



The Role of Political Parties in Indonesia's Democratic Transition: Strengths, Weaknesses, and Future Directions

*Peran Partai Politik dalam Transisi Demokrasi Indonesia:
Kekuatan, Kelemahan, dan Arah Masa Depan*

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Abstract

Political parties have played a central role in Indonesia's democratic transition since the fall of the New Order regime. This paper critically examines the role of political parties in consolidating Indonesia's democracy, assessing their ability to represent diverse interests, foster political participation, and provide effective governance. The study explores the evolution of Indonesia's party system, the challenges of party fragmentation, and the growing influence of political dynasties and oligarchs. Through an analysis of party strategies, electoral outcomes, and political communication, the paper assesses how political parties have shaped both the national political discourse and local governance. The research also explores the growing trend of populist and identity-based politics, examining the impact on party development and the quality of democratic processes. The contribution of this paper lies in its comprehensive evaluation of the strengths and weaknesses of Indonesia's political parties and its

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Publisher: Artes Libres Institutum

Available online at <https://journals.arteslibres.org/index.php/politics>

recommendations for improving party system integrity and political accountability.

Keywords: *Political parties, democratic transition, party system, fragmentation, populism, electoral politics, political accountability*

Abstrak

Partai politik telah memainkan peran sentral dalam transisi demokrasi Indonesia sejak jatuhnya rezim Orde Baru. Makalah ini secara kritis mengkaji peran partai politik dalam mengkonsolidasikan demokrasi Indonesia, menilai kemampuan mereka untuk mewakili beragam kepentingan, mendorong partisipasi politik, dan menyediakan tata kelola yang efektif. Studi ini mengeksplorasi evolusi sistem partai Indonesia, tantangan fragmentasi partai, dan meningkatnya pengaruh dinasti politik dan oligarki. Melalui analisis strategi partai, hasil pemilu, dan komunikasi politik, makalah ini menilai bagaimana partai politik telah membentuk wacana politik nasional dan tata kelola lokal. Penelitian ini juga mengeksplorasi tren meningkatnya politik populis dan berbasis identitas, mengkaji dampaknya terhadap perkembangan partai dan kualitas proses demokrasi. Kontribusi makalah ini terletak pada evaluasi komprehensifnya tentang kekuatan dan kelemahan partai politik Indonesia dan rekomendasinya untuk meningkatkan integritas sistem partai dan akuntabilitas politik.

Kata kunci: *Partai politik, transisi demokrasi, sistem partai, fragmentasi, populisme, politik elektoral, akuntabilitas politik*

I. INTRODUCTION

Indonesia's democratic transition following the *Reformasi* movement of 1998 represents one of the most significant political transformations in Southeast Asia. The collapse of the authoritarian New Order regime under Suharto marked the beginning of a new democratic era characterized by political liberalization, decentralization, and the expansion of civil liberties. During the New Order era, political participation was tightly controlled

through state domination, military influence, and restrictions on opposition parties. Following the Asian Financial Crisis and widespread public protests, Indonesia entered a period of democratic reform that fundamentally transformed its political institutions and electoral system (Aspinall, 2010). The transition enabled the establishment of a competitive multi-party democracy and opened greater opportunities for citizen participation in governance.

Prior to Reformasi, Indonesia's political party system operated within an authoritarian framework designed to maintain regime stability rather than democratic competition. The New Order government reduced political competition by limiting political organizations to three officially recognized entities: Golkar, the United Development Party (PPP), and the Indonesian Democratic Party (PDI). Elections were conducted regularly but lacked genuine competitiveness and functioned largely to legitimize the ruling regime (Liddle, 1996). Political opposition was systematically weakened through state repression, censorship, and centralized political control. Consequently, political parties during this period functioned primarily as instruments of regime maintenance rather than representative democratic institutions.

The fall of the New Order regime initiated a major restructuring of Indonesia's political landscape. Constitutional amendments, electoral reforms, and decentralization policies facilitated the emergence of a highly competitive political environment. The 1999 general election, recognized as Indonesia's first democratic election after authoritarian rule, involved 48 political parties competing for parliamentary seats (Mietzner, 2013). This rapid proliferation of political parties reflected Indonesia's social diversity as well as the renewed freedom of political association. Since then, Indonesia has successfully conducted regular elections at national and regional levels, demonstrating substantial democratic progress compared to many other post-authoritarian states in the developing world.

Political parties have played a crucial role in Indonesia's democratic consolidation by institutionalizing electoral competition and facilitating peaceful transfers of political power. In democratic systems, political parties function as intermediaries between citizens and the state by aggregating interests, recruiting political leaders, mobilizing voters, and formulating policy alternatives (Mainwaring & Scully, 1995). In Indonesia, political parties have contributed to democratic stability by enabling electoral transitions between successive administrations, including those led by Abdurrahman Wahid, Megawati Sukarnoputri, Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono, and Joko Widodo. These peaceful transitions indicate the growing institutionalization of democratic norms and civilian political authority in Indonesia.

Despite these democratic achievements, Indonesia's political parties continue to face serious structural and institutional weaknesses. Many parties lack strong ideological foundations and instead rely heavily on charismatic leadership and elite patronage networks. According to Slater (2004), political parties in Indonesia often operate within cartel-like arrangements that prioritize elite cooperation and resource distribution over policy competition. As a result, ideological distinctions between parties are frequently weak, and coalition-building tends to be driven more by political pragmatism than programmatic alignment. This condition reduces the effectiveness of political parties in representing public interests and weakens democratic accountability.

Another significant challenge facing Indonesia's party system is the persistence of oligarchic influence and political dynasties. Wealthy business elites continue to exert considerable influence over political financing, candidate selection, and policy-making processes (Hadiz & Robison, 2013). Political campaigns in Indonesia require substantial financial resources, making parties highly dependent on elite sponsors and patronage networks. In many cases, local and national political offices are dominated by influential families that maintain political power across generations. The rise of political dynasties has raised concerns

regarding unequal political competition, corruption, and declining public trust in democratic institutions.

The fragmentation of Indonesia's multi-party system also presents challenges for democratic governance. The large number of political parties competing in elections has often resulted in fragmented legislatures and unstable coalition governments. Although electoral threshold policies have reduced the number of parties represented in parliament, coalition politics in Indonesia remains highly fluid and transactional (Mietzner, 2013). Political alliances are frequently formed on the basis of strategic interests rather than ideological consistency, making long-term policy coordination difficult. Consequently, opposition parties often struggle to function effectively as mechanisms of democratic oversight and accountability.

In addition to fragmentation, identity politics and populism have increasingly shaped Indonesia's contemporary political environment. Religious and ethnic mobilization have become prominent features of electoral campaigns, particularly at the local level. The 2017 Jakarta gubernatorial election demonstrated how sectarian narratives and religious polarization could significantly influence electoral outcomes (Hadiz, 2018). Political actors have increasingly utilized populist rhetoric and social media campaigns to mobilize support by appealing to identity-based sentiments rather than substantive policy debates. These developments pose challenges to democratic inclusiveness and risk deepening political polarization within Indonesian society.

The growing influence of digital political communication has further transformed Indonesia's democratic process. Political parties and candidates now rely heavily on social media platforms to engage voters, shape political narratives, and mobilize electoral support. While digital communication has increased political participation and expanded access to information, it has also facilitated the spread of misinformation, online propaganda, and hate speech (Lim, 2017). The increasing personalization of politics through digital campaigns has contributed to the dominance of

political branding and image management over policy-oriented political discourse. Consequently, democratic competition in Indonesia increasingly reflects media-driven populism rather than substantive ideological engagement.

This study seeks to critically evaluate the role of political parties in Indonesia's democratic consolidation by examining their strengths, weaknesses, and evolving political functions in the post-Reformasi era. The research focuses on how political parties represent diverse societal interests, encourage political participation, and contribute to governance effectiveness. It also investigates the institutional challenges facing Indonesia's party system, including oligarchic domination, party fragmentation, corruption, and identity-based political mobilization. Through this analysis, the study aims to assess the broader implications of party politics for the quality and sustainability of Indonesian democracy.

The study contributes to the academic literature on democratization and party politics by providing a comprehensive assessment of Indonesia's evolving party system within a post-authoritarian context. Indonesia represents a significant case study because it combines democratic electoral competition with high levels of social diversity, decentralization, and elite influence. By integrating discussions on populism, political communication, oligarchy, and democratic consolidation, this paper offers a broader analytical perspective on the role of political parties in transitional democracies. Furthermore, the research contributes to understanding how democratic institutions adapt to contemporary political challenges in Southeast Asia.

In addition, this paper provides policy recommendations aimed at strengthening Indonesia's democratic institutions and improving the integrity of its party system. Strengthening internal party democracy, improving transparency in political financing, and promoting merit-based candidate recruitment are essential for enhancing accountability and reducing oligarchic domination. Political parties must also invest in political education and ideological development to encourage issue-based competition and

reduce reliance on identity politics. Greater regulation of digital political communication and stronger mechanisms for combating misinformation are equally important for protecting democratic processes in the digital era.

Ultimately, the future of Indonesia's democracy depends significantly on the ability of political parties to reform themselves and strengthen their democratic functions. Although Indonesia has successfully institutionalized electoral democracy, substantive democratic consolidation requires political parties that are transparent, programmatic, and accountable to citizens. Political parties must move beyond transactional politics and elite-centered competition toward more inclusive and policy-oriented democratic practices. By improving institutional integrity and fostering broader political participation, Indonesia's political parties can continue to play a central role in deepening democratic governance and ensuring political stability in the future.

II. HISTORICAL CONTEXT: POLITICAL PARTIES UNDER THE NEW ORDER REGIME

The development of Indonesia's contemporary party system cannot be understood without examining the political structure established during the New Order regime under Suharto. The New Order, which lasted from 1966 to 1998, was characterized by centralized authoritarian governance, military dominance, and strict political control. Following the political turmoil surrounding the 1965 anti-communist purge and the decline of Sukarno's Guided Democracy, Suharto consolidated power through a regime that prioritized political stability, economic development, and national security over democratic freedoms (Crouch, 2010). Political parties were permitted to exist, but their activities were heavily regulated and subordinated to the interests of the state. Rather than functioning as autonomous democratic institutions, parties became instruments through which the regime maintained political control and legitimacy.

One of the defining features of the New Order was the systematic suppression and restructuring of political competition. The regime viewed ideological diversity and party fragmentation as threats to political stability, particularly after the ideological conflicts of the 1950s and 1960s. Consequently, Suharto implemented policies aimed at depoliticizing society and limiting opposition activity. Through extensive state intervention, political organizations were forced to operate within a tightly controlled political framework that restricted freedom of association and public dissent (Liddle, 1996). The government also relied heavily on the military's dual-function doctrine, known as *dwifungsi*, which legitimized military involvement in both security and political affairs. This military-political alliance strengthened the regime's capacity to suppress opposition and monitor political activity throughout the country.

A major turning point in the New Order's control over political parties occurred in 1973, when the government forced the consolidation of existing political parties into three officially recognized political organizations. Islamic parties were merged into the United Development Party (PPP), nationalist and Christian parties were combined into the Indonesian Democratic Party (PDI), while Golkar functioned as the regime's primary political vehicle (Mietzner, 2013). This restructuring significantly reduced political pluralism and ensured that electoral competition remained tightly controlled. Although elections continued to be held regularly, they lacked genuine democratic competition because opposition parties operated under severe institutional constraints and state intimidation.

Among these organizations, Golkar occupied a uniquely dominant position within the political system. Unlike conventional political parties, Golkar functioned as a state-backed political machine closely connected to the bureaucracy, military, and business elites. Civil servants were often pressured to support Golkar, while state resources were mobilized to secure electoral victories for the organization (Robison & Hadiz, 2004). Golkar's

dominance enabled the regime to present an appearance of electoral legitimacy while effectively preventing meaningful political opposition. Through its extensive organizational network and access to state institutions, Golkar consistently won overwhelming majorities in parliamentary elections throughout the New Order era.

Political parties under the New Order also played an important symbolic role in legitimizing authoritarian governance. Although the regime maintained the formal structure of elections and representative institutions, these mechanisms functioned primarily as instruments for reinforcing state authority rather than facilitating democratic participation. Elections were carefully managed to demonstrate public support for the government and project an image of political stability domestically and internationally (Slater, 2004). Opposition parties were allowed limited participation but lacked the organizational freedom and political resources necessary to challenge Golkar's dominance effectively. Consequently, Indonesia during this period exhibited what scholars commonly describe as "electoral authoritarianism," where democratic institutions existed formally but operated within fundamentally undemocratic conditions.

In addition to institutional control, the New Order regime employed ideological mechanisms to limit political opposition. The state imposed Pancasila as the sole ideological foundation for all political organizations and social groups, thereby restricting alternative ideological expressions, particularly those associated with political Islam and leftist movements (Fealy & White, 2008). Political activism outside state-sanctioned structures was often portrayed as a threat to national unity and security. The government also maintained strict control over the media, universities, and civil society organizations, reducing opportunities for political mobilization and dissent. These measures contributed to the depoliticization of Indonesian society and weakened the development of autonomous political institutions.

Despite the regime's extensive control, political dissatisfaction gradually increased during the 1990s due to rising authoritarianism, corruption, and economic inequality. The Asian Financial Crisis of 1997 severely weakened the legitimacy of the New Order government by triggering economic collapse, unemployment, and widespread social unrest. Student protests, civil society activism, and elite fragmentation intensified demands for political reform and democratic change (Aspinall, 2010). As economic conditions deteriorated, the regime struggled to maintain political stability and public confidence. The inability of the government to effectively address the crisis ultimately accelerated the collapse of Suharto's authoritarian rule.

The resignation of Suharto in May 1998 marked a critical turning point in Indonesian political history and initiated the Reformasi era. The collapse of the New Order created an unprecedented opening for democratic transformation and political liberalization. Restrictions on political organization, media freedom, and civil society activity were rapidly reduced, allowing new political actors and movements to emerge (Crouch, 2010). The transition period witnessed the dismantling of many authoritarian institutions that had previously constrained political competition. Constitutional reforms introduced direct elections, strengthened legislative institutions, and promoted decentralization, fundamentally reshaping Indonesia's political system.

One of the most immediate consequences of political liberalization was the rapid proliferation of political parties in the post-Reformasi period. Dozens of new parties emerged representing diverse ideological, religious, regional, and social interests. The 1999 general election involved 48 competing political parties, reflecting the re-emergence of political pluralism after decades of authoritarian suppression (Mietzner, 2013). These parties played a central role in facilitating democratic participation and mobilizing citizens within the new democratic framework. The expansion of party competition also enabled broader

representation of previously marginalized groups and contributed to the institutionalization of electoral democracy in Indonesia.

The rise of political parties after Reformasi significantly transformed Indonesia's democratic landscape. Political parties became essential actors in structuring electoral competition, recruiting political leaders, and mediating relations between citizens and the state. However, the rapid expansion of the party system also introduced new challenges, including fragmentation, weak institutionalization, and the persistence of elite domination (Ufen, 2008). While democratization created greater political openness and participation, many parties remained heavily dependent on personalistic leadership and patronage networks. Nevertheless, the post-1998 period represented a fundamental shift from authoritarian political control toward a more competitive and participatory democratic system.

III. EVOLUTION OF INDONESIA'S PARTY SYSTEM: CHALLENGES OF FRAGMENTATION

The democratic transition that followed the fall of Suharto in 1998 fundamentally transformed Indonesia's political party system from a tightly controlled authoritarian structure into a highly competitive multi-party democracy. Political liberalization during the Reformasi era allowed citizens to establish political organizations freely, resulting in the rapid emergence of numerous political parties representing a wide range of ideological, religious, ethnic, and regional interests. The 1999 general election, Indonesia's first democratic election after the New Order regime, involved 48 competing political parties, reflecting the sudden expansion of political pluralism and public participation (Mietzner, 2013). This transformation marked a significant departure from the centralized political control of the New Order period and signaled the beginning of a more open democratic political environment.

Indonesia's post-Reformasi party system is generally characterized as a fragmented multi-party system in which no

single political party dominates national politics consistently. Instead, political competition involves multiple parties competing for parliamentary representation and executive office through coalition-building and electoral alliances. This fragmentation reflects Indonesia's highly diverse social composition, including differences in religion, ethnicity, ideology, and regional identity (Ufen, 2008). Nationalist, Islamic, secular, and populist political parties all coexist within the democratic framework, creating a complex political landscape in which coalition politics has become essential for governance. While such diversity demonstrates the inclusiveness of Indonesia's democracy, it has also generated significant institutional and political challenges.

One of the most persistent challenges within Indonesia's party system is excessive party fragmentation. The large number of political parties competing in elections has often produced fragmented legislatures in which no party can independently secure a governing majority. Consequently, coalition governments have become a permanent feature of Indonesian politics. Coalitions are frequently formed not on the basis of ideological compatibility but rather through pragmatic political negotiations aimed at securing cabinet positions, legislative influence, and access to state resources (Slater, 2004). This pattern has contributed to unstable alliances and weakened policy coherence within government institutions. In many cases, coalition arrangements prioritize short-term political survival over long-term programmatic governance, reducing the effectiveness of democratic accountability.

The dominance of coalition politics has had significant implications for national governance and policy-making in Indonesia. Presidents must typically negotiate with multiple political parties to secure legislative support, resulting in broad and often ideologically inconsistent governing coalitions. While coalition-building may promote political inclusiveness and reduce the likelihood of authoritarian concentration of power, it can also slow decision-making processes and complicate policy implementation (Aspinall & Mietzner, 2019). The need to

accommodate diverse coalition partners frequently leads to political compromises that dilute policy agendas and weaken executive authority. Furthermore, opposition parties often join governing coalitions, reducing the effectiveness of parliamentary oversight and limiting meaningful democratic competition.

Indonesia's electoral system has also played an important role in shaping party fragmentation and electoral outcomes. Since the Reformasi era, Indonesia has adopted an open-list proportional representation system that allows voters to select individual candidates while maintaining proportional allocation of parliamentary seats. This electoral arrangement encourages broader political participation and representation but also facilitates the survival of multiple political parties (Mietzner, 2013). Proportional representation systems generally produce more fragmented party systems because smaller parties have greater opportunities to obtain parliamentary representation compared to majoritarian electoral systems. In Indonesia, this system has enabled both large and relatively small parties to compete effectively at the national level.

The relatively low parliamentary electoral threshold implemented in the early post-Reformasi elections further contributed to party proliferation and fragmentation. Initially, many small parties were able to secure seats in parliament despite receiving only modest levels of voter support. Although electoral reforms gradually increased parliamentary thresholds to reduce excessive fragmentation, Indonesia's political system remains characterized by a relatively high number of competing parties (Tomsa, 2008). Critics argue that excessive fragmentation undermines political clarity because voters often struggle to distinguish ideological differences among parties. Moreover, fragmented legislatures may weaken governmental stability and hinder the development of coherent long-term policy strategies.

Among Indonesia's major political parties, Indonesian Democratic Party of Struggle (PDI-P) has emerged as one of the most influential actors in the post-Reformasi political landscape.

Rooted in nationalist and populist traditions associated with Sukarno, PDI-P positioned itself as a reform-oriented opposition force during the final years of the New Order regime. Under the leadership of Megawati Sukarnoputri, the party gained substantial electoral support by appealing to democratic reform, nationalism, and lower-income constituencies (Aspinall, 2010). Despite its strong electoral position, however, PDI-P has often faced criticism for relying heavily on charismatic leadership and maintaining centralized internal decision-making structures. Its adaptation to democratic competition has therefore combined electoral success with ongoing institutional challenges related to internal party democracy.

Golkar represents another important case in Indonesia's evolving party system. As the dominant political vehicle of the New Order regime, Golkar initially faced uncertainty regarding its survival after the collapse of authoritarianism. However, the party successfully adapted to democratic competition by restructuring its organizational strategies and expanding its appeal beyond its association with the former regime (Tomsa, 2008). Golkar maintained extensive networks within the bureaucracy, business sector, and regional political elites, enabling it to remain a major political force in the post-Reformasi era. Nevertheless, critics argue that Golkar's continued influence reflects the persistence of oligarchic politics and elite continuity within Indonesian democracy.

The emergence of Great Indonesia Movement Party (Gerindra) demonstrates the growing importance of populist nationalism in Indonesia's contemporary political environment. Founded by Prabowo Subianto, Gerindra positioned itself as a nationalist-populist party emphasizing strong leadership, economic sovereignty, and social welfare. The party gained significant electoral support by appealing to voters dissatisfied with existing political elites and governance performance (Mietzner, 2014). Gerindra's rise reflects broader global trends in populist politics, where charismatic leadership and nationalist rhetoric

increasingly shape democratic competition. However, concerns remain regarding the party's commitment to democratic pluralism given Prabowo's military background and controversial political history.

Islamic-oriented political parties have also played a significant role in Indonesia's democratic development, particularly the Prosperous Justice Party (PKS). Emerging from Islamic activist networks, PKS initially gained support through its image as a disciplined, anti-corruption, and morally conservative political party (Buehler, 2016). The party has demonstrated a relatively strong organizational structure compared to many Indonesian parties and has effectively mobilized urban middle-class Muslim voters. However, PKS has also faced challenges in broadening its appeal beyond its core religious constituency and balancing Islamic identity politics with democratic inclusiveness. Internal factionalism and corruption scandals have further complicated the party's efforts to maintain its reformist image.

Overall, the evolution of Indonesia's party system demonstrates both the achievements and limitations of democratic consolidation in the post-Reformasi era. The expansion of political pluralism and electoral competition has strengthened democratic participation and reduced authoritarian control. However, persistent fragmentation, coalition instability, weak ideological institutionalization, and oligarchic influence continue to challenge the effectiveness of political parties in representing public interests and promoting accountable governance. While major parties such as PDI-P, Golkar, Gerindra, and PKS have adapted to democratic competition in different ways, many structural weaknesses remain unresolved. Consequently, the future development of Indonesia's democracy depends significantly on the ability of political parties to strengthen institutional capacity, promote programmatic competition, and improve political accountability.

IV. THE INFLUENCE OF POLITICAL DYNASTIES AND OLIGARCHS

One of the most significant challenges confronting Indonesia's democratic consolidation is the persistent influence of political dynasties and oligarchic elites within the party system. Although the Reformasi movement of 1998 succeeded in dismantling authoritarian rule and introducing competitive elections, democratic institutions in Indonesia continue to be heavily shaped by entrenched networks of family power, wealth, and patronage. Political parties, rather than functioning solely as democratic institutions representing public interests, often operate as vehicles for elite consolidation and the preservation of political influence among powerful families and business groups (Hadiz & Robison, 2013). Consequently, Indonesia's democratic transition has been characterized not only by political liberalization but also by the adaptation of old elites to new democratic structures.

Political dynasties have become increasingly prominent in Indonesia's post-Reformasi political landscape. Dynastic politics refers to the concentration of political power within certain families across generations, often facilitated through party networks, economic resources, and social influence. In Indonesia, decentralization and direct local elections unintentionally created new opportunities for political families to expand their influence at both national and regional levels (Aspinall & Berenschot, 2019). Family members frequently occupy strategic political positions simultaneously, including parliamentary seats, gubernatorial offices, mayoralities, and party leadership roles. This pattern reflects the persistence of patron-client politics in which personal relationships and kinship networks continue to shape political competition.

One of the most influential political dynasties in Indonesia is associated with Megawati Sukarnoputri and the family of Sukarno, Indonesia's founding president. Megawati, who leads Indonesian Democratic Party of Struggle (PDI-P), has maintained substantial

influence over Indonesian politics since the Reformasi era. Her political legitimacy is closely connected to Sukarno's historical legacy and nationalist symbolism. Several members of the Sukarno family have also occupied political positions, demonstrating how political capital can be inherited and institutionalized through party structures (Mietzner, 2013). The continued dominance of the Sukarno family within PDI-P illustrates how charismatic authority and historical legacy remain central components of political legitimacy in Indonesia.

Another major example of dynastic influence is the political network surrounding Prabowo Subianto and his extended family. Prabowo, a former military general and leader of Great Indonesia Movement Party, is connected to one of Indonesia's most influential political and economic families. He is the former son-in-law of Suharto and maintains extensive ties with military, business, and political elites established during the New Order era (Robison & Hadiz, 2004). The rise of Gerindra demonstrates how elite networks from the authoritarian period successfully adapted to democratic competition by repositioning themselves within electoral politics. Prabowo's repeated presidential campaigns further illustrate how personal influence, economic resources, and elite alliances remain central to political success in Indonesia.

Political dynasties are also highly visible at the regional level, where decentralization has enabled local elites to consolidate political control. Numerous governors, mayors, and regents have facilitated the political advancement of spouses, children, and relatives through local elections and party nominations. According to Buehler (2013), local political dynasties often dominate regional governance by controlling access to state resources, business opportunities, and patronage networks. In many cases, local political families maintain influence across multiple electoral cycles, limiting political competition and reducing opportunities for new political actors. This phenomenon has raised concerns regarding the quality of local democracy and the persistence of informal power structures beneath formal democratic institutions.

The expansion of dynastic politics has important implications for political representation and democratic consolidation in Indonesia. Critics argue that dynastic politics weakens meritocracy because political recruitment is frequently based on family connections rather than competence or public service experience (Aspinall & Berenschot, 2019). Political parties often prioritize candidates with strong family networks, financial resources, and name recognition because they are considered more electorally viable. As a result, talented individuals without elite connections may face significant barriers to political participation. Dynastic politics also contributes to unequal access to political power and reinforces social inequality within democratic institutions.

Furthermore, the dominance of political families can undermine public trust in democratic processes. When political leadership appears concentrated among a limited number of elite families, citizens may perceive elections as mechanisms that reproduce existing power structures rather than promote genuine democratic competition. This perception can weaken democratic legitimacy and contribute to political apathy among voters. Although dynastic politics does not necessarily eliminate electoral competition entirely, it often narrows the range of political alternatives available to the public and strengthens elite continuity within democratic systems (Slater, 2004).

Alongside political dynasties, oligarchic influence represents another defining characteristic of Indonesia's contemporary political system. Oligarchs, particularly wealthy business elites, play a central role in financing political parties, electoral campaigns, and political coalitions. The high cost of elections in Indonesia has made political parties increasingly dependent on private financial contributions from business actors and wealthy political patrons (Winters, 2011). Campaign financing is often insufficiently regulated, allowing economic elites to exert significant influence over candidate selection, policy priorities, and party strategies.

Consequently, political competition frequently reflects the interests of economic elites rather than broader societal concerns.

The relationship between oligarchs and political parties has deep historical roots extending back to the New Order period. Under Suharto's authoritarian regime, business elites developed close relationships with political and military authorities through patronage networks and state-controlled economic opportunities (Robison & Hadiz, 2004). Following democratization, many of these elites successfully adapted to the new political environment by financing political parties and supporting electoral campaigns. Rather than disappearing after Reformasi, oligarchic networks became integrated into democratic institutions, shaping electoral competition and governance through financial influence and informal political connections.

Oligarchic interests significantly influence party agendas and policy-making processes in Indonesia. Political parties frequently prioritize policies that protect business interests, secure economic concessions, or maintain access to financial support from wealthy donors. According to Winters (2011), oligarchic power in Indonesia operates through the ability of economic elites to influence political outcomes while preserving their wealth and social dominance. This condition limits the capacity of political parties to pursue redistributive policies or structural reforms that might challenge elite economic interests. As a result, democratic institutions may formally function through elections and representative governance while substantively remaining constrained by unequal power relations.

Electoral patronage also remains a central feature of Indonesia's political system. Political candidates and parties often rely on patronage networks involving vote-buying, material incentives, and local brokers to mobilize electoral support (Aspinall & Sukmajati, 2016). Wealthy candidates possess significant advantages because they can finance extensive campaign operations and distribute resources to local constituencies. This patronage-based political culture reinforces the influence of

oligarchs and political dynasties while weakening issue-based democratic competition. Instead of emphasizing policy platforms or ideological programs, electoral success often depends on access to financial resources and personal networks.

The interaction between political dynasties and oligarchic interests has important consequences for Indonesia's democratic development. Although Indonesia has successfully institutionalized regular elections and political competition, democratic participation remains heavily influenced by elite domination and unequal resource distribution. Political parties frequently function as vehicles for elite negotiation rather than as representative institutions accountable to citizens. Consequently, Indonesia's democracy exhibits characteristics of what some scholars describe as "oligarchic democracy," where formal democratic procedures coexist with concentrated economic and political power (Hadiz & Robison, 2013).

Nevertheless, Indonesia's democratic system also demonstrates resilience and adaptability despite these challenges. Civil society organizations, anti-corruption institutions, independent media, and public activism continue to pressure political parties and elites to improve transparency and accountability. Public criticism of corruption, dynastic politics, and oligarchic influence has increased significantly in recent years, particularly among younger voters and urban middle-class groups. These developments indicate that while elite influence remains strong, democratic contestation and demands for reform continue to shape Indonesia's evolving political landscape.

Ultimately, the influence of political dynasties and oligarchs remains one of the central challenges facing Indonesia's democratic consolidation. While political parties have contributed to democratic stability and electoral competition, they are often constrained by elite domination, patronage networks, and unequal political access. Strengthening internal party democracy, improving campaign finance transparency, and expanding opportunities for merit-based political participation are essential

steps toward reducing the dominance of dynastic and oligarchic politics. Without meaningful institutional reform, the concentration of political and economic power among elites may continue to undermine democratic accountability and limit the development of a more inclusive political system.

V. POPULISM, IDENTITY POLITICS, AND THEIR IMPACT ON PARTY DEVELOPMENT

In Indonesia's post-Reformasi democratic landscape, political parties have increasingly adapted to populist rhetoric and identity-based mobilization as strategic tools for electoral competition. While the democratic transition following the fall of Suharto created space for pluralism and party competition, it also produced structural conditions that facilitated the rise of populist narratives. These include persistent socioeconomic inequality, weak public trust in political institutions, and widespread perceptions of corruption among political elites (Aspinall & Mietzner, 2019). In this context, populism has emerged as a powerful political strategy through which parties and candidates frame politics as a struggle between "the people" and "corrupt elites," often simplifying complex governance issues into emotionally resonant narratives.

The rise of populist politics in Indonesia has been closely linked to prominent political figures who have shaped national discourse and party strategies. One of the most significant populist actors is Prabowo Subianto, leader of Great Indonesia Movement Party, whose campaigns have frequently emphasized nationalism, economic sovereignty, and strong leadership. Prabowo's populist messaging has resonated with voters dissatisfied with economic inequality and perceived elite corruption, allowing Gerindra to position itself as an alternative to established political forces (Mietzner, 2015). Similarly, Anies Baswedan has been associated with populist and moralistic political framing, particularly during the 2017–2022 Jakarta gubernatorial period. His political communication often combined themes of social justice, religious

identity, and criticism of elite governance, contributing to the increasing personalization of Indonesian electoral politics (Hadiz, 2018).

Populism in Indonesia does not operate independently from identity politics; rather, it often intersects with religious and ethnic mobilization. In a Muslim-majority country with significant cultural and ethnic diversity, political parties frequently rely on religious symbolism and identity-based appeals to secure electoral support. Islamic-oriented parties such as the Prosperous Justice Party (PKS) have historically emphasized moral governance, anti-corruption platforms, and Islamic values in their political messaging (Buehler, 2016). While PKS initially gained support through its disciplined organizational structure and reformist image, its political strategy has also evolved in response to broader trends of religious conservatism and identity-based competition within Indonesian society.

Identity politics has become particularly visible in electoral contests where religious narratives are mobilized to influence voter behavior. The 2017 Jakarta gubernatorial election is widely regarded as a turning point in the intensification of religious identity politics, where allegations of blasphemy against incumbent governor Basuki Tjahaja Purnama (Ahok) triggered mass mobilizations and polarized public opinion along religious lines (Wilson, 2019). This event demonstrated how religious identity could be politically instrumentalized to reshape electoral outcomes and deepen societal divisions. Political parties, both Islamist and nationalist, strategically responded by adjusting their campaign messaging to accommodate or counter identity-based narratives.

The increasing reliance on identity politics has also contributed to the rise of Islamist political influence within Indonesia's party system. Although Indonesia maintains a formally secular state structure based on Pancasila, Islamist actors have increasingly shaped policy debates and electoral strategies through parties, civil society organizations, and informal networks. According to Hadiz (2018), Islamic populism in Indonesia is not

limited to formal Islamist parties but extends across broader political coalitions that incorporate religious sentiment into electoral mobilization. This trend has influenced party strategies, encouraging mainstream parties to adopt more religiously sensitive messaging in order to avoid losing support to Islamist challengers.

However, the growing prominence of identity politics has significant implications for social cohesion and democratic governance. While identity-based mobilization can enhance political participation by engaging religious and cultural communities, it also risks deepening divisions within society. Political competition increasingly reflects contestation between “religious” and “secular” factions, which may undermine the development of programmatic and policy-oriented party systems (Mietzner, 2020). In this context, political parties are incentivized to prioritize symbolic identity appeals over substantive policy debates, weakening the quality of democratic deliberation and governance.

Populism and identity politics have also contributed to increased political polarization in Indonesia. Social media platforms and digital communication technologies have amplified emotionally charged political narratives, enabling rapid dissemination of partisan and sometimes misleading information (Lim, 2017). As a result, political discourse has become increasingly fragmented, with competing ideological camps often engaging in mutual distrust and delegitimization. This polarization is particularly evident in electoral cycles, where political competition extends beyond policy disagreements to include moral and cultural identity conflicts.

The combination of populist rhetoric and identity-based mobilization has had broader consequences for democratic values and institutional trust. While populism claims to represent “the people,” it can simultaneously undermine institutional checks and balances by portraying political opposition, media, and civil society as illegitimate or corrupt actors. In Indonesia, such dynamics have occasionally weakened public trust in democratic institutions,

particularly when political elites frame opposition groups as threats to national unity or religious values (Aspinall & Mietzner, 2019). This trend complicates efforts to build stable democratic norms based on pluralism and compromise.

Despite these challenges, populism and identity politics have not completely undermined Indonesia's democratic system. Elections remain competitive, political pluralism persists, and peaceful transfers of power continue to occur. Moreover, civil society organizations, independent media, and youth movements have increasingly advocated for more inclusive and issue-based political discourse. These actors provide counterbalances to the divisive effects of identity politics by promoting democratic values such as tolerance, accountability, and policy-driven debate.

Overall, the rise of populism and identity politics represents a double-edged development in Indonesia's party system. On one hand, these dynamics have enabled political parties to mobilize voters, expand participation, and articulate grievances related to inequality and corruption. On the other hand, they have contributed to polarization, weakened ideological coherence, and encouraged the personalization of political competition. The long-term challenge for Indonesia's democracy lies in transforming populist and identity-based mobilization into more programmatic forms of political engagement that strengthen rather than fragment democratic governance.

VI. POLITICAL PARTIES AND GOVERNANCE: STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES

Political parties have been central to Indonesia's democratic transition following the end of authoritarian rule under Suharto in 1998. As key intermediaries between society and the state, parties have contributed significantly to the institutionalization of electoral democracy, the expansion of political participation, and the consolidation of representative governance. In comparative democratic theory, political parties are essential for aggregating

interests, structuring political competition, and ensuring governmental accountability (Mainwaring & Scully, 1995). In Indonesia's post-Reformasi context, these functions have gradually developed, although unevenly, as parties continue to adapt to a rapidly changing political and institutional environment.

One of the key strengths of Indonesian political parties is their role in promoting political participation and supporting democratic institutions. Since democratization, parties have played a critical role in mobilizing voters during elections and encouraging citizens to engage in formal political processes. High voter turnout in national and local elections reflects the capacity of parties to connect with diverse segments of society and sustain electoral engagement (Aspinall, 2010). Political parties have also contributed to the normalization of democratic practices such as competitive elections, peaceful leadership transitions, and coalition-based governance, which have become defining features of Indonesia's political system.

In addition to participation, political parties have increasingly contributed to public debate and policy discourse, particularly in areas such as national development, poverty reduction, and social justice. Major political parties, including Indonesian Democratic Party of Struggle (PDI-P), Great Indonesia Movement Party, and Prosperous Justice Party (PKS), have developed programmatic platforms that address economic inequality, welfare policies, and governance reform. Although these platforms are often shaped by electoral competition rather than ideological consistency, they nonetheless reflect a gradual shift toward more policy-oriented political engagement (Mietzner, 2013). In this regard, political parties have played a constructive role in deepening Indonesia's democratic discourse.

Furthermore, political parties have made important contributions to government accountability and democratic consolidation. Through parliamentary representation and coalition politics, parties participate in overseeing executive actions and shaping legislative outcomes. Indonesia's multiparty system

ensures that governments must negotiate with multiple political actors, which can enhance checks and balances within the political system (Slater, 2004). In principle, this institutional arrangement strengthens accountability by preventing the concentration of power and encouraging political negotiation among competing interests.

Despite these strengths, Indonesian political parties also face significant structural weaknesses that limit their effectiveness in governance. One of the most persistent challenges is weak internal party democracy. Leadership selection processes are often centralized and dominated by elite figures rather than transparent and participatory mechanisms. As a result, political succession is frequently shaped by personal influence, financial capacity, and elite negotiation rather than meritocratic competition (Ufen, 2008). This weak institutionalization contributes to the personalization of politics and reduces the responsiveness of parties to their members and constituents.

Another major weakness is the persistence of corruption, clientelism, and political manipulation within party structures. Political parties in Indonesia often rely on informal networks of patronage to mobilize electoral support and secure campaign financing. According to Aspinall and Sukmajati (2016), vote-buying and clientelist practices remain widespread in Indonesian elections, particularly at the local level. These practices undermine democratic accountability by shifting political competition away from policy-based platforms toward material inducements and transactional relationships between voters and political elites.

Ideological incoherence and short-term political orientation also weaken the effectiveness of political parties in governance. Many parties prioritize electoral survival and coalition bargaining over long-term policy development. This tendency is reinforced by Indonesia's fragmented party system, where coalition governments require continuous negotiation among ideologically diverse actors (Mietzner, 2013). As a result, policy consistency is often compromised, and long-term national development strategies may

be subordinated to short-term political compromises. This dynamic reduces the ability of political parties to function as stable policy-making institutions.

A case study of party governance in Indonesia illustrates how these strengths and weaknesses interact in public policy implementation. Political parties play a direct role in shaping national policies in key sectors such as health, education, and economic development through their representation in parliament and executive coalitions. For example, welfare-oriented policies and infrastructure development programs are often products of coalition agreements among major political parties rather than unified ideological visions (Aspinall & Mietzner, 2019). While this arrangement allows for broad political inclusion, it can also dilute policy effectiveness due to competing party interests and fragmented decision-making processes.

Internal fragmentation within political parties further affects their ability to govern effectively. Factional divisions, leadership rivalries, and competing elite interests often influence policy positions and legislative behavior. In some cases, internal disagreements within parties lead to inconsistent policy support in parliament, weakening the coherence of governance outcomes (Tomsa, 2008). This fragmentation is particularly evident in large catch-all parties, where ideological diversity and elite competition coexist within a single organizational structure. Consequently, party discipline is often weak, and legislative coordination becomes difficult to maintain.

Overall, political parties in Indonesia have played a dual role in democratic governance: they have contributed significantly to democratic participation, institutional stability, and policy development, while simultaneously exhibiting weaknesses related to internal democracy, corruption, and fragmentation. These contradictions reflect the broader challenges of democratic consolidation in a post-authoritarian context, where institutional development is ongoing and uneven. Strengthening party institutionalization, improving transparency, and promoting

programmatic politics remain essential for enhancing governance effectiveness and ensuring that political parties fulfill their democratic functions more fully in the future.

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VII. THE ROLE OF POLITICAL PARTIES IN LOCAL GOVERNANCE

Indonesia's post-Reformasi democratic transition has been deeply shaped by the simultaneous processes of democratization and decentralization. Following the collapse of authoritarian rule under Suharto in 1998, Indonesia adopted one of the most extensive decentralization reforms in the developing world. These reforms significantly shifted political authority from the central government to provincial and district levels, thereby transforming the role of political parties in local governance. In this new institutional setting, political parties became key actors not only in national politics but also in shaping regional governance, policy outcomes, and local political competition (Aspinall & Berenschot, 2019).

Decentralization has fundamentally altered the structure of political party organization in Indonesia by strengthening local party branches and increasing the importance of regional political

actors. Local party structures now play a decisive role in candidate nomination, electoral mobilization, and policy implementation at the subnational level. However, this localization of political power has also facilitated the entrenchment of political dynasties and local elite networks. In many regions, political authority is concentrated among influential families and patronage networks that dominate party organizations and control access to political and economic resources (Buehler, 2013). As a result, decentralization has produced both democratic opportunities and new forms of localized elite domination.

Political parties are central to regional governance because they serve as gatekeepers for local executive and legislative positions. Governors, regents, and mayors are typically nominated by political parties or coalitions of parties, making party endorsement essential for electoral success. This system strengthens party influence over regional leadership selection but also encourages transactional politics, where nominations are often determined by financial contributions, elite bargaining, and informal networks rather than merit or policy competence (Mietzner, 2013). Consequently, local governance outcomes are frequently shaped by party dynamics and elite negotiations rather than programmatic development agendas.

Local elections (*pilkada*) have become a defining feature of Indonesia's decentralized democratic system and play a crucial role in shaping party competition. These elections have expanded political participation and allowed voters to directly choose regional leaders, thereby enhancing democratic legitimacy at the local level. However, they have also intensified competition among political parties, often leading to increased campaign costs and the expansion of money politics and clientelistic practices (Aspinall & Sukmajati, 2016). While local elections provide opportunities for political renewal and accountability, they also reinforce the importance of wealth and patronage in determining electoral outcomes.

The dynamics of local party competition vary significantly across Indonesia's diverse regions. In West Java, for example, political competition is highly influenced by Islamic identity politics and strong party networks, with parties such as the Prosperous Justice Party (PKS) playing a significant role in mobilizing religious constituencies. In Bali, political dynamics are shaped more by cultural identity and the dominance of nationalist parties such as the Indonesian Democratic Party of Struggle (PDI-P), reflecting the island's unique sociopolitical context. Meanwhile, in Papua, political competition is strongly influenced by issues of autonomy, ethnic identity, and state integration, with party politics often intersecting with broader questions of representation and development inequality (Aspinall, 2011). These regional variations demonstrate how local contexts shape the functioning and strategies of political parties.

Local political party systems also face significant challenges related to institutional capacity and accountability. Many local party branches remain weakly institutionalized and heavily dependent on national party elites for resources and decision-making authority. This weak local autonomy limits the ability of regional party organizations to develop coherent policy platforms or maintain consistent organizational structures. In many cases, local party branches primarily function as electoral machines rather than programmatic political institutions, focusing on short-term electoral gains rather than long-term governance objectives (Ufen, 2008).

Electoral reforms introduced after Reformasi have had mixed effects on local governance. On one hand, the introduction of direct local elections has strengthened democratic accountability by allowing citizens to directly evaluate and select regional leaders. This has increased the responsiveness of local governments and expanded political participation. On the other hand, these reforms have also intensified electoral competition and increased the financial costs of campaigning, thereby strengthening the role of wealthy candidates and political elites in local elections (Aspinall &

Berenschot, 2019). As a result, while decentralization has enhanced democratic participation, it has also reinforced patterns of elite dominance in many regions.

The empowerment of political parties at the local level has therefore produced both positive and negative consequences for Indonesia's democratic development. Positively, decentralization has allowed for greater political inclusion, increased local representation, and more responsive governance structures. Politically marginalized groups have gained new opportunities to participate in local decision-making processes through party competition and regional elections. However, decentralization has also facilitated the fragmentation of political authority and strengthened the influence of local oligarchs and dynastic networks, which often dominate party structures and limit genuine political competition.

Overall, the role of political parties in local governance reflects the broader paradox of Indonesia's democratic decentralization. While political parties have become more embedded in local political systems and have contributed to the expansion of democratic participation, they have also become vehicles for elite competition and patronage politics at the regional level. The effectiveness of local governance therefore depends heavily on the ability of political parties to institutionalize internal democracy, reduce clientelism, and strengthen programmatic competition. Without such reforms, decentralization may continue to reproduce rather than reduce patterns of inequality and elite domination in Indonesia's democratic system.

VIII. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR STRENGTHENING INDONESIA'S POLITICAL PARTIES AND DEMOCRACY

Strengthening Indonesia's democracy requires more than maintaining electoral procedures; it demands deeper institutional reforms that address the structural weaknesses of political parties.

Since the end of authoritarian rule under Suharto, Indonesia has successfully institutionalized competitive elections, yet persistent problems such as party fragmentation, oligarchic dominance, dynastic politics, and weak ideological coherence continue to limit democratic consolidation (Aspinall & Mietzner, 2019). Therefore, reform efforts must focus not only on electoral mechanisms but also on the internal functioning of political parties and their broader role in governance.

A first priority is the reform of the political party system to reduce fragmentation and strengthen ideological coherence. Indonesia's multiparty system has contributed to inclusiveness, but excessive fragmentation has also produced unstable coalitions and weak policy coordination (Mietzner, 2013). Electoral thresholds should be carefully recalibrated to balance inclusiveness with governability, ensuring that parties entering parliament possess meaningful public support. At the same time, reforms should discourage the proliferation of non-programmatic "electoral vehicles" that exist primarily for elite bargaining. Strengthening party institutionalization would help shift Indonesian politics from transactional coalition-building toward more stable programmatic competition.

Equally important is the need to reduce the influence of oligarchic actors and political dynasties within party structures. As scholarship on Indonesian politics has shown, wealth concentration and elite networks significantly shape party financing, candidate selection, and policy agendas (Hadiz & Robison, 2013; Winters, 2011). Campaign finance reform is therefore essential to limiting the dependence of parties on wealthy donors and business elites. Public funding for political parties should be increased and tied to strict transparency requirements, while private donations must be regulated through enforceable ceilings and disclosure mechanisms. Without addressing these structural inequalities, democratic competition risks remaining skewed in favor of elite interests.

Promoting internal party democracy is another critical reform agenda. Many Indonesian political parties remain highly

centralized, with leadership selection often controlled by small elite groups or dominant party figures. This weak internal democracy reduces accountability and limits the participation of party members in decision-making processes (Ufen, 2008). Parties should adopt transparent and competitive leadership selection mechanisms, such as open primaries or regulated internal elections, to strengthen legitimacy and reduce elite monopolization. In addition, candidate nomination processes should be standardized and made more transparent to ensure merit-based selection rather than reliance on financial or familial connections.

Beyond institutional procedures, political parties must also strengthen the quality of their ideological and policy platforms. At present, many parties in Indonesia function primarily as electoral machines rather than programmatic institutions with coherent policy agendas (Mietzner, 2013). Strengthening party ideology is essential for improving democratic accountability and enabling voters to make informed choices. Parties should develop clear long-term policy commitments in key areas such as poverty reduction, social justice, education reform, healthcare, and sustainable development. This shift from personality-based politics to issue-based competition would significantly improve the quality of Indonesia's democratic discourse.

A further challenge that requires urgent attention is the growing influence of populism and identity-based politics. While populist rhetoric and identity mobilization have been effective in engaging voters, they often deepen social polarization and weaken democratic inclusiveness (Hadiz, 2018). Political parties should adopt strategies that emphasize national integration and civic identity rather than ethnic or religious exclusivism. Civic education programs, inclusive political messaging, and cross-community coalition-building are essential tools for reducing polarization. In addition, political elites should refrain from exploiting religious and ethnic sensitivities for short-term electoral gains, as such strategies undermine long-term democratic stability.

Strengthening political accountability is also fundamental to improving Indonesia's democratic governance. Regulatory institutions such as the Electoral Commission and anti-corruption bodies must be empowered to monitor party activities, enforce campaign finance rules, and sanction violations effectively. Transparency in party financing and governance should be made mandatory, with regular public disclosure of financial reports and donor identities (Aspinall & Berenschot, 2019). Furthermore, parliamentary oversight mechanisms should be strengthened to ensure that elected representatives remain accountable to voters rather than to party elites or private sponsors.

Ultimately, the reform of Indonesia's political parties must be understood as part of a broader effort to deepen democratic consolidation. While electoral democracy has become firmly established, substantive democracy—characterized by accountability, inclusion, and policy responsiveness—remains incomplete. Addressing structural issues such as oligarchic influence, weak party institutionalization, and identity-based polarization is essential for strengthening democratic resilience. Without meaningful reform, political parties risk becoming instruments of elite control rather than vehicles of public representation.

In conclusion, Indonesia's democratic future depends heavily on the transformation of its political party system. Strengthening internal democracy, improving transparency, reducing oligarchic and dynastic influence, and promoting issue-based political competition are not merely technical adjustments but foundational reforms for democratic sustainability. If implemented effectively, these reforms can help ensure that political parties fulfill their core democratic functions: representing citizens, structuring political competition, and sustaining accountable governance in a diverse and complex society.

IX. CONCLUSION

Indonesia's post-Reformasi democratic trajectory demonstrates both remarkable institutional achievement and persistent structural vulnerability. Since the collapse of authoritarian rule under Suharto in 1998, political parties have become central pillars of democratic governance, enabling competitive elections, peaceful transfers of power, and expanded political participation. As intermediaries between society and the state, parties have contributed to the consolidation of electoral democracy by structuring political competition, mobilizing voters, and sustaining representative institutions (Mainwaring & Scully, 1995). However, this institutional success has been accompanied by enduring weaknesses that continue to limit the depth and quality of democratic consolidation in Indonesia.

A key finding of this study is that Indonesia's political parties operate within a dual reality of democratic institutionalization and elite domination. On the one hand, parties have successfully facilitated political inclusion and electoral stability in a highly diverse society, supporting the legitimacy of democratic processes and governance structures (Aspinall, 2010). On the other hand, they remain constrained by weak internal democracy, ideological incoherence, and persistent reliance on patronage-based politics (Mietzner, 2013). These structural limitations are further reinforced by oligarchic influence and dynastic politics, which shape candidate selection, party financing, and policy direction, often at the expense of broader public representation (Winters, 2011; Hadiz & Robison, 2013).

Another central finding concerns the increasing fragmentation of the party system and the growing influence of populism and identity politics. While Indonesia's multiparty system reflects the country's social diversity and supports political inclusion, it has also produced unstable coalition politics and weak programmatic governance (Ufen, 2008). At the same time, populist rhetoric and identity-based mobilization have intensified political

polarization, particularly in electoral contests where religious and cultural identities are strategically mobilized (Hadiz, 2018). These dynamics complicate efforts to build cohesive policy agendas and weaken the capacity of political parties to function as stable vehicles of democratic accountability.

Looking forward, the future of Indonesia's democratic consolidation will depend significantly on the ability of political actors and institutions to address these structural challenges. Reducing excessive party fragmentation, strengthening ideological and programmatic coherence, and limiting the influence of oligarchic networks are essential steps toward improving democratic governance. Without meaningful reform, political parties risk remaining instruments of elite competition rather than effective channels of citizen representation. Similarly, managing the political consequences of populism and identity politics is crucial for preventing further polarization and ensuring that democratic competition remains inclusive and policy-oriented.

The implications of these dynamics extend beyond party politics to the broader quality of democracy and governance in Indonesia. Political parties are not only electoral actors but also key institutions shaping policy outcomes, state accountability, and political stability. Weaknesses in party institutionalization therefore translate directly into governance challenges, including inconsistent policy implementation, corruption risks, and limited responsiveness to public needs (Aspinall & Mietzner, 2019). Strengthening political parties is thus essential not only for democratic deepening but also for improving the effectiveness and legitimacy of public administration.

In conclusion, Indonesia's experience illustrates the complexities of democratic consolidation in a post-authoritarian and highly plural society. While political parties have played a crucial role in sustaining electoral democracy, their structural weaknesses continue to constrain democratic quality. Addressing fragmentation, curbing oligarchic and dynastic influence, and mitigating populist and identity-based polarization are therefore

critical priorities for the future. The extent to which Indonesia can transform its political parties into programmatic, transparent, and accountable institutions will ultimately determine the resilience and quality of its democratic system in the years ahead.

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