

## Election and Democratic Deepening in Indonesia: The Case of the 2024 Election

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### Abstract

*The 2024 election is a crucial phase for Indonesian democracy. This election would be a juncture for whether the election is just a procedural mechanism for a power transition or a milestone in strengthening Indonesian democracy. This is due to the trend of Indonesian democratic regression characterized by narrowing space for civil liberties and weakening of the civilian institutions that support the existence of democracy. In this research, we use the concept of electoral integrity from Norris, Frank, and Coma. Electoral integrity emphasizes the fulfillment of free and fair principles throughout the election stages, that is, pre-election, campaigning, voting, and election evaluation. Electoral integrity directly contributes to democratic consolidation, which refers to the acceptance of democratic norms by the public such as law enforcement, transparency, deliberation, and bureaucratic integrity. This study uses a qualitative method. The data collection uses library research where data from secondary sources becomes the basis for compiling a conceptual framework and research analysis. The results of our study show that there are still several crucial issues during the 2024 election process that hinders democratic consolidation in Indonesia. Some critical points regarding the 2024 election are electoral regulations, party verification, voter registration, and electoral violations. The negligence of electoral integrity during the entire process of elections has the consequence toward the quality of the 2024 elections as a mere procedural mechanism. Even though the 2024 election has taken place peacefully, it is still insufficient to drive Indonesian democracy more substantive ways.*

**Keywords:** democracy, democratic consolidation, the 2024 election

### Abstrak

Pemilu 2024 menjadi fase penting bagi demokrasi Indonesia. Pemilu kali ini menjadi tolak ukur apakah pemilu hanya menjadi sekadar peristiwa prosedural pergantian kekuasaan atau tonggak penguatan demokrasi Indonesia. Hal ini tak lepas dari menguatnya tren kemunduran demokrasi Indonesia berupa menyempitnya ruang kebebasan sipil dan melemahnya institusi-institusi sipil penopang demokrasi. Pada penelitian ini, kami menggunakan konsep integritas pemilu dari Norris, Frank, dan Coma. Integritas pemilu menekankan pada terpenuhinya prinsip bebas dan adil sepanjang tahapan pemilu, yaitu pra-pemilu, kampanye, pemunggutan suara, dan evaluasi pemilu. Pemilu yang berintegritas secara langsung turut menentukan konsolidasi demokrasi yang merujuk pada terlembaganya nilai-nilai demokrasi seperti penegakan hukum, transparansi publik, deliberasi publik, dan integritas birokrasi sebagai manifestasi *good governance*. Penelitian ini menggunakan metode kualitatif. Teknik pengumpulan data dengan menggunakan studi kepustakaan dimana data-data yang berasal dari sumber sekunder menjadi dasar dalam menyusun kerangka konseptual dan analisis fokus penelitian. Hasil penelitian kami memperlihatkan masih terdapat beberapa hal krusial selama proses pemilu 2024 yang menjadi penghambat hadirnya konsolidasi demokrasi di Indonesia. Beberapa poin yang menjadi catatan kritis kami pada studi ini adalah regulasi pemilu 2024, verifikasi partai politik, pendataan pemilih, dan pelanggaran pemilu. Studi kami mencatat terdapat pengabaian terhadap nilai-nilai utama konsolidasi demokrasi yang turut membawa konsekuensi pada stagnasi pemilu 2024 hanya sekadar mekanisme demokrasi prosedural. Kami berkesimpulan meskipun

penyelenggaraan pemilu 2024 berlangsung secara damai tapi masih belum cukup untuk menjadi penggerak demokrasi Indonesia menjadi lebih substantif.

**Kata kunci:** demokrasi, konsolidasi demokrasi, pemilu 2024

## INTRODUCTION

The consolidation of Indonesian democracy faces serious challenges. There are some empirical conditions as the primary considerations to support the statement. First, political parties, as one of the critical institutions of democracy, have not been adequately institutionalized, trapped in party personalization and oligarchy (Mietzner, 2020). The party relies more on the figure of its leader than the political machine having its roots in society (Fionna, 2016). Second, the system of checks and balances that assigns the legislature to supervise the executive could be more effective. However, executive power in Indonesia's multiparty presidential system is increasingly dominant by absorbing parties in parliament into coalitions supporting the government (Mietzner, 2016). This condition finally leads to the weakness of checks and balances between executive and legislative power. Third, civil liberties, which are an essential feature of democracy, also often receive critical notes from the domestic public and international institutions. For example, Freedom House's latest report gives a score of 28 out of 60 for aspects of civil liberties in Indonesia that contribute to Indonesia's "partly free" status (Freedom House, 2023).

Contemporary political dynamics such as populism and political polarization also challenge the Indonesian democratic deepening. These phenomena lead to the trend of Indonesian democratic regression. The consolidation of Indonesian democracy remains an extensive work for the political parties, elites, and civil society to realize it. Nonetheless, Indonesia's electoral democracy still has a solid foundation (Aspinall & Mietzner, 2019). Since the political reforms took place in 1998, there has never been a postponement of elections. Political contestation through regular elections not only results in a democratic change of government but also accommodates citizen's political rights. Even Freedom House gave a high score to Indonesia's electoral democracy – 30 out of 40 points (Freedom House, 2023). Therefore, it is in this context that the 2024 election is critical to assess further whether it can serve its importance for the survival of Indonesian democracy or not.

However, elections can contribute to democratic regression. The weak political commitment among elites to democratic regime can be the primary cause at the structural level. An example is normalizing violations and manipulation, which makes the quality and legitimacy of elections low. Conditions will be more severe due to the highly partisan attitude of voters who tend to sacrifice democracy for their political preferences (Fossati et al., 2022). Furthermore, discourses of postponing the 2024 elections (Farisa, 2023), extending the presidential term (Fikri, 2023), and changing the electoral system (Achmad, 2023) are some examples that pose a potential threat to Indonesian democracy. Even though the election management bodies have worked well enough for the 2024 election, several crucial problems during its preparations have resulted in public pessimism towards the future of Indonesian democracy. Some critical issues, for example, are such as the verification of political parties participating in the 2024 election (Nurhasim, 2022); the attitude of Bawaslu that was not firm and seemed to be 'partisan' in addressing violations by political actors (Subarkah, 2023); the recruitment of administrators (KPU and Bawaslu commissioners) between election stages (Fadilla, 2022); the burden on electoral organizers as the consequences of simultaneous elections (Kaharuddin, 2022). In this case, the professionalism of election commission is vital because it directly impacts the quality of elections as a mechanism for the succession of power and ensuring the democratic rights of the people.

We try to analyze some critical issues during the 2024 election. Since the election is the leading indicator of democratic polity, this study is relevant to contemporary Indonesian politics to see how the 2024 election becomes a steppingstone for democratic deepening. The studies on Indonesian democracy are mostly centered on electoral dynamics with emphases on behavioral

perspectives. For example, the intense of competitive elections have pushed Indonesian politicians on the populist approach to garner voter's sympathies and electoral votes (Aspinall, 2015; Fossati & Mietzner, 2019; Hadiz, 2018). Along with the rise of identity politics, not only Islamists but also secular groups tend to use illiberal approaches to justify their political means (Baker, 2023; Diprose et al., 2019; Fossati, 2024; Mietzner, 2018; Mietzner & Muhtadi, 2018). Vote-buying becomes another critical theme since candidates, particularly in legislative elections, use this strategy to enlarge their winning margin (Aspinall & Berenschot, 2019; Aspinall & Sukmajati, 2016; Muhtadi, 2019). Moreover, the personalization of Indonesian politics due to the low level of party institutionalization leads to the elites' predatory behavior to ensure their interests and survivals (Hadiz & Robison, 2013; Kenawas, 2023a; Mietzner, 2024; Mietzner & Honna, 2023; Tomsa, 2017). These cases have finally caused Indonesian democratic regression (Power, 2018; Power & Warburton, 2020; Warburton & Aspinall, 2019). In sum, most studies portray how elections have provided a space for political contestation and its following impacts. Here, we focus on how the election impact a democratic consolidation in Indonesia. To the best of our knowledge, most studies analyze elections in behavioral contexts, elites' political struggle for power. On the contrary, we discuss the election, particularly through institutional perspectives, as a mechanism to enhance Indonesian democratic quality. Therefore, this study tries to bridge these gaps.

Democratization in various parts of the world has become increasingly prominent since the Third Wave in 1974. The causes of the democratic transition vary in each country. For example, democratization occurs due to the economic crisis (Bunce, 2001), civil society resistance (Aspinall, 2005), and the split of the elite coalition that supports the authoritarian regime (Haggard & Kaufman, 2016). However, another interesting explanation for democratization is the role of elections. Lindberg (2006) explains that elections contribute to liberalization, strengthen political institutions and civil liberties. Edgell et al. (2018) show that elections significantly impact the existence of liberal democracy (especially legal certainty, checks and balances) and encourage public opinion in policy formulations. Moreover, in relations to the state and society, elections increase public's trust toward the democratic regime (Hooghe & Stiers, 2016). Here, elections provide a space for political contestation for the opposition. From this perspective, citizens' awareness grows gradually on the importance of a democratic regime giving more public spaces to express their political views. In this case, elections socialize democratic values to citizens and consequently improve the quality of democracy.

The idea that elections lead to democratization is a complex issue that needs to be critically examined. Some scholars, such as Gandhi & Lust-Okar (2009), argue that elections alone do not guarantee democratization. They point out that in some cases, autocratic regimes may use elections to maintain power by co-opting elites or controlling opposition. Additionally, in countries with strong state institutions, regimes can manipulate elections, suppress opposition, and use state resources to maintain control (van Ham & Seim, 2017). Kaya & Bernhard (2013) suggest that in such circumstances, elections can be a tool for authoritarian regimes to either maintain their power or to bring about their downfall. Therefore, the role of elections in democratization is not straightforward; it can either challenge autocratic rule or help sustain it.

The critical point of democratization through elections is the context surrounding autocratic regimes. Some scholars see that the possibility of democratization by elections needs additional circumstances. Morse (2012) underlines regime vulnerability as one of the requirements for democratization where an autocrat's power for mobilization weakens and opposition grows more robust. Democratization is more likely to occur in authoritarian regimes with high electoral competition than in those with hegemonic rulers and political institutions (Donno, 2013). Howard and Roessler (2006) emphasize the importance of the strategic coalition of the opposition in mobilizing voter support against the co-optation, manipulation, and repression of authoritarian regimes. A country's experience with democracy also acts as a critical juncture that affects democratic improvements through repeated elections (Kim, 2020). Moreover, voters' support for opposition coalitions during the voting day increases the possibility of democratization by elections more likely (Gandhi & Ong, 2019). In short, democratization by

elections is a complex phenomenon. It requires a solid force from the opposition and the integrity of elections (van Ham & Seim, 2017).

The elections not only invoke a regime transition but also change the distribution of power to a broader spectrum. Power is not only concentrated in a dominant actor. Democratic actors outside the government also have a crucial influence on power relations. Unfortunately, studies on elections and democracy, as we have mentioned above, mostly focus on political contestation between political actors fighting for government power. Attention to election institutions is no less necessary in seeing elections' contribution to democratization and the consolidation of democracy. The electoral management bodies (EMBs) are not only the institutions with the authority to hold elections but are responsible for guarding citizens' political rights. Some of the critical tasks of the EMB include compiling voter lists, determining eligibility to participate in elections, carrying out voting, and counting and validating votes (Catt et al., 2014). These tasks are crucial to not only ensure the completion of procedural democracy but a further step for substantive democracy. Furthermore, independence, integrity, and professionalism are important for free and fair elections. The partiality of electoral management bodies is prone to electoral frauds and manipulations that automatically reduce legitimacy. Consequently, the performance of electoral management bodies to administer and monitor elections has direct impacts toward the quality of the country's democracy.

To work professionally and efficiently, EMBs need a proper institutional design to manage their roles, functions, and authorities. The most fundamental aspect is the autonomy of EMBs since the EMBs have a direct impact on the credibility of elections (Rosas, 2010). In this case, the impartiality of electoral management bodies acts as a democratic baseline that cannot be negotiated for free and fair elections. The presence of EMBs as the guardians of democracy is even more crucial in a country with the least democracy – not free or partly free democracy – since the regimes can quickly intervene in the electoral processes and results (van Ham & Lindberg, 2015). Although alternative oversight institutions, such as civil society, judiciary, and mass media, can be additional forces to strengthen the roles of EMBs (Birch & Van Ham, 2017), there is no specific guarantee that EMBs can work independently vis-a-vis the political interests of the regimes. The situation can worsen when society is highly polarized, and the EMBs have a high partisan identity to serve the regime (Alderman, 2023). Consequently, elections cannot meet the expectations as a means of democratic improvement.

To systematically measure the quality of elections, Norris et al. (2013) arranges several indicators for assessing election quality that include four main dimensions, that is, (1) pre-election, (2) campaign, (3) election day, and (4) post-election. The pre-election stage includes electoral laws, that must be fair to all parties and protecting citizen's rights; electoral procedures particularly related to the management of election in accordance with laws; boundaries such as equal treatments to all parties and candidates; voter registration especially regarding the accuracy of voter data; party registration where it encompasses the inclusion of all parties to participate in the election – candidates from opposition, women, and ethnic minorities. The second part is campaigns consisting of all activity to influence voter's political preference by using all media platform and financial resources. The third stage is voting day where voters do not feel threatened to give votes for their preferred candidates/parties and *a firm mechanism in dealing with election violations* (additional emphasis by authors). Finally, a post-election places the last phase that covers vote count, post-election related to the acceptance of election results and legal channel to solve electoral disputes, and the evaluation of electoral authorities. All these phases explicitly place the centrality of Election Management Bodies as the leading actors to deliver a free and fair election. This simply means the ability of EMBs to handle the whole phase professionally is the key to the further improvement of Indonesian democratic quality. Furthermore, the impartiality of EMBs will determine whether the election contributes to the democratic consolidation – the rule of law, political accountability, bureaucratic integrity, and public deliberation – or a mere procedural activity that strengthen an autocratic regime (Schedler, 2002).

However, this study does not aim to measure quantitatively the quality of the 2024 Indonesian election. The authors have some limitations in explaining the overall electoral

sequences. This article only covers some assessments and analyses in qualitative narratives on the critical phases of the 2024 election. We have observed some critical issues such as party registration, electoral regulation, voter registration, and the institutional capacity of EMBs to deal with electoral violations. These issues have direct impacts on the quality of the 2024 election. For example, the verification of political parties as contestants in the 2024 election has invited criticism from the public, particularly regarding electoral fraud by some members of the Election Commission. Even lawsuits by political parties that do not pass verification have contributed to new legal problems and uncertainty over the 2024 election (Saubani, 2023).

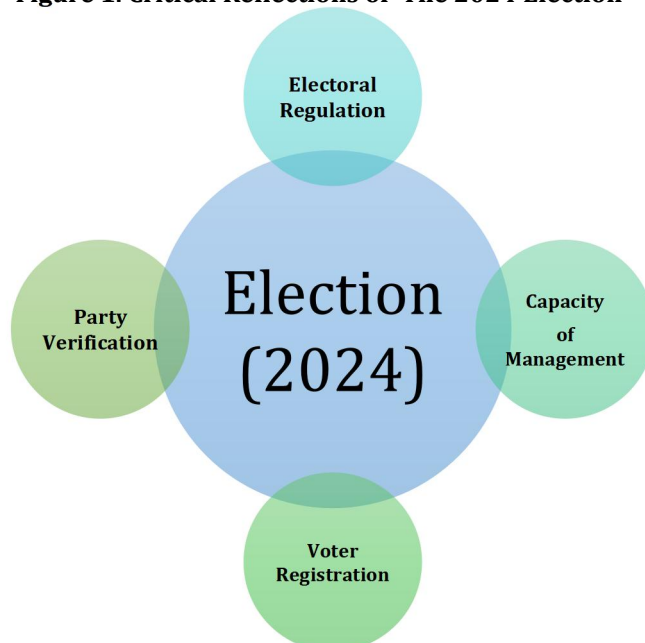
## RESEARCH METHOD

This study used qualitative method. The type of our research is a case study. The 2024 election has been a peculiar case since it becomes a milestone of two-decade Indonesian democracy. The election provides us entire description on the dynamics of contemporary Indonesian politics. It has transformed not only political mechanisms for government transition but also the ways of elites to secure their political interests. In our view, this approach fits with our research focus since we aim to analyze the case in a deeper explanation. We try to explain why the case matters and how it impacts the trajectory of Indonesian democracy. Our data comes from relevant literature such as articles and news in mass media, books, journals, government regulations, and so on. The literature we collected is particularly for constructing a conceptual framework and a basis for identifying and explaining critical issues during the 2024 election.

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The 2024 election is a crucial stage for Indonesian democracy. The election is not only about a regular transition of leadership in the government but also a moment that will directly impact Indonesia's democratic deepening. However, there are some critical reflections regarding the 2024 election, such as electoral regulation, party verification, voter registration, and the capacity of election management bodies to prevent and tackle electoral violations. These issues are essential to be discussed further. This is because the problems we identified before are related to electoral quality and integrity.

**Figure 1. Critical Reflections of The 2024 Election**



*Source: Processed by the author*

## Electoral Rules

The regulation for the 2024 election remains the same as the previous election, that is, Law Number 17/2017 on General Election. Technically, there is no significant difference from the 2019 election. The legislative and presidential elections are held at the same time. However, in the run-up to the 2024 election, the election law becomes a subject of judicial reviews that impact election uncertainties. We observe that the Constitutional Court has been a battleground for political actors and elites to change election rules in their favor. We discuss three decisions from the Constitutional Court that have caused public anxiety about the future of Indonesian democracy. The Court's decisions on party verification, electoral system, and age restriction for presidential and vice-presidential candidates are a few examples of this case. Nonetheless, we focus our discussion on the electoral system and age limitation in this section. We will touch on the issue of party verification in the next part.

Indonesia has adopted an open-list proportional system for the legislative election since 2009. This system has changed the patterns of electoral competition and voters' behavior. Political contestations among parties and candidates running for legislative councils become tougher. Political parties compete to nominate prospective candidates, and all candidates contend to get selected by voters. All candidates face two front rivalries – candidates from other parties and their party counterparts – since those who collect the highest number of votes will automatically become the MPs (members of parliaments). The massive competition has pushed candidates to use a shortcut to influence voters' political choice through vote-buying. Candidates offer material incentives and ask voters for electoral votes in return. This campaign method has been practiced intensively during elections. Consequently, it has opened a broader opportunity for political corruption since vote-buying leads to unaccountable practices in running the government (Muhtadi, 2018). Moreover, political parties face de-institutionalization and lack of power to control their representatives in parliaments and executive branches (Argawati, 2023a). Financially, most parties depend on their candidates to finance political campaigns. Finally, these reasons motivate some groups to propose a judicial review of Article 168 Paragraph 2 of Law Number 17/2017 to change the election system from an open-list proportional to a closed system.

An open-list proportional system may trigger a massive practice of vote-buying during elections (Muhtadi, 2018). But, compared to a closed-list system, it gives a broader space for voters to select their preferred candidates (Saputra & Setiawan, 2023). Voters can demand candidates for more realistic programs for people's prosperity. Moreover, in an open-list proportional system, candidates are more responsible to voters since their survival in parliaments primarily depends on electoral support from voters. If a closed-list proportional system were applied, political parties would have more control over their MPs than constituents. This system would strengthen party institutions. Candidates would be more loyal since parties have full authority in recommending candidates who align with the party's ideological platform. However, this requires a high degree of party institutionalization where political parties have a durable base of political support from the grassroots. The problem with political parties in Indonesia is that they are weakly institutionalized (Tomsa, 2014). There are only a few voters who identify their ideological affiliation toward political parties. Most voters see a candidate's popularity and are influenced by social networks in giving electoral votes (Muhtadi, 2019; Pradhanawati et al., 2019). Therefore, the closed-list system would strengthen political parties on the one side but weaken popular sovereignty on the other hand. It only gives a more significant incentive toward party oligarchs; voters lose control over parties and candidates; political corruption grows massively because candidates need party recommendation rather than voters' acceptance. Fortunately, the Constitutional Court's decision favors an open-list proportional system that keeps voter primacy over party oligarchs.

The Constitutional Court's verdicts on the electoral law are not free from controversies. For instance, the age restriction for a vice-presidential candidate invites various responses from the public. Some see the Court's decision as an opportunity for the young generation to compete in the presidential election. The verdict reflects equal rights among citizens, particularly in political participation (Olivia, 2023). Unlike legislative elections that allow citizens under 30 years of age

to become a candidate for MPs, the presidential election regulation requires that a candidate must be at least 40 years old. The Court implicitly gives the green light for candidate nomination under the age of 40 with an additional requirement – having experience as a head of regional government selected through elections (Argawati, 2023b). However, the public has massively criticized the Court's decision since it tends to nepotism and facilitates the rise of political dynasties (Fernandes, 2023; Kenawas, 2023b; Kurniawan, 2023a). It is difficult to see the verdict as the product of a fair judgment. Tempo magazine reported that the chief of the Court actively approached and influenced the legal opinions of other judges to relax the age restriction for presidential and vice-presidential candidates (Rosana & Dongoran, 2023). As we know, the chief of the Court, who had a major influence in the direction of the verdict at the time, is the brother-in-law of President Jokowi. And Gibran Rakabuming Raka, the eldest son of President Jokowi himself, is the person who gets the most benefits from the verdict. Afterward, he was named Prabowo's running mate for the 2024 presidential election. In sum, the Court's verdict on the age restriction has changed the course of political competition and undermined the foundation of Indonesian democracy.

Some judicial reviews on the election law have made the Constitutional Court an arena for political battles among key actors. On the one hand, this trend highlights the fact that everyone has recognized the importance of the Court as the guardian of democracy. As a product of democratic reform, the Court can review laws and decide disputes on election results. The presence of the Court has transformed political chaos into a peaceful mechanism for conflict resolutions regarding electoral disputes; political actors have avoided violent actions and prefer the legal channel to solve disagreements (Mietzner, 2010). However, the strategic position of the Court in the political structure of Indonesian democracy has made it vulnerable to undemocratic attacks. Many actors use judicial reviews at the Court to serve their political interests against democratic norms. They try to control the Court to influence and change the rules of the game in their favor (Ginsburg & Huq, 2020). Ironically, the current threat to democracy does not come from the army, which could launch a coup to take over the government from civilians. Civilian politicians can lead to an autocratic regime by altering fundamental governance arrangements through constitutional amendments (Jakab, 2018). Consequently, the politicization of the Court to fulfill the political ambitions of the ruling elites has contributed to the country's democratic backsliding (Ginsburg, 2019). In the case of Indonesia, we have seen that the Constitutional Court has moved to this direction. Moreover, the legal battles in the Court have caused the uncertainty of the 2024 election since the judicial processes could disrupt the critical phase of the election, especially the registrations of legislative, presidential, and vice-presidential candidates.

Another controversy on electoral regulation is related to women political representation. In this case, KPU Regulation No. 10/2023, especially Article 8 Paragraph 2, regulates the calculation of 30% representation of women in each electoral district. This regulation hampers women's political representation because it enforces rounding down of numbers for fractions that produce a decimal number of less than 50. Democracy activists see this as a violation of the law and women's political rights (Nababan, 2023). The presence of the 30% gender quota is to address gender inequality in political representation. Men have greater social, economic, and political capital than women to compete in politics. Furthermore, men have easier access to building social networks to win voter support because they do not face major cultural barriers compared to women. The existence of a gender affirmation policies is a form of state protection so that political involvement between men and women does not become increasingly unequal. Therefore, regulation is clearly against the affirmative policy for women's political representation because it does not encourage political parties to work harder to fulfill the women's candidacy quota in each electoral district. Moreover, the reality shows that the list of permanent candidates for legislative members has not met the 30% gender quota (Purnamasari, 2023b). Even though the Supreme Court annulled this article, the KPU's response of not revising the rules and only providing a letter to political parties to guide the Supreme Court's decision has implications for the KPU's credibility as a guardian of citizens' political rights as well as



democracy (Purnamasari, 2023a) . This issue is important since there will be no democratic consolidation if women, as a part of society, are excluded from political affairs.

### **Party Verification**

Political parties are a crucial institution for democracy. They provide potential leaders and the socio-political bases to support the government to run the country legitimately. The primary function of political parties is to connect the state and society. Moreover, political parties primarily educate voters on democratic norms and the country's political values. They are the driving force for democracy. The quality and durability of democracy depend on how political parties can perform their primary tasks and possess a high degree of institutionalization. In this case, party institutionalization means a party has the strength and organizational capacity to fulfill its main roles in a democratic state- (Huntington, 1996; Mainwaring & Scully, 1995). Here, political parties have an established mechanism that regulates their internal affairs and a solid social base that provides them with stable political support.

The electoral regulation in Indonesia stipulates a political party must meet some fundamental requirements to participate in an election. Political parties must face two stages of party verification, administrative and factual (Wahyu, 2022) . In administrative verification, the Election Commission checks all party documents such as documents ratifying the party as a legal entity, internal party regulations, party structures and administrators, party offices, and party membership. On the other hand, factual verification refers to attempts to verify further the proofs of all requirements provided by political parties to the Election Commission. In short, party verification examines whether political parties exist in society and possess the organizational capacity to serve their primary function, particularly in collecting electoral votes. Political parties can fully participate in the upcoming election if all the requirements are met.

Theoretically, party verification can push toward the institutionalization of the party system. The high entry barriers for new political parties will direct the pattern of interparty competition toward stability, especially regarding vote share (Okthariza, 2023) . As we have seen from the previous elections, most voters tend to vote for the established parties as their political preferences (Wahyu, 2021) ; even the result of the 2024 election shows that the established parties have successfully surpassed the parliamentary threshold -- PDI-P, Golkar, Gerindra, PKB, Nasdem, PKS, Demokrat, and PAN (CNN Indonesia, 2024) . Compared to new parties, the established parties do not face difficulty getting vote shares since they have large party cadres and political machines for voter mobilization. Therefore, it is understandable that most new parties hardly pass the parliamentary threshold of 4%. Thus, party verification is not only a means of assessing party institutions but also encourages simplifying political parties. Only parties with cohesive structures and institutions can participate as electoral contestants. And if we follow this logic, all the complexity of party verification will encourage politicians to join the existing parties rather than forming the new ones.

However, democracy must guarantee citizen's political rights. Creating a new party is a manifestation of the rights, and the main task of the state is to fulfill them. The state must ensure that the process is conducted impartially. Party verification is a crucial step that will determine the quality of an election. Critical issues in the party verification process directly impact the democratic deepening in Indonesia. If the process is flawed, the credibility of the Election Commission will be questioned by the public. And this is the case with party verification in the run-up to the 2024 election. The fundamental problem is the verdict from the Constitutional Court that makes party verification unfair (Basyari, 2021a). The essence of the Court's decision is that political parties that have crossed the parliamentary threshold in the previous election – the 2019 election – only take part in administrative verification (Basyari, 2021b). On the other hand, new parties and others unable to collect 4% vote share nationally must undergo administrative and factual verification. In this case, the equality of citizens' rights and expressing their freedom in elections is completely ignored. In sum, this decision does not reflect the principle of fairness as a fundamental norm of democracy.

The case has made the Election Commission's work more accessible and the election budget more efficient since only a few parties must be audited in the factual verification. However, the



actual condition underlying political parties in Indonesia is that they have a critical problem with party membership. Parties lack cadres at the grassroots level, which makes the party's electoral support more stable from one election to another. Most voters in Indonesia do not feel a strong emotional and ideological linkage toward parties (party identification/party ID). There is a significant decrease in party ID among Indonesian voters, from 11.7% in 2017 to 6.8% in 2021 (Suryaningtyas, 2023). Theoretically, the high level of party ID indicates that political parties have successfully penetrated their ideological thought into the structure of society, giving them a socio-political base for their existence and survival (Liddle & Mujani, 2007; Wilkinson, 2015). Party ID proves that political parties have served their essential task of connecting the state and society well. Furthermore, party ID creates loyal voters who consistently give their support amidst strict political competition. They do not ask for material incentives from parties or candidates during elections since they put their ideological attachment as their primary consideration to vote. This is the missing link in Indonesia's political parties, where they primarily rely on the popularity of candidates rather than party machines composed of loyalist voters. Therefore, the Court's verdict on party verification ignores the principle of justice and weakens party institutionalization.

The problem in party membership, party ID in this sense, underlines two critical issues, party organization and public trust. Most political parties in Indonesia rely on the popularity of their central politicians, particularly the party chairman. Parties do not seriously build their organizational structure to support their survival. This can be seen from the emergence of political dynasties in party governance (Kurniawan, 2023b). Many top-party politicians place their family members in strategic party positions. Consequently, party governance is dominated by the culture of feudalism and nepotism rather than meritocracy, contributing to the weakness of party institutionalization. This is an irony of political parties that fail to present democratic mechanisms in their party governance. Institutionally, parties become weak since most politicians only use parties as their vehicle to pursue their political ambition. There is a reification issue here where the public does not widely acknowledge the parties (Randall & Svåsand, 2002). Finally, this impacts public opinion towards political parties. The public sees political parties as institutions that merely care about their interests rather than articulating public demand into welfare policies. This makes most of the public less emotionally connected to parties, finally causing only a few individuals to be interested in joining political parties. From this reality, we can conclude that factual verification is required for all political parties since the parliamentary parties have a critical problem in their party memberships. By excluding parliament parties as the objects of factual verification, electoral governance is against electoral integrity.

Apart from the regulation, factual verification leaves another critical loophole that hinders democratic deepening in Indonesia. Since party ID among voters decreases, new parties mostly face difficulties in inviting individuals to be party cadres. To handle this problem, parties only take individual identities to be included in party membership without consent. Consequently, when verification teams from the Election Commission checked the truth, many individuals were shocked that they were members of political parties (Pusparisa et al., 2022). Based on this finding, many parties finally did not meet the essential requirement to directly participate in the 2024 election. However, several parties that should not have met the requirements passed factual verification to be political contestants. This then raised suspicions from civil society regarding the manipulation of the results of factual verification of political parties (Harbowo & Basyari, 2022). Civil society claims that there has been a change in factual verification results from "not meeting the requirements" to "meeting the requirements" in some regions (Purnamasari, 2022). For this case, the coalition of civil society reported key members of the Election Commission to the Honorary Board of Election Organizers (DKPP) due to ethical violation during party verification (Salasah, 2022). Although the issue has been solved, this case has impacted the impartiality and credibility of the Election Commission to deliver a free and fair election.

The entire process of party verification shows that it does not effectively drive toward the simplification of political parties. The complication of establishing a political party, in fact, does

not reduce the emergence of new parties in every election. We have witnessed how new political parties frequently emerge during electoral cycles. The character of Indonesian democracy, dominated by political patronage and power sharing among elites, has stimulated aspiring party oligarchs to build a new party (Slater, 2018). There is no significant difference between the new and old parties, both in terms of political ideology and policy platform (Fossati et al., 2020). Mostly, the purpose of politicians forming new parties is to be a negotiation mechanism to enter the circle of power, not as an organization to voice people's prosperity with a clear ideological line. Therefore, the formation of political parties in Indonesia should ideally start at the regional scale and then the national level. If party verification is not carried out properly by election organizers and opens a lot of room for negotiation between elites to smooth the steps for new parties, strengthening democracy will be difficult to achieve. This is because democracy requires the solidity of political party institutions, and party verification is the first step in assessing this solidity.

### **Voter Registration**

The central part of elections is citizen participation. Voters place a strategic position during an election. They are the leading actors who decide the best candidates to run the government in the next few years. Thus, ensuring citizens' voting rights is critical for the election management bodies. This is because a higher voter turnout during elections directly impacts democratic deepening. The high voter turnout indicates voters become more aware that elections are not only a peaceful mechanism for a government transition but also a means to judge candidates' policy platforms for people's prosperity. In the two previous elections, voter turnout increased significantly from 69.6% (presidential election) and 75.1% (legislative election) in 2014 to 81.9% (presidential election) and 81.7% (legislative election) in 2019 (Masyukrilla, 2023a). This is certainly a good trend for Indonesian democracy and gives the Election Commission more challenging tasks to boost the number since there are more than 200 million registered voters in the 2024 election (Wahyu, 2023).

The fundamental issue of voter registration is regarding the accuracy and reliability of the data (Putri, 2023; Sulistyo, 2021; Teka, 2023). For example, the Election Supervisory Body found more than 6 million ineligible voters during the matching and research period for the fixed-voter list for the 2024 election (Basyari, 2023a). This could be a potential dispute among contestants due to the presence of double voters. Since the direct elections from 2009 to 2019, the validity of voter registration has been accused as a subject of electoral fraud by the parties and candidates who lost in the electoral competition. However, the Election Commission has managed the issue very well and facilitated voters to check their eligibility through KPU's website, [cekdptonline.kpu.go.id](http://cekdptonline.kpu.go.id). Another critical problem is the security of voter data. There was a voter data leak before the 2024 general election (Sulistya, 2023). The leak indicates that the Election Commission did not have a solid data security system. The inability of the Election Commission to maintain the confidentiality of voter data could reduce the credibility of the organizing institution and the legitimacy of the election (BBC\_Indonesia, 2023). Moreover, the misuse of personal data can cause material disadvantages to voters. Apart from that, the leak is vulnerable to be exploited by irresponsible parties to commit election fraud. Therefore, developing a secure and comprehensive data system is essential for future Election Commission to ensure citizens' rights and protect voters' personal and sensitive information.

### **Electoral Violations**

The absence of electoral violations is critical for delivering a free and fair election. The spread and massive electoral violations impact the quality of elections and the prospect of democratic consolidation. The negligence of electoral violations will create an ineffective and bad government due to widespread political corruption. Moreover, the newly elected government will have weak legitimacy because most of the public does not acknowledge the election result. Consequently, it is not only democracy that will perish but also puts the future of the country in uncertainty.

According to the electoral regulation, there are three types of electoral violations commonly known in Indonesia – ethics, administration, and crimes. In this section we limit our discussions to two cases, ethics and crimes, particularly vote buying. Ethical violations are related to the neglect of ethics by election organizers in carrying out their duties. This issue is crucial since it is related to the integrity and professionalism of persons in the election management bodies to deliver a free and fair election. The frequent ethical violations certainly cause public doubts on the impartiality of the EMBs. Unfortunately, the 2024 election presented some ethical violations by the chairman, members, and ad hoc staffs of the Election Commission (Tim\_Kompas, 2024c). For more details, there were 205 ethical violations during the 2024 election (Yuniarto, 2024). Although the ethical violations did not impact the entire process of the election, their behaviors have reduced the integrity and credibility of the Election Commission (Manumoyoso, 2024). Consequently, this leads to public criticism toward the independence and institutional professionalism of the Election Commission (Basyari, 2023b).

Vote buying is another crucial issue that decreases the quality of elections and democracy. Vote buying refers to a political behavior giving material incentives to voters in exchange for electoral support (Nichter, 2014). This practice can further foster political corruption and hinder the presence of good government since elected politicians prioritize their interests rather than public needs (Kitschelt & Wilkinson, 2007). Although vote buying is formally prohibited, most candidates running for legislative and executive elections rely on this practice to gather electoral support from voters. On the other hand, voters become more pragmatic by asking material benefits from candidates in exchange for their political choice during elections. This condition finally creates 'informality trap', voters ask instant benefits and politicians prefer clientelism rather than programmatic politics, that shackle Indonesian democracy (Susilo, 2022). According to an expert, there is an increase on voter acceptance toward vote buying practice in the 2024 election, where based on an exit poll there are 46.9% voters that view money politics as a normal compared to the 2019 elections, 32.1% (Muhtadi, 2024). In fact, the practice of money politics is becoming increasingly widespread ahead of voting day on February 14, 2024 (Yandwiputra et al., 2024). Furthermore, the operation of money politics practices involves state apparatus such as village officials, civil servants, and government social program assistants (Costa, 2024; Tim Kompas, 2024b, 2024a, 2024d). This trend becomes an alert for Indonesian democracy since the main cause of this issue lies on institutional aspects, particularly the weakness of party institutionalization and ineffectiveness of law enforcement on vote buying.

Money politics, based on Indonesian law, is categorized as a crime with threats of fines and penalties. However, many people do not consider this case as a severe problem. For example, a poll conducted by Litbang Kompas revealed that most people would not report the practice of money politics during elections to Bawaslu even though they saw it directly (Masyukrilla, 2023b). They do not view it as their personal matter and have no willingness to get involved further in political problems. This happens because the process of handling money politics is complicated - requiring the presence of reporters, witnesses, influence on vote acquisition, and long waiting times. Apart from that, the public also sees that Bawaslu is not taking a firm stance towards the practice of money politics involving important state officials (Purnamasari, 2024). Furthermore, protracted and indecisive handling of money politics can result in the social exclusion of individuals reporting the cases considering that the distribution mechanism of vote-buying involves complex social-political networks. Thus, quicker problem handling and simpler processes become an alternative in overcoming money politics. Proving vote-buying should not involve increasing vote acquisition but should simply engage in activities that distribute money to influence voters' political orientation (Harbowo, 2021). This change in the way money politics is handled is important to save the quality of elections and Indonesian democracy in the future.

## CONCLUSION

The peaceful election in 2024 is a new milestone for Indonesian democracy. This indicates that actors in Indonesian political landscape have accepted democracy as the only mechanism for power and government transition. Elections have been recognized by all actors as the only mechanism for power transition. The election has paved the way for the emergence of new

political actors to enter the centers of power and public decision making - the executive and legislative. However, the 2024 election leaves some critical cases that impede democratic consolidation. Critical aspects of democratic consolidation have not been fulfilled properly during the 2024 election. For example, changes to the rules regarding the age limit for presidential and vice-presidential candidates have ignored public accountability and bureaucratic integrity. The regulation on the percentage of women candidacy tends to marginalize women's political rights and ignore the principle of equality. The party verification process is contrary to aspects of justice, the rule of law and public transparency. The cases of money politics that are not handled properly show the weakness of law enforcement against actions that damage democracy. Another crucial issue is the ethical violations committed by KPU members which show the weak integrity of the bureaucracy of the election management institution itself. These cases are the biggest homework that must be addressed by all parties who care about the future of Indonesian democracy. Fixing these problems can certainly make elections not just a procedural event for the change of power but also a milestone in strengthening Indonesian democracy. Moreover, the Election Supervisory Body (Bawaslu) should collaborate with civil society organization to educate citizens' political awareness on the importance of a free and fair election by actively reporting electoral violations, particularly the cases on money politics. This attempt will increase election supervisions and the quality of the election in future.

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