing Indonesian democracy today is not only in the technical aspects of elections, but also in the institutional design that structures political inequality. Reform of the threshold system needs to consider the balance between government effectiveness and representative justice.

4. CONCLUSION

4.1 Conclusion

1. The crisis of meritocracy in Indonesia's political recruitment mechanisms reflects the structural failure of political parties to carry out their democratic functions as vehicles for cadre development and public representation. The selection process for legislative candidates, which should be based on integrity, capacity, and track record, has instead been co-opted by patronage, personal loyalty, and financial contributions. This phenomenon shows that political recruitment in Indonesia more closely resembles electoral oligarchy, in which party elites

⁵¹ Robert A. Dahl, *Democracy and Its Critics* (Yale University Press, 1989).

⁵² Richard S. Katz dan Peter Mair, "Changing Models of Party Organization and the Emergence of the Cartel Party," *Party Politics* 1, no. 1 (1995): 5–28, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1354068895001001001>.



monopolize the nomination process to maintain power and the distribution of resources. As a result, parliament is filled with politicians who are weak in terms of their representative capacity and are more loyal to party structures than to their constituents, rendering the oversight and legislative functions ineffective. The quality of democracy in Indonesia reflects a paradox between procedural inclusiveness and substantive exclusivity. Legislative elections (DPR) reveal the link between money politics, pragmatic party recruitment, and the application of electoral thresholds, which together form a transactional and elitist democracy. The principle of equal suffrage, which should guarantee public participation, is instead exploited in the practice of money politics and high-cost competition, turning the people's votes into a political commodity. Political recruitment oriented towards financial power replaces ideological values and meritocracy, while electoral thresholds narrow the space for small parties to participate equally. This condition strengthens the dominance of large parties and weakens the political representation of civil society. As a result, Indonesian democracy only functions procedurally without being able to realize the substance of true people's sovereignty.

2. High-cost politics in Indonesia has shifted the orientation of democracy from ideological values to pragmatic electoral interests. The high cost of legislative candidacy means that political power is only accessible to those with large capital, while political parties depend on the financial support of candidates and external sponsors. As a result, the function of parties as institutions for cadre development and political education has weakened, replaced by patronage and electoral transactions. This condition reinforces party pragmatism, creates a cycle of political corruption, and deepens the dominance of oligarchy in Indonesia's democratic system. Meanwhile, the electoral threshold in Indonesia, although intended to simplify the party system and maintain political stability, has actually created representation inequality. The 4% threshold rule leaves millions of people unrepresented and strengthens the dominance of large parties, while small parties based on values and ideology are excluded from parliament. On the other hand, this policy encourages large parties to strengthen the centralization of power and electoral pragmatism, shifting the orientation of parties from ideological to transactional. As a result, Indonesian democracy tends to move towards a cartel and oligarchic system, where political power is concentrated among the elite, while the substance of people's representation weakens.

4.2 Recommendations

This study still has a number of limitations that can be used as material for reflection and reference for further research. First, studies on the crisis of meritocracy in political recruitment mechanisms in Indonesia still focus on normative and institutional analysis, so they do not fully describe the internal dynamics of parties empirically. Further research is expected to deepen the analysis through a case study



approach on specific political parties, in order to understand how patronage and personal loyalty operate in the selection process of legislative candidates.

Second, this study has not quantitatively measured the influence of high-cost politics on the behavior of parties and candidates in electoral contests. Future studies are recommended to use comparative campaign finance and party funding data in order to more accurately explain the relationship between political costs, electoral corruption, and the degradation of ideological values. Third, the discussion of the electoral threshold is still conceptual and does not include a longitudinal analysis of the impact of this policy on political representation in various election periods. Further research could explore the extent to which the threshold affects the sustainability of new parties, ideological diversity in parliament, and the representation of minority groups and civil society.

Fourth, this study highlights the paradox of procedural democracy in Indonesia, but has not integrated aspects of public participation and voter behavior as important variables in measuring the quality of substantive democracy. Future researchers are advised to broaden the scope of analysis with a multidisciplinary approach, combining political, legal, and sociological studies, in order to provide a more comprehensive picture of the relationship between electoral structures, elite behavior, and public political awareness in strengthening a just and inclusive democracy.

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Keputusan KPU Nomor 1204 Tahun 2024 tentang Penetapan Ambang Batas Perolehan Suara Sah Nasional.

