



## Challenges and Opportunities in the Dynamics of the Multi-Party System in Indonesia

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### Abstrak

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengetahui dan mendeskripsikan tantangan dan peluang sistem multi partai dalam memperkuat demokrasi di era Reformasi. Metode yang digunakan dalam penelitian ini adalah kualitatif. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa sistem multi partai di Indonesia dalam efektivitas pengelolaan partai politik masih didominasi oleh figur-figur elit dan keluarga sehingga partai-partai lebih berfungsi sebagai kendaraan politik individu daripada institusi yang merepresentasikan kepentingan masyarakat luas, dan inilah yang menjadi tantangan utama bagi sistem multi partai di Indonesia. Kemudian, peluang yang paling disoroti adalah meningkatnya keterwakilan politik bagi demokrasi di Indonesia. Sistem multi partai memungkinkan berbagai kelompok kepentingan, termasuk minoritas, untuk mendirikan partai dan bersaing dalam pemilihan umum. Hal ini membuka ruang bagi beragam aspirasi politik yang mungkin tidak terwakili dalam sistem dua partai atau sistem dominasi satu partai. Pluralisme politik ini seharusnya mampu menciptakan kebijakan publik yang lebih inklusif dan mewakili kepentingan berbagai lapisan masyarakat. Selain itu, sistem multi partai juga dapat mendorong munculnya partai-partai baru yang lebih segar dan inovatif, serta memberikan alternatif bagi pemilih yang mungkin merasa tidak puas dengan partai-partai besar yang ada.

**Kata kunci:** Multipartai, Reformasi, Sistem Politik

### Abstract

*This study aims to determine and describe the challenges and opportunities of the multi-party system in strengthening democracy in the Reformation era. The method used in this study is qualitative. The results of the study show that the multi-party system in Indonesia in the effectiveness of political party management is still dominated by elite figures and families so that parties function more as individual political vehicles than institutions that represent the interests of the wider community, and this is the main challenge for the multi-party system in Indonesia. Then, the most highlighted opportunity is the increase in political representation for democracy in Indonesia. The multi-party system allows various interest groups, including minorities, to establish parties and compete in general elections. This opens up space for various political aspirations that may not be represented in a two-party system or a one-party dominance system. This political pluralism should be able to create public policies that are more inclusive and represent the interests of various levels of society. In addition, a multi-party system can also encourage the emergence of new, fresher and more innovative parties, as well as provide alternatives for voters who may be dissatisfied with the existing major parties.*

**Keywords:** Multiparty, Reform, Political System



## INTRODUCTION

The reforms that began in 1998 brought a breath of fresh air to Indonesian political life after the end of the New Order era which was marked by the dominance of one political party, which then became a multi-party system as the main characteristic of political life since the reform era. This change marked a major shift from the system that was previously dominated by one party and authoritarian government under the leadership of the New Order. (Lestari, 2022) explained that during the New Order, the Golongan Karya Party (Golkar) became the main political actor supported by the military and state bureaucracy, while other parties were under tight supervision. However, along with the collapse of the New Order and the increasing demands for reform, political freedom in Indonesia was opened wide, marked by the emergence of many new political parties. This developing multi-party system provides wider space for political competition, more diverse representation, and freedom of expression for previously marginalized groups. (Schwalbach, 2023); (Nath., et al, 2023) explain that the multi-party system is a reflection of the plurality and diversity of politics in society, which should be able to create healthy and representative political competition. However, although the multi-party system offers greater freedom, it also brings a series of challenges that affect political stability and governance. Political fragmentation resulting from the large number of political parties often creates an unstable political situation. The party coalitions needed to form a government are often fragile, and political decision-making becomes more complicated due to the tug-of-war of interests between the parties in the coalition. (Taufiqurrohman, 2020); (Adhani., et al, 2022) also states that many parties do not have a strong ideological basis, but are more oriented towards pragmatic interests. This causes coalitions to often form not based on a common vision or platform, but simply to meet the requirements for a majority in parliament.

One key aspect of this dynamic is the emergence of parties based on certain political figures, or what are often referred to as "personalistic parties." In the Indonesian context, many political parties rely on the popularity of their leaders rather than a clear ideology or program. These parties tend to be built around a particular figure, often an influential figure in both politics and business, and when the popularity of the figure fades, these parties also lose their support. This phenomenon illustrates the weakness of political party institutions in Indonesia, where parties have not been able to become established organizations and function as strong representatives of the interests of the people. In addition, the multi-party system also opens up opportunities for the emergence of parties based on ethnicity, religion, or the interests of certain groups. This can be a positive force in creating more inclusive representation, but it can also deepen polarization in society. Polarization based on ethnic and religious identities has become an increasingly prominent issue in several elections in Indonesia, especially at the local level. Identity-based parties often prioritize their own group interests over the broader national interest, which can disrupt social cohesion and overall political stability. On the other hand, the multi-party system in Indonesia also presents a great opportunity for the development of democracy. With more competing parties, people have more choices in determining their political preferences. This political pluralism allows different groups and voices to be represented in the political system, which can ultimately improve the quality of democracy. In addition, with more parties, the potential for new ideas and alternative solutions to national problems becomes greater. This can encourage public policy innovation and increase political accountability, as small or new parties may be more courageous in fighting for agendas that are not carried by large parties. However, the rapidly developing multi-party system in Indonesia is also not free from various weaknesses that need to be fixed. <https://www.kompas.id/baca/utama/2018/09/14/pentingnya-sistem-multipartai-sederhana/>

The challenges faced are not only at the operational level of government, but also in terms of regulatory arrangements and political institutions. One of the main problems is the absence of an election system that is strong enough to filter political parties that truly have a significant support base. The relatively low parliamentary threshold allows too many political parties to enter parliament, which in turn complicates the decision-making process and the formation of a stable government. The multi-party system that applies in Indonesia during the Reformation era does



offer greater political flexibility compared to the previous era. However, this system also gives rise to various problems related to political fragmentation, coalition instability, and weak political party institutions. Political fragmentation, which means the existence of many parties with diverse interests, often makes it difficult to form a strong and sustainable coalition. This weak coalition government then has an impact on the legislative process which is slow, inconsistent, and often hampered by the interests of the ruling parties. On the other hand, the weakness of political party institutions reflects that these parties have not been fully able to develop a clear ideology, measurable work programs, and democratic internal mechanisms. Parties tend to be dominated by elite figures, so the potential to represent the aspirations of society more broadly is limited.

One way to improve this system is through electoral system reform. This reform could include increasing the parliamentary threshold to reduce the number of parties that can enter parliament, thereby minimizing political fragmentation. With fewer parties, the process of forming a government will be simpler, and the government that is formed can be more stable and effective in implementing its programs. However, this effort also needs to be balanced by maintaining political pluralism so that minority or marginalized groups still have the opportunity to be represented. In addition to electoral system reform, political parties also need to strengthen their internal capacity. Parties must be able to become more democratic institutions, with transparent and accountable decision-making mechanisms.

<https://nasional.kompas.com/read/2022/03/24/03000051/sistem-kepartaian--partai-tunggal-dwi-partai-dan-multipartai>

Strengthening party ideology is also important so that political parties do not only function as political vehicles for certain individuals, but truly represent a clear vision and mission for the public interest. This can be done through better political education within the party, so that party members, both at the central and regional levels, have a better understanding of the role of the party in the democratic system. Furthermore, civil society participation in the political process must also be increased. A society that is more involved in the political process will encourage political parties to be more responsive to the needs and aspirations of the people. In today's digital era, access to political information is increasingly open, and the public can be more active in supervising political parties and the government. The use of digital technology in political campaigns and public involvement in the policy-making process can also strengthen democracy. For example, through online platforms, the public can convey their aspirations directly to stakeholders, and this can be an important means of improving relations between the government and the people.

The challenge in Indonesia's multi-party system also lies in how to maintain a balance between political stability and broad representation. While the existence of many parties allows for more inclusive representation, it also has the potential to create political fragmentation that can disrupt the stability of government. Therefore, there needs to be a balance between providing space for various parties to compete democratically, while ensuring that the political system can still produce a stable and effective government. At the international level, Indonesia can also learn from other countries that implement multi-party systems to see how they have managed to deal with similar challenges. Countries with a long history of multi-party democracy, such as Germany or India, for example, have developed various mechanisms to maintain political stability without sacrificing pluralism. The experiences of these countries can be a consideration for Indonesia in strengthening a more mature and stable multi-party system. Thus, the dynamics of the multi-party system in Indonesia after the Reformation reflect the various challenges and opportunities that must be faced in the process of democratic consolidation. This system, although providing wider space for political freedom and representation, also has implications for political stability and government effectiveness. To ensure that the multi-party system in Indonesia can function optimally, reforms are needed in the electoral system, strengthening the capacity of political parties, and increasing civil society participation.



## METHOD

This study uses a qualitative method with discourse analysis. According to (Setiawati and Rusmawati, 2019), this approach is used to analyze the dynamics of the multi-party system in Indonesia, especially in examining the challenges and opportunities that emerged in the Reformation era. Given the political and social complexity involving many actors, issues, and discourses, this method allows researchers to understand how political discourses that develop in society influence perceptions, political decisions, and the structure of the multi-party system itself. At this stage, the data collected focuses on sources that are relevant to political developments in Indonesia, especially related to political parties and the issues faced in the post-reform multi-party system. The data sources collected include media articles and news coverage, interviews with political actors, and social media analysis. Then, related to discourse analysis, it focuses on issues such as government stability, political coalitions, party ideology, people's representation, and political reform because qualitative discourse analysis not only pays attention to the content of the text, but also the social and political context in which the discourse develops. Qualitative methods with discourse analysis are a very suitable approach to studying the dynamics of the multi-party system in Indonesia. By analyzing the language, symbols, and political context in the developing discourse, researchers can understand how the challenges and opportunities of this system are shaped and perceived by various political actors. The results of this analysis can provide important insights into how Indonesian politics works and help formulate corrective steps to strengthen democracy in the Reformation era.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In the context of democracy, political parties not only function as a liaison between the government and the people, but also as a mechanism to recruit and educate potential leaders, as well as an instrument to articulate government policies and directions. Political parties are one of the important elements in the modern democratic system. As the main means for society to participate in political life, political parties play a vital role in representing the aspirations, interests, and needs of various social groups. <https://www.kompas.com/skola/read/2020/11/06/161935669/pembentukan-berbagai-partai-politik-pasca-indonesia-merdeka>

According to Law No. 2 of 2008 concerning Political Parties, the functions of political parties are 1) to provide political education to members and the general public; 2) To create an environment that supports the unity and integrity of the Indonesian nation for the sake of public welfare; 3) To receive, collect, and disseminate the political aspirations of the community; 4) To encourage political participation of Indonesian citizens; and 5) To recruit politicians. The functions carried out by each political party are related to each other. Parties are very important in communicating political interests or interests that exist or are sometimes hidden in society. Political parties combine their ideas, visions, and policies as best they can from these various interests. After that, the ideas and aspirations of the policy are advocated to influence or contribute to the formation and determination of state policy. (Udiyo, 2020); (Yusri and Mahuli, 2023) that political parties also play an important role in carrying out political socialization. This happens when political parties disseminate the ideas, visions, and strategic policies they choose to their constituents to gain support from the wider community. This is part of political communication.

Political parties also play an important role in political education for the wider community so that they become Indonesian citizens who are aware of their rights and obligations in the life of the nation, state, and society. Political parties also play an important role in socialization. Furthermore, the purpose of political parties is to conduct political recruitment. Indeed, parties were created to function as a legitimate tool to elect competent leaders in the process of filling political positions through democratic mechanisms that prioritize gender equality. Conflict regulation and control is the fourth task. This role functions as a way to unite various interests through the institutional channels of political parties.

In various countries, political party systems are formed with different characteristics,



depending on the history, culture, and socio-political structure that exists. In a democratic system, there are several models of political party systems, such as a two-party system, a multi-party system, and a one-party dominance system. Each model has its advantages and disadvantages, and faces different challenges in creating political stability and ensuring effective representation. A two-party system, for example, tends to create a stable government because political competition is more focused on the two major powers, as seen in the United States and the United Kingdom. However, this system is sometimes considered to limit political pluralism, because small parties or minority groups often do not have the space to compete effectively. On the other hand, a multi-party system, such as that which has developed in many European countries and Indonesia, offers greater opportunities for various groups to be represented in the political process. This system allows the emergence of various parties with different platforms, so that it can better reflect the diversity of views of society. However, a multi-party system also faces challenges in maintaining political and government stability, especially when the coalition formed is fragile and easily broken. In the party system, there is a multi-party system, but there is no competition. In the New Order era, the party system was still known as a simple multiparty system. However, there was no competition between parties. because Golkar had become the dominant party. Therefore, there is an opinion that the party system is actually moving towards a single party system. Because of what? because Golkar only maintained the current situation. After the reformation, Indonesia returned to the multiparty system. This makes sense because freedom of expression, association, and assembly have been restricted for years. So, the desire of politicians to form political parties emerged when the reformation provided freedom.

(Areza., et al, 2023) argue that the spread of political parties should be seen as a learning process amidst the excitement of politics. Indonesia has many lessons to learn from the two post-reform general elections with a multi-party system. A self-evaluation process is needed for the system implemented and political parties. Does the party system ideally encourage stable governance and more effective democracy, or have post-reform parties functioned as pillars of democracy that have encouraged our democracy to be more effective, or vice versa. However, behind the success of the multi-party system in opening up a more inclusive democratic space, there are no small challenges. Political fragmentation due to the large number of competing parties often causes instability in government, especially because the coalitions formed tend to be fragile. In addition, most political parties in Indonesia still face internal problems such as weak party institutions, elite dominance, and a lack of clear ideology or platform. One of the main challenges of the multi-party system in Indonesia is the political fragmentation that occurs due to the large number of political parties competing to gain popular support. This fragmentation often results in a weak and unstable government, because parties must form a coalition to achieve a majority in parliament. The formation of these coalitions is often not based on shared ideology or political platforms, but rather on short-term interests, which causes coalition governments to often be fragile and vulnerable to division. In addition to fragmentation, the multi-party system in Indonesia also faces challenges in terms of the effectiveness of political party management. Many political parties in Indonesia are still dominated by elite figures and families, so that these parties function more as individual political vehicles than institutions that represent the interests of the wider community. This phenomenon is often referred to as "personalistic parties," where parties rely more on the popularity of their leaders than on a clear platform or ideology. As a result, voter loyalty to parties tends to be low, and voters choose based on figures rather than party work programs. This is certainly a major challenge in creating a mature democracy, where political parties should function as a bridge between the government and society.

On the other hand, the multi-party system also provides opportunities for democracy in Indonesia. One of the most prominent opportunities is increasing political representation. The multi-party system allows various interest groups, including minorities, to establish parties and compete in general elections. This opens up space for various political aspirations that may not be represented in a two-party system or a one-party dominant system. This political pluralism should be able to create public policies that are more inclusive and represent the interests of



various levels of society. In addition, the multi-party system can also encourage the emergence of new, fresher and more innovative parties, and provide alternatives for voters who may be dissatisfied with the existing major parties. However, this more inclusive representation is not always directly proportional to the effectiveness of the government. One of the major challenges faced by Indonesia in a multi-party system is how to maintain government stability amidst the diversity of political parties. The party coalitions that are formed are often fragile and often experience internal conflicts that lead to cabinet reshuffles or even the fall of the government. This is one of the reasons why several governments in Indonesia after the Reformation era have found it difficult to implement consistent and sustainable programs. This government instability has an impact on the policy-making process, which is often hampered by the tug-of-war of interests between parties in the coalition.

In order to overcome these challenges, there are several steps that can be taken to strengthen the multi-party system in Indonesia. First, there needs to be a reform in the political party system itself, including strengthening party institutions to be more open and democratic. More transparent and accountable party management can increase public trust in political parties and reduce elite dominance in parties. In addition, strengthening party ideology is also important so that parties do not only rely on the popularity of their leaders, but also have a clear and measurable political platform. Thus, voters can make more rational choices based on the work programs offered by the party, not just based on popular figures. Second, in the long term, Indonesia needs to consider reforming the electoral system that can reduce political fragmentation. One option that can be considered is a higher parliamentary threshold system. Currently, the parliamentary threshold in Indonesia is 4%, which is relatively low compared to other countries with multi-party systems. Increasing the parliamentary threshold can help reduce the number of parties entering parliament, thereby reducing political fragmentation and facilitating the formation of a more stable government. However, this step must be taken carefully so as not to sacrifice the political pluralism that has been achieved since the Reformation era.

Third, to maintain the stability of the governing coalition, political parties need to commit to more substantive cooperation, based on shared ideology and long-term development vision. Coalitions built on short-term interests tend to be unstable and vulnerable to internal conflict. Therefore, the formation of a coalition needs to be based on a clear policy platform and a commitment to jointly implement government programs. In this case, the role of state institutions such as the DPR and the President is very important in overseeing the course of the coalition and ensuring that the interests of the people remain the main priority. Fourth, civil society also has an important role in strengthening democracy through a multi-party system. Active participation of the community in elections and supervision of political parties can increase the accountability of political parties. In today's digital era, the public has wider access to be involved in the political process, whether through social media, online campaigns, or other participatory initiatives. With more active participation, the public can encourage political parties to be more responsive to the needs and aspirations of the people, and reduce pragmatic political practices that often harm the public interest.

Overall, the multi-party system in Indonesia after the Reformation brings complex challenges and opportunities in realizing a more mature democracy. Challenges in the form of political fragmentation, party elite dominance, and government instability need to be overcome through in-depth political reform. On the other hand, the multi-party system also opens up opportunities for more inclusive political representation and healthier competition. With the right improvements, the multi-party system in Indonesia can be a strong foundation for the consolidation of democracy and national progress. Therefore, a study of the political party system, especially in the context of multi-party, is important to understand how political parties can play a role in strengthening democracy. An in-depth study of the role, function, challenges, and opportunities of the political party system will help in analyzing the political dynamics that occur, as well as provide insights for improving the political system in the future. A healthy and functional party system is the main foundation for creating a stable and sustainable democracy.



## CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

The dynamics of the multi-party system in Indonesia since the reform era have shown significant developments, both in terms of political pluralism and the complexity of inter-party relations in government. The 1998 reform brought major changes by ending the authoritarian New Order era and opening up space for a more democratic political system. This multi-party system allows more political parties to participate and represent the diverse interests of Indonesian society. However, the multi-party system in Indonesia also faces a number of major challenges. Party fragmentation and fragile coalitions often lead to political instability, especially in the formation of an effective and stable government. The involvement of many parties in elections and parliaments leads to intense competition, which sometimes leads to conflict and division. In addition, the open proportional election system also increases political fragmentation, because small parties can gain significant votes without having to have large mass support. The success of the multi-party system in Indonesia lies in its ability to adapt and find a balance between pluralism and stability. Over time, several political parties have shown maturity in forming coalitions and competing healthily, although many improvements are still needed. Then, from the results of this study, recommendations can be given, as follows:

1. The government and political parties need to strengthen coalitions in a more stable and sustainable way, both at the national and regional levels. Stronger coalitions will help reduce political fragmentation and increase government effectiveness. To achieve this, commitment is needed from parties to work together more solidly, not only based on short-term interests, but also for more stable long-term goals.
2. The current open proportional electoral system allows too many small parties to enter parliament, which has the potential to worsen political fragmentation. Simplifying the electoral system, such as raising the parliamentary threshold, can help reduce the number of parties in parliament and create a more focused and efficient political system.
3. Better political education for the public is essential to ensure that voters understand the ideology and work programs of the parties they choose. This will help reduce transactional and purely pragmatic political practices, and encourage higher quality political participation.
4. Political parties must strengthen their efforts to provide representation for groups that have been underrepresented, such as women, minority groups, and young people. The multi-party system provides a large space to fight for the interests of various groups, and parties must be able to utilize this opportunity well.
5. One of the major issues in the multi-party system in Indonesia is the dependence of parties on funding from economic elites or large sponsors, which can damage the integrity of democracy. Reforms are needed regarding political party funding regulations to prevent oligarchic domination in the political process and ensure that political parties function in accordance with the interests of the people.
6. Political parties in Indonesia need to strengthen internal political cadre and education programs in order to create politicians who are more competent and have integrity. Good cadre formation will also help parties maintain continuity of leadership and present politicians who have a long-term vision in leading the party and the country.

By addressing challenges and taking advantage of opportunities, Indonesia's multi-party system can continue to develop towards a more stable and democratic direction. Further political reforms are needed to ensure that the system is not only inclusive, but also capable of forming an effective government and representing the aspirations of the people as a whole.

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