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The Challenges for Indonesia's Electoral Institution in Facing Cartelization and Oligarchs Politics

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Abstract

Purpose : This study aims to analyze how the interaction between party cartelization and political oligarchy operates within Indonesia's electoral institutional structure, and how it affects the independence, accountability, and transparency of electoral management bodies (KPU and Bawaslu). Using the 2024 election as the case context, this study further seeks to formulate a collaborative accountability model to address these structural challenges.

Design/methodology : This qualitative document-based case analysis draws on legal documents, institutional reports, civil society reports, and academic literature. Following Tracy's qualitative research framework, the data were analyzed through interpretive thematic analysis within a political economy and power theory framework.

Findings : The analysis reveals that cartelization and oligarchy are institutionalized through exclusionary electoral thresholds, weak campaign finance accountability, politicized commissioner selection, and budgetary dependence. These mechanisms systematically erode the independence of electoral institutions and weaken oversight over complex electoral violations.

Practical Implication : The "Democratic Middle Way" model, operationalized through a Multi-Stakeholder Electoral Integrity Forum (F-MIP), offers a practical blueprint for collaborative electoral oversight without immediate statutory overhaul.

Originality/value : This article connects party cartelization, political oligarchy, and electoral governance, providing a collaborative accountability framework to strengthen electoral integrity in transitional democracies.

Keywords : Party Cartelization, Political Oligarchy, Electoral Governance, Accountability

Paper type : Conceptual Paper

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Tantangan Badan Pemilu Indonesia dalam Menghadapi era Kartelisasi dan Oligarki Politik

Abstrak

Tujuan : Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis bagaimana interaksi antara kartelisasi partai dan oligarki politik beroperasi dalam struktur kelembagaan pemilu Indonesia, serta bagaimana relasi tersebut memengaruhi independensi, akuntabilitas, dan transparansi lembaga penyelenggara pemilu (KPU dan Bawaslu). Dengan menggunakan Pemilu 2024 sebagai konteks kasus, penelitian ini juga berupaya merumuskan model akuntabilitas kolaboratif untuk menjawab tantangan struktural tersebut.

Desain/metodologi: Analisis kasus kualitatif berbasis dokumen ini menggunakan dokumen hukum, laporan institusional, laporan masyarakat sipil, dan literatur akademik. Mengikuti kerangka penelitian kualitatif Tracy, data dianalisis melalui analisis tematik interpretatif dalam kerangka ekonomi politik dan teori kekuasaan.

Temuan : Analisis menunjukkan bahwa kartelisasi dan oligarki terlembaga melalui ambang batas elektoral yang eksklusif, lemahnya akuntabilitas dana kampanye, seleksi komisioner yang dipolitisasi, dan ketergantungan anggaran. Mekanisme ini secara sistematis menggerus independensi lembaga pemilu dan melemahkan pengawasan terhadap pelanggaran pemilu yang kompleks.

Implikasi Praktis : Model "Jalan Tengah Demokrasi" yang dioperasionalkan melalui Forum Multi-Pihak Integritas Pemilu (F-MIP) menawarkan cetak biru praktis bagi pengawasan pemilu kolaboratif tanpa memerlukan perubahan undang-undang secara segera.

Originalitas/Nilai : Artikel ini menghubungkan kartelisasi partai, oligarki politik, dan tata kelola pemilu, serta menyediakan kerangka akuntabilitas kolaboratif untuk memperkuat integritas pemilu di negara demokrasi transisi.

Kata Kunci : Kartelisasi Partai, Oligarki Politik, Tata Kelola Pemilu, Akuntabilitas

Jenis Penelitian : Artikel Konseptual

INTRODUCTION

The dominance of oligarchy and party cartelization represents an escalating structural challenge within Indonesia's electoral democracy. Over the past decade, various indicators have pointed toward stagnation, or even a regression in democratic quality, characterized by narrowing political competition, skyrocketing political costs, and a dearth of alternative candidates in electoral contests (Pepinsky, 2025; Slater, 2018). This phenomenon is manifested, inter alia, through the imposition of presidential and parliamentary thresholds, which de facto restrict the access of new political actors while entrenching the hegemony of established major parties within the party system (Sabrina & Inder, 2024).

Furthermore, this configuration not only creates institutional barriers to political alternatives but also fosters a pattern of pseudo-competition, wherein electoral contests are dominated by actors originating from the same elite circles. In such a scenario, elections risk being reduced from instruments of political representation to mere mechanisms for power circulation among elite groups, driven by a global pragmatic trend of seeking office-based rewards rather than ideological alignment (Subekti & Wahid, 2023). Significant increases in political costs further exacerbate this exclusion, as only actors with access to substantial economic resources and power networks can survive the competitive arena. Consequently, electoral democracy ceases to function as an open space for broad public interest articulation, instead reproducing pre-existing power imbalances.

Normatively, Indonesia's electoral conduct is anchored in a legal framework that enshrines the principles of direct, general, free, secret, honest, and fair elections (*LUBER JURDIL*), supported by independent bodies such as the General Elections Commission (KPU) and the Elections Supervisory Agency (Bawaslu) that are institutionally designed to safeguard electoral integrity, accountability, and transparency (Nazril et al., 2024). In practice, however, the independence of these institutions confronts systematic structural pressures—ranging from commissioner selection processes susceptible to political interference and complex interdependencies with executive and legislative power-holders, to limited supervisory capacity and fiscal dependence on the state (Ham & Garnett, 2019). Crucially, such interventions rarely operate through overt coercion; instead, they manifest through legally permissible soft institutional mechanisms, whereby the legal framework itself becomes a potential instrument of legitimacy for practices that substantively erode democratic quality (Arifin et al., 2025; Pradipta, 2025). This persistent gap between normative design and implementation reality underscores that electoral integrity is not merely a matter of procedural compliance, but is inextricably tied to the broader power configurations that shape how rules are enforced and by whom.

The 2024 Indonesian general election serves as the case context for this article because it clearly illustrates the interaction between party cartelization, political oligarchy, and electoral institutional design. Conducted under Law Number 7 of 2017 on General Elections, the election was shaped by key institutional mechanisms such as the presidential nomination threshold, parliamentary threshold, campaign finance reporting, and the authority of electoral management bodies. These mechanisms are central because they structure political access, influence electoral competition, and affect the autonomy of institutions such as the KPU and Bawaslu.

This article treats the 2024 election not merely as a chronological event, but as a strategic case for examining broader institutional problems in Indonesia's electoral democracy. The presidential nomination threshold made candidacy dependent on the bargaining power of established parliamentary parties, while the parliamentary threshold affected the conversion of votes into seats and limited the representation of smaller parties. Through this case context, the article analyzes how electoral thresholds, campaign financing, commissioner selection, and budgetary dependence operate as interconnected mechanisms through which party cartelization and oligarchic power influence electoral governance (Pepinsky, 2025; Sabrina & Inder, 2024).

In this context, party cartelization is reflected in the concentration of power among a handful of party elites who systematically lock political access through regulative instruments and internal party mechanisms. This practice restricts inclusive political recruitment and encourages inter-party coordination to preserve the status quo, as conceptualized in the cartel party framework by Katz & Mair (1995). In such a situation, political parties cease to function as channels for public representation, transforming instead into collective elite instruments for managing access to state resources.

Concurrently, political oligarchy operates through strategic alliances between economic and political elites in campaign financing, resource distribution, and policy formation. Winters (2011) asserts that oligarchy functions through the capacity of wealthy actors to defend and expand their wealth via control over political institutions. In an electoral democracy, this relationship breeds a high dependency on financial resources, rendering the political process increasingly exclusive and biased toward the interests of capital owners.

The interaction between party cartelization and political oligarchy creates a mutually reinforcing power configuration. Elite control over political access merges with economic resource dominance to dictate the direction of electoral competition. This relationship does not only narrow the competitive space but also forms an institutional dependency that directly impacts the independence of electoral bodies affecting commissioner selection, decision-making, and supervisory practices

(Mietzner, 2020). Under these conditions, electoral institutions do not operate as fully independent entities but function within a power structure that constrains their autonomy and objectivity, potentially shifting the role of elections from a democratic mechanism to an instrument for elite power reproduction (Aspinall & Mietzner, 2019).

Previous studies attribute Indonesia's democratic decline to several interrelated dynamics. Some emphasize party cartelization through promiscuous power-sharing (Slater, 2018), the partisan use of state institutions (Power, 2018), and illiberal tendencies that coexist with competitive elections (Aspinall & Mietzner, 2019; Warburton & Aspinall, 2019). Others show how authoritarian innovations narrow electoral competition through formal democratic channels (Mietzner, 2020), while the roles of elites and mass publics in this process remain debated (Aspinall et al., 2019). A parallel strand highlights oligarchy, which shapes DPR functions (Asrinaldi et al., 2022), operates through cartel-like strategies in lawmaking, including electoral rules (Tambunan, 2023), and extends to regional resources (Hidayaturrahman et al., 2020). Elite collusion has also been found to both enable and limit executive aggrandizement (Mietzner, 2024). Specifically, the presidential threshold concentrates power in candidate nomination (Sabrina & Inder, 2024), and the 2024 election illustrates how electoral rules, social structure, and elite incentives interact (Pepinsky, 2025). Meanwhile, electoral integrity depends not only on formal independence but also on institutional design, capacity, and performance (James & Garnett, 2023). Yet these strands rarely treat cartelization, oligarchy, and electoral management independence together.

Building on this gap, the novelty of this article lies in connecting party cartelization, political oligarchy, and electoral institutional design as a mutually reinforcing power configuration, wherein electoral thresholds, campaign financing, commissioner selection, and budgetary dependence function not as technical-procedural matters but as institutional mechanisms through which elites sustain dominance. Electoral integrity is thus understood not as administrative weakness but as the outcome of power relations institutionalized within electoral rules and practices.

This article aims to analyze how the interaction between cartelization and oligarchy operates within Indonesia's electoral institutional structure and affects the independence, accountability, and transparency of electoral management bodies, focusing on four mechanisms where formal rules, party interests, and economic resources intersect. Conceptually, it proposes the "Democratic Middle Way" model, operationalized through a Multi-Stakeholder Electoral Integrity Forum, to strengthen oversight via multi-actor collaboration without replacing formal institutions. The model broadens accountability by integrating state actors, academia, civil society, media, and citizen communities into a multilayered ecosystem. Beyond enriching the

literature on cartelization, oligarchy, and electoral governance, this article offers a practical contribution to an electoral oversight architecture more adaptive to contemporary democratic challenges.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employs a qualitative document-based case analysis to examine how party cartelization and political oligarchy operate through Indonesia's electoral institutional design. The 2024 Indonesian general election is selected as the case context because it represents a recent and politically significant electoral cycle in which debates over the presidential nomination threshold, parliamentary threshold, campaign finance accountability, and the independence of electoral management bodies became particularly salient. Following Tracy (2024), analytical rigor was ensured through three strategies: (1) source triangulation by cross-verifying primary legal and institutional documents with civil society reports and media investigations to minimize institutional bias; (2) analytic memoing to document emerging patterns, theoretical insights, and alternative interpretations throughout the coding process, thereby providing an audit trail for interpretive decisions; and (3) transparent documentation through a structured codebook containing explicit definitions, inclusion and exclusion criteria, and coding justifications to enhance transparency and reproducibility.

The primary data comprise legal and institutional documents related to the 2024 general election, including Law Number 7 of 2017 on General Elections, relevant KPU and Bawaslu regulations and decisions, DKPP decisions, campaign finance reports, and official institutional and budgetary documents. These primary sources were complemented by reports from civil society and election-monitoring organizations, media investigations, and peer-reviewed literature. Sources were purposively selected based on their relevance to four analytical mechanisms: electoral thresholds, campaign financing, commissioner selection, and the budgetary dependence of electoral management bodies. Data were analyzed using interpretive thematic analysis combining deductive and inductive coding. Deductive coding was guided by the concepts of party cartelization, oligarchic domination, electoral integrity, and collaborative accountability, while inductive coding identified emerging themes such as soft institutional intervention, legal-formal exclusion, budgetary dependency, and accountability gaps. The analysis compared formal institutional arrangements with documented practices to examine how electoral rules and institutional mechanisms interact with party interests and economic resources. The findings were subsequently synthesized into the Democratic Middle Way model as a conceptual response to the limitations of state-centric electoral oversight.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In line with the document-based case analysis outlined in the research method, this section examines the 2024 Indonesian general election as a strategic case for understanding how party cartelization and political oligarchy operate through electoral institutional design. The discussion is organized around four analytical mechanisms: electoral thresholds, campaign financing, commissioner selection, and the budgetary dependence of electoral management bodies. These mechanisms are examined not as isolated technical issues, but as interconnected institutional arenas through which formal rules, party interests, and economic resources shape the independence, accountability, and transparency of electoral governance.

A. The Institutional Anatomy of Cartelization: Electoral Thresholds and Campaign Finance Regulation

An examination of Indonesia's electoral legal framework reveals that political cartelization does not operate solely through the informal behavior of elites; rather, it has become formally institutionalized within statutory provisions. Employing an institutionalist perspective, this section maps how regulatory instruments such as electoral thresholds and campaign finance provisions function as exclusionary mechanisms that confine political competition to a narrow circle of dominant actors.

Among the most tangible manifestations of cartelization within Indonesia's electoral institutional design are the presidential threshold established under Article 222 of Law No. 7 of 2017 on General Elections and the parliamentary threshold stipulated in Article 414 of the same law. These provisions function as institutional mechanisms that regulate political access and shape electoral competition by limiting opportunities for new political actors while reinforcing the dominance of established parties. Normatively, such policies are frequently justified as measures to streamline the party system and reinforce presidential stability (Nugroho et al., 2022). However, an analysis of their implementation across the past three electoral cycles indicates that these thresholds have evolved into oligarchic instruments that systematically foreclose opportunities for the emergence of alternative political forces (Karim & Hamil, 2022).

In the context of the 2024 election, this provision became particularly relevant because access to presidential candidacy remained dependent on the bargaining power of parties already represented in parliament. As a result, the nomination process was shaped not only by public preference, but also by elite-level coalition negotiations among established parties.

The presidential nomination threshold, stipulated in Article 222 of Law Number 7 of 2017 concerning General Elections, mandates that a political party or coalition of parties must hold at least 20 percent of seats in the House of Representatives (DPR) or

25% of the valid national vote in the preceding legislative election to nominate candidates for president and vice president. In practice, this provision engenders what may be termed a structural lock-in effect (Rahman et al., 2023). Parties already entrenched and dominating parliament from the previous period automatically possess a golden ticket to contest the subsequent presidential election, whereas new or non-parliamentary parties are compelled to coalesce in alliances that are often pragmatic rather than ideological (Cahyono et al., 2023; Wutoy et al., 2022). Consequently, the presidential electoral stage becomes little more than an arena for the circulation of the same elite cohort over time, thereby corroborating Winters (2011) thesis regarding the capacity of wealthy and powerful actors to sustain their positions through control over formal rules of the game.

Meanwhile, the parliamentary threshold, which has been progressively raised from 2.5% in the 2009 election to 4% in the 2019 and 2024 elections, further accentuates the exclusionary character of Indonesia's party system. Empirical data demonstrate a precipitous decline in the number of parties securing parliamentary representation relative to the total number of contesting parties. In the 2004 election, of 24 participating parties, 16 succeeded in placing representatives in the DPR. By contrast, in the 2019 election, of 16 participating parties, only 9 surpassed the parliamentary threshold. Votes cast for smaller parties failing to meet the threshold amounting to millions of ballots are effectively discarded and left unconverted into seats, a phenomenon that undermines the principles of electoral justice and proportional representation. Within the cartel party framework conceptualized by Katz & Mair (1995), this situation illustrates how mainstream parties leverage state resources and legislative authority to enact regulations that safeguard their own political market position against newcomers.

Table 1. Comparison of Contesting Parties and Parliamentary Parties in Post-Reform Elections

Election Year	Contesting Parties	Parliamentary Parties	Wasted Vote Percentage
2004	24	16	7.5%
2009	38	9	18.3%
2014	12	10	7.1%
2019	16	9	12.8%
2024	18	8	15.4%

Source: Compiled from KPU data, the Constitutional Court Decision No. 116/PUU-XXI/2023 (Mahkamah Konstitusi, 2024), Perludem (2024) via Rumah Pemilu, and Kompas Litbang (Kompas.id, 2024)

Table 1 quantitatively illustrates the declining number of parties capable of penetrating parliament, alongside a concurrent increase in unrepresented votes. In the

2024 election, only 8 of 18 contesting parties gained parliamentary representation, while 15.4% of votes were left unconverted into seats. This pattern reinforces the argument that parliamentary thresholds do not merely simplify the party system, but also contribute to the narrowing of representation and the consolidation of established party dominance. Beyond mere numerical trends, these data reflect a constriction of political representation channels and the consolidation of cartel formations at the national level. In this context, elections risk losing their function as mechanisms for aggregating and articulating diverse public interests, instead shifting toward formal procedures that reaffirm the dominance of established groups.

Beyond electoral thresholds, the regulatory framework governing campaign finance constitutes another critical arena wherein cartelization and oligarchy intersect intensively. The high cost of politics in Indonesia is not a natural feature of the political marketplace but rather a consequence of the competitive structure created by the law itself. High-cost politics opens wide avenues for actors possessing substantial capital (oligarchs) to enter and dictate the policy orientations of parties and candidates (Kurniawan, 2025).

An analysis of the Election Law and its derivative regulations, particularly the KPU Regulations on Campaign Finance Reporting, reveals a significant accountability gap. From the perspective of this article, this accountability gap is not merely a weakness in electoral administration, but a mechanism that enables the intersection between cartelized party competition and oligarchic financing. First, the obligation to report campaign finances both the Initial Campaign Finance Report (LADK) and the Campaign Finance Receipts and Expenditures Report (LPPDK) remains more administrative than substantive. Public Accounting Firms (KAP) appointed by political parties or candidate pairs to audit financial statements occupy a position of inherent conflict of interest due to the contractual client-auditor relationship that compromises their independence (Arsyad et al., 2025). Second, the absence of a mechanism for forensic auditing involving independent bodies such as the Supreme Audit Agency (BPK) or the Financial Transaction Reports and Analysis Center (PPATK) proactively impedes the tracing of dark money flows from oligarchic sources (Chandranegara & Bakhri, 2023; Sari, 2025).

As a result, political parties and candidates tend to rely on funding from a small number of large donors both individual tycoons and corporations rather than cultivating a collective funding base from member dues or supporter contributions (Mietzner, 2015). This pattern of financial dependence is subsequently transformed into political indebtedness in the post-election period. This finding reinforces Winters (2011) argument that oligarchy in electoral democracies does not always manifest as authoritarian rule; rather, it frequently operates subtly through control over political capital flows, enabling oligarchs to dictate legislative agendas and the distribution of

state resources, such as mining concessions, infrastructure projects, or strategic appointments within State-Owned Enterprises (BUMN).

Thus, the existing campaign finance regulations not only fail to prevent oligarchic penetration but also inadvertently legitimize such practices by allowing them to proceed through formally compliant procedures devoid of substantive oversight. This is what is meant by soft intervention a situation wherein the prevailing legal framework serves as a protective shield for the perpetuation of asymmetrical power relations.

B. The Erosion of Independence: Commissioner Selection, Budgetary Dependence, and Institutional Autonomy

Having delineated how cartelization is institutionally embedded within electoral regulations, this section proceeds to analyze its impact on electoral management bodies, namely the KPU and Bawaslu. The central argument advanced here is that the interaction between cartel parties and oligarchs not only shapes the rules of the game but also systematically erodes the independence, capacity, and integrity of the very institutions intended to serve as neutral arbiters in electoral contestation.

The selection process for prospective members of the KPU and Bawaslu constitutes the initial critical juncture that determines the quality and independence of electoral institutions. Formally, the selection mechanism involves an independent selection committee formed by the government, which screens candidates for submission to the DPR to undergo a fit and proper test. However, observation of past practices indicates that the DPR, as the representative body of cartel political parties, plays a highly determinant role in the final outcome (Nurfajila & Hurriyah, 2024).

Soft intervention occurs during the fit and proper test stage. Rather than focusing rigorously on integrity track records, technical electoral expertise, and a vision for democratic strengthening, the process within the DPR frequently devolves into informal political negotiation. Major party factions tend to endorse candidates perceived as cooperative and unlikely to inconvenience party interests in the future, particularly regarding sensitive issues such as political party verification, electoral district delineation, or campaign finance audits (Nugraha et al., 2025; Nurfajila & Hurriyah, 2024). Candidates perceived as too independent or critical of party interests may face political resistance during the selection process, particularly when their positions are viewed as potentially disruptive to future decisions on party verification, electoral districting, or campaign finance oversight. This phenomenon generates a chilling effect among elected commissioners, whereby they implicitly comprehend the critical boundaries that must not be transgressed to safeguard their positions.

Consequently, the institutional independence guaranteed by law is subverted by the short-term political interests of parliamentary actors (Ham & Garnett, 2019).

In addition to personal intervention through commissioner selection, the autonomy of the KPU and Bawaslu is also hampered by structural dependence on institutions effectively controlled by political parties and the executive branch. This dependence is most palpable in the realm of budgeting. Although the KPU and Bawaslu possess the authority to formulate their electoral budget requirements, final approval of the budget ceiling rests with the DPR and the Ministry of Finance. In numerous instances, budget negotiations between the KPU/Bawaslu and the DPR have been protracted and laden with political tug-of-war (Kumara, 2022). Reductions in allocations for specific supervisory functions or delays in the disbursement of funds for electoral stages can serve as effective pressure instruments to enfeeble the oversight functions of electoral bodies (Yusuf et al., 2025).

This bureaucratic dependency is exacerbated by the complexity of state administrative procedures that compel the KPU and Bawaslu to adhere to general public financial management regulations, which are often ill-adapted to the technical demands and tight schedules of election administration. Under such conditions, institutional energy and resources are disproportionately consumed by the pursuit of administrative compliance rather than by strengthening the integrity and substantive oversight of the electoral process (James & Garnett, 2023b). This aligns with the observations of Aspinall & Mietzner (2019), who note that democratic regression in Indonesia occurs not through the outright dismantling of institutions, but through the incremental erosion of their capacity and the toleration of dysfunction within oversight bodies. The consequences of such institutional dependence are visible in the difficulty of enforcing accountability in complex electoral violations, particularly those categorized as structured, systematic, and massive (TSM).

One of the clearest indicators of the erosion of electoral institution independence is the difficulty encountered by Bawaslu and the Elections Organizer Honorary Council (DKPP) in addressing electoral violations that are Structured, Systematic, and Massive (TSM) in nature. Although the Election Law vests Bawaslu with the authority to handle TSM violations particularly in the context of vote-buying or abuse of authority in practice, proving such violations is exceedingly arduous (Asnawi et al., 2023).

First, the high evidentiary burden often cannot be met due to the narrow timeframe for case adjudication and Bawaslu's lack of authority to conduct wiretapping or document seizure (Siambaton et al., 2025). Second, TSM violations typically involve extensive and intricate elite networks, including actors at both local and national levels, rendering their handling not merely a technical legal matter but also a high-stakes political confrontation (Wahanisa et al., 2025). Consequently, many

alleged TSM cases ultimately conclude with a finding of unproven or are reduced to minor administrative infractions by individuals. This enforcement gap demonstrates that the current institutional design of electoral oversight is sufficiently robust to monitor procedures (e.g., data entry errors or logistical delays) but markedly feeble in confronting power relations (e.g., bureaucratic mobilization to favor specific candidates or large-scale illicit financial flows). Such impunity, in turn, perpetuates cartelization practices and oligarchic dominance, as principal actors remain largely untouched by meaningful sanctions.

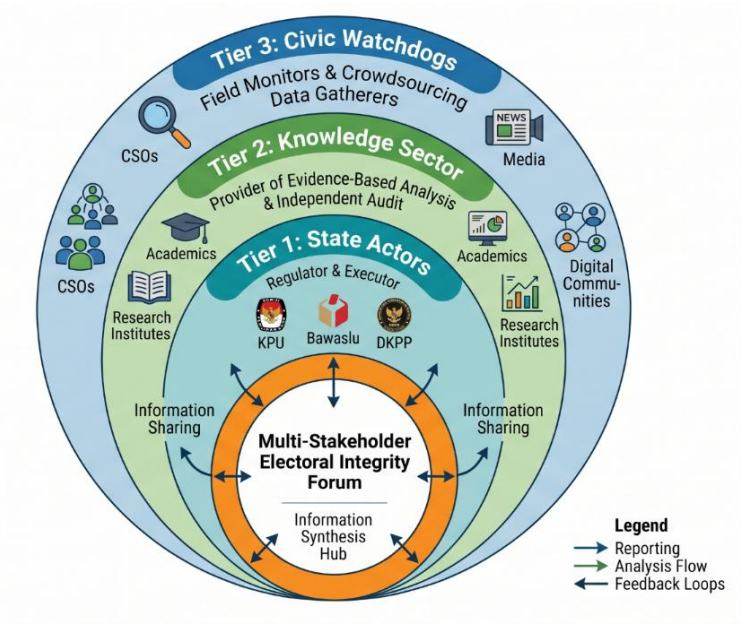
C. Bridging the Gap: Advancing a Democratic Middle Way Model through Collaborative Accountability

The findings presented in the preceding sections reveal a chronic institutional gap: an electoral system that is formally democratic yet substantively corroded by elite interests. To address this, a repositioning of the oversight role is imperative one that no longer relies exclusively on state capacity (Bawaslu and DKPP) but also integrates the strengths of civil society within a broader oversight ecosystem. In this section, this article proposes a conceptual model termed the "Democratic Middle Way" grounded in collaborative accountability. The model is designed as a direct response to the four institutional vulnerabilities identified in this article: exclusionary electoral thresholds, weak campaign finance accountability, politicized commissioner selection, and budgetary dependence.

The prevailing approach to electoral oversight in Indonesia has been dominated by a state-centric paradigm, wherein Bawaslu is positioned as the sole actor bearing full responsibility for the integrity of the electoral process (Efendi et al., 2023). Although the law provides space for public participation in the form of election observers, the relationship between Bawaslu and observers remains auxiliary in nature and lacks systemic integration. Consequently, the substantial potential residing in civil society organizations, independent media, academia, and digital communities has yet to be optimally harnessed as a countervailing force against the power of cartels and oligarchs.

The "Democratic Middle Way" model proposed herein seeks to fill this void by advocating a shift from a hierarchical oversight model to one of collaborative governance. Within this model, electoral oversight is understood as a shared responsibility involving synergy between state actors (KPU, Bawaslu, DKPP) and non-state actors (civil society, academics, media, and organized citizenry). The objective is not to supplant or enfeeble Bawaslu's authority, but rather to fortify oversight capacity and legitimacy by constructing layered strata of social control.

Picture 1. Three-Tier Collaborative Accountability Framework



Source : Author's Analysis, 2025

To operationalize this concept, the collaborative accountability model is structured within a three-tiered framework wherein each tier fulfills complementary roles and contributions. At the first tier, state actors namely KPU, Bawaslu, and DKPP continue to execute their constitutionally mandated functions as regulators and executors of the electoral process. The critical distinction lies in their enhanced receptiveness to inputs originating from the other two tiers. For instance, rather than relying exclusively on internal reports generated through its own hierarchical structures, Bawaslu would actively validate preliminary findings surfaced by media investigations or inquiries conducted by civil society organizations, thereby enriching its evidentiary base and broadening the scope of its oversight.

The second tier comprises the knowledge sector, which includes academics, university-based election study centers, and independent research institutes. This tier serves as a center for evidence-based policy analysis, furnishing in-depth examinations of issues such as irregularities in voter registration lists, forensic audits of campaign finance reports, and studies assessing the impact of electoral regulations upon the degree of political competition. By way of illustration, a consortium of academics could undertake a methodological audit of a political party's Campaign Finance Receipts and Expenditures Report (LPPDK), with the resultant findings offered both as formal recommendations to Bawaslu and as public information intended to inform broader civic discourse.

The third and outermost tier consists of civic watchdogs, encompassing civil society organizations actively engaged in election monitoring such as the Association for Elections and Democracy (Perludem), the Independent Committee for Election Monitoring (KIPP), and the People's Voter Education Network (JPPR) as well as mass media outlets, investigative journalists, and digital communities dedicated to fact-checking and social media monitoring. Leveraging advances in information technology, these actors function as distributed field sensors capable of detecting electoral violations in real time. The adoption of crowdsourcing models for violation reporting, exemplified by citizen-led platforms such as "*Kawal Pemilu*" (Guard the Election) and "*Jaga Pemilu*" (Protect the Election), empowers ordinary citizens to contribute directly to the identification and documentation of electoral malfeasance within their immediate localities. Collectively, these three tiers constitute an integrated, multi-layered ecosystem of oversight wherein the strengths of each sector are harnessed to compensate for the limitations of the others, thereby constructing a more resilient and democratically accountable electoral governance architecture.

To translate collaborative principles into institutional practice, this article proposes the establishment of a Multi-Stakeholder Electoral Integrity Forum (*Forum Multi-Pihak Integritas Pemilu*/F-MIP). Conceived as an ad-hoc, independent body operating parallel to the electoral cycle, the forum would be constituted at both national and sub-national levels at the outset of each election period, drawing membership from accredited representatives of Bawaslu, academia, election-monitoring civil society organizations, and the press council. Its primary functions are threefold. First, the forum would conduct a joint review of campaign finance reports (LADK and LPPDK) obtained from the KPU, engaging financial experts and independent forensic accountants to produce a publicly disseminated Shadow Campaign Finance Report that supplements Bawaslu's formal oversight with the weight of civic scrutiny. Second, prior to the parliamentary selection of KPU and Bawaslu commissioners, the F-MIP would convene a Public Panel wherein candidates present their anti-cartelization commitments and respond to public questioning; the resulting recordings and summaries would inform both public opinion and parliamentary deliberation, thereby narrowing the space for opaque political bargains. Third, the forum would spearhead an integrated digital monitoring platform capable of aggregating formal Bawaslu reports, investigative media data, and citizen-generated crowdsourced information into a single public dashboard. Through these mechanisms, the "Democratic Middle Way" generates multilayered pressure legal-formal and socio-political that incrementally transforms electoral oversight without dismantling existing constitutional structures.

CONCLUSION

This study has demonstrated that the erosion of electoral integrity in Indonesia stems from the institutionalized interplay between party cartelization and political oligarchy. Using the 2024 Indonesian general election as a strategic case context, the article shows that exclusionary electoral thresholds, weak campaign finance oversight, politicized commissioner selection, and the budgetary dependence of electoral management bodies operate as interconnected mechanisms that reproduce elite dominance within electoral democracy. These mechanisms do not function in isolation, but constitute a self-reinforcing system in which regulatory exclusion, financial dependency, and institutional vulnerability mutually sustain one another.

To address these structural deficits without requiring immediate statutory overhaul, this article proposes the "Democratic Middle Way" model, operationalized through a Multi-Stakeholder Electoral Integrity Forum (F-MIP). The model integrates state actors, the knowledge sector, civil society, media, and organized citizen groups to produce shadow campaign finance reports, convene public commissioner panels, and maintain an integrated digital monitoring platform. Future research should empirically examine the dynamics and effectiveness of multi-stakeholder oversight initiatives in local electoral contexts, particularly to assess whether collaborative accountability can meaningfully reduce oligarchic capture and cartelistic exclusion in Indonesia's diverse political landscape.

PRACTICAL & THEORETICAL IMPLICATION

Theoretical Implication

Theoretically, this study contributes to the literature by reconceptualizing electoral integrity as an outcome of institutionalized power relations rather than merely a question of administrative performance or procedural compliance. Existing studies generally examine party cartelization, political oligarchy, and electoral governance as separate strands of inquiry. By integrating these perspectives, this study demonstrates that electoral thresholds, campaign finance arrangements, commissioner selection, and budgetary dependence operate as interconnected institutional mechanisms through which elite power is reproduced. This perspective extends existing scholarship by positioning electoral management bodies not merely as administrative institutions but as actors embedded within broader configurations of political and economic power. Consequently, the proposed Democratic Middle Way offers a conceptual framework for understanding how collaborative accountability may complement formal institutional independence in strengthening electoral integrity within transitional democracies.

Practical Implication

The proposed Multi-Stakeholder Electoral Integrity Forum (F-MIP) provides a practical framework for strengthening electoral oversight beyond formal state mechanisms. By facilitating joint campaign finance reviews, public commissioner candidate panels, and integrated digital monitoring, the model expands oversight capacity through collaboration among electoral institutions, civil society, academia, and the media. Rather than replacing existing electoral management bodies, it complements their institutional role by broadening accountability and enhancing transparency without requiring immediate statutory reform.

Limitations and Future Research

Despite its conceptual contribution, the Democratic Middle Way model has several limitations. First, the model remains conceptual and has not yet been empirically implemented or evaluated across different electoral settings. Second, its effectiveness depends on the willingness of electoral institutions, civil society organizations, academia, and the media to engage in sustained collaboration, which may vary across political contexts. Third, unequal organizational capacity and resource disparities among non-state actors may limit the consistency of collaborative oversight. Future research should therefore empirically assess the feasibility, institutional adaptability, and effectiveness of the proposed model through comparative studies across national and subnational elections. Such research would help refine the operational design of collaborative accountability and identify the conditions under which the model can effectively reduce cartelistic and oligarchic influence over electoral governance.

Declaration of Generative AI and AI-assisted Technologies in the Writing Process

Generative AI and AI-assisted technologies were used in the preparation of this manuscript primarily to support language editing, grammatical correction, and refinement of sentence structure and academic expression. Their use was limited to assisting the presentation and revision of the manuscript and did not involve the generation of research data, selection or verification of sources, data analysis, interpretation of empirical materials, or determination of the study's findings and conclusions. The development of the research argument, analytical framework, interpretation of the documents examined, and formulation of the proposed model were undertaken by the authors. All AI-assisted revisions were reviewed and, where necessary, revised by the authors to ensure that the final text accurately reflected the authors' analysis and intended arguments. The authors therefore retain full responsibility for the content, accuracy, scholarly integrity, and final version of the manuscript.

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