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The Discourse on Indirect Regional Head Elections in Indonesia: A Cartel Party Perspective

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ABSTRACT

The renewed proposal to return regional head elections in Indonesia from direct popular voting to selection by Regional People's Representative Councils (DPRD) raises questions about institutional reform, especially when established parties already hold extensive legislative representation. This study examines how party preferences toward DPRD-based selection intersect with the provincial legislative configuration produced by the 2024 legislative elections. Using a qualitative descriptive-interpretive approach, the analysis combines documentary coding of party positions with cross-provincial comparison of DPRD seat distributions. It interprets the resulting pattern through the cartel party thesis. The findings reveal graded convergence rather than a uniform party position. Golkar, Gerindra, and PKB expressed explicit support and collectively hold 905 provincial DPRD seats, while NasDem, Demokrat, and PAN articulated qualified or conditional receptiveness. Including the latter parties yields a broader analytical aggregation of 1,536 seats, though it does not indicate equivalent commitment or a unified pro-reform bloc. PKS remained undecided or deliberative, while PDI-P rejected the proposal despite holding the largest provincial seat total and the only absolute single-party majority. Legislative strength therefore does not determine party preference. The political significance of convergence lies in the possibility that final executive selection would be relocated to legislatures where several supportive or receptive parties already possess substantial representation. The findings support a cartel-compatible interpretation at the level of institutional redesign because convergence over electoral rules, representation within the arena that would be empowered, and the potential expansion of party-mediated gatekeeping coincide. At the same time, formal inter-party coordination or a consolidated party cartel remains unproven.

INTRODUCTION

The proposal to return regional head elections (Pilkada) from direct popular voting to selection by Regional People's Representative Councils (DPRD) has recurred in Indonesia's democratic debate for more than a decade (Dewi, 2016; Lay, 2007; Suyatno, 2016). The issue returned to national prominence in December 2024, when President Prabowo Subianto publicly endorsed DPRD-based selection during a Golkar Party event, prompting responses from political parties, civil society organizations, and scholars (Lai, 2024; Reuters, 2024). Supporters have framed the proposal as a response to the high costs and administrative burden of direct elections, particularly amid continuing concerns over money politics (Baehaki, 2025; Fernandes et al., 2025; Pambudi et al., 2025). Critics have focused on its democratic consequences, especially the prospect of weakening direct electoral legitimacy and reducing voters' influence over regional executive leadership (Agustino et al., 2023; Jumadil et al., 2026; Syahid, Fahlevy, et al., 2026). The controversy situates regional executive

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selection within a broader dispute over political representation and the distribution of democratic authority in Indonesia's decentralized system.

The political significance of this debate became sharper after the 2024 electoral cycle, as the resulting provincial legislative configuration gave several major parties broad representation across Indonesia's 38 provincial DPRDs, although outright single-party majorities remained rare. During the subsequent debate over indirect regional head elections, major parties' public statements also revealed partial convergence in institutional preferences, ranging from explicit support to qualified or conditional openness, alongside unresolved and opposing positions (Anggrainy, 2025; Detikcom, 2026; Rahmawati, 2025). The positions differed in their justifications and level of commitment, yet several established parties converged around the same institutional alternative. This alignment matters because DPRD-based selection would shift the final choice of regional executives to legislatures where those parties already have substantial representation. The resulting analytical puzzle concerns why dissatisfaction with direct elections has translated into support for this specific institutional arrangement among several established parties.

Scholarship on regional head elections has largely centered on the costs and governance problems associated with direct electoral competition, alongside constitutional debates over the appropriate mechanism for selecting regional executives (Aminah et al., 2020; Prianto et al., 2025; Setiawan & Widyana, 2022). Studies of Indonesian electoral politics have also documented persistent clientelism, high campaign costs, and weaknesses in political finance under direct elections (Aspinall & Berenschot, 2019; Mietzner, 2015; Muhtadi, 2019). This literature explains why direct regional elections remain contested. It provides less leverage for explaining why DPRD-based selection has emerged as an attractive institutional alternative for several political parties when other reforms could address electoral costs or weaknesses in political finance without transferring final executive selection to legislatures. The unresolved issue therefore concerns the political significance of the institutional alternative being proposed.

Research on Indonesian political parties offers another part of the explanation: coalition formation frequently reflects office-seeking incentives and pragmatic bargaining more strongly than ideological distance, allowing parties that compete electorally to cooperate extensively once access to political office becomes salient (Ambardi, 2009; Hendrawan et al., 2021; Mietzner, 2023, 2025). Similar dynamics appear in subnational politics, where centralized candidate selection and flexible nomination strategies often shape regional electoral competition (Budi, 2020; Prianto & Yuslaini, 2024; Syahid, Asbudi, et al., 2026). These studies provide a strong account of how parties cooperate within existing electoral arrangements. Far less attention has been given to episodes in which the design of those arrangements itself becomes an object of convergence among established parties. DPRD-based selection brings that distinction into view because it would alter the institutional arena in which access to regional executive office is ultimately decided.

To examine this problem, this article employs the cartel party thesis developed by Katz & Mair (1995, 2009) as its principal analytical framework. The thesis highlights how established parties may cooperate over the conditions of political competition as their organizational interests become increasingly tied to state institutions. Studies of Indonesian

party politics have likewise shown that electoral competition can coexist with extensive elite cooperation and power-sharing among major parties (Ambardi, 2009; Slater, 2004, 2018). For this study, a pattern of party convergence is treated as cartel-compatible when three observable conditions coincide: the convergence concerns rules governing political competition rather than only the distribution of office under existing rules; the parties sharing or approaching that institutional preference already possess substantial representation within the legislative arena that would be empowered by the proposed reform; and the reform would expand party-mediated gatekeeping over access to regional executive office by relocating final selection authority from voters to DPRDs. These conditions operationalize compatibility with cartel logic rather than cartelization itself; convergence alone is insufficient, and the study does not infer formal collusion, shared strategic motives, or a consolidated party cartel without direct evidence of those processes. The post-2024 distribution of provincial DPRD seats is therefore treated as an institutional opportunity structure that establishes the legislative setting in which convergence acquires political significance, rather than as a direct explanation of why individual parties support or reject the proposal.

This article argues that the renewed discourse on indirect regional head elections reveals a partial convergence of party preferences whose compatibility with cartel party logic becomes visible when that convergence is considered alongside the institutional position of the parties involved and the gatekeeping consequences of the proposed reform. The provincial legislative configuration produced by the 2024 elections makes this convergence politically consequential without determining individual party positions. The article extends cartel party analysis from coalition formation and office allocation under established electoral rules to convergence over the rules governing access to executive office itself. Empirically, it connects publicly articulated party positions with the distribution of legislative representation across all 38 provincial DPRDs, allowing the political significance of institutional convergence to be assessed against the actual structure of provincial legislatures. Under this configuration, shifting final executive selection from voters to DPRDs would increase the importance of party-mediated legislative bargaining in determining access to regional executive office.

METHOD

This study uses a qualitative descriptive-interpretive design to examine the contemporary discourse on returning regional head elections from direct popular voting to selection by Regional People's Representative Councils (DPRD) in Indonesia. The empirical analysis is organized around two linked units: publicly articulated party positions toward DPRD-based regional head elections and the distribution of party representation across Indonesia's 38 provincial DPRDs following the 2024 legislative elections. The study examines whether these two dimensions display a patterned relationship that can be interpreted through the cartel party thesis. The provincial legislative configuration is treated as an institutional opportunity structure that shapes the political significance of party convergence. It therefore serves as the structural setting for the analysis, while claims concerning cartelization remain at the level of theoretical interpretation rather than causal inference from seat distribution.

The study relies on secondary documentary and electoral data, with its core empirical materials consisting of official provincial DPRD seat data published by the General Election Commission (KPU) and attributable public statements by national party leaders or senior party officials concerning DPRD-based regional head elections. Electoral regulations, Constitutional Court decisions, parliamentary documents, institutional reports (including those issued by the Association for Elections and Democracy (PERLUDEM), and relevant academic studies were used to establish the legal and political setting and support interpretation. KPU data served as the principal reference for provincial seat distribution, with other institutional sources used to cross-check the compiled figures. Media reports were included when they reproduced identifiable statements from party leaders or senior officials. At the same time, statements by government officials were used to reconstruct the wider public debate unless they could also be attributed to a party position. Documentary materials were selected purposively according to their direct relevance to the research question and triangulated across official records, electoral data, and attributable public statements. Special autonomy seats in the Papuan provincial DPRDs were excluded from party-specific totals because these seats were not allocated through party-based electoral competition.

The analysis proceeded through four linked stages, beginning with classifying documentary materials by party discourse, legislative representation, and proposals for institutional reform, and organizing electoral data across the 38 provincial DPRDs. For cross-provincial comparison, party seat shares were grouped into three descriptive categories: absolute seat majority (>50%), high minority representation (30–49%), and substantial parliamentary presence (10–29%). The >50 percent threshold carries a direct structural meaning because it identifies a party holding an absolute majority of seats in a provincial legislature. The 30–49 percent and 10–29 percent intervals are researcher-defined heuristic categories used to distinguish comparatively high minority representation from substantial but non-dominant legislative presence across DPRDs of different sizes. These intervals do not correspond to statutory voting thresholds, imply control over DPRD decision-making, or constitute independent indicators of cartelization. The 10 percent threshold also serves as a common descriptive benchmark for comparing the geographical reach of party representation across provinces. At the same time, seat shares below that level remain included in the dataset and total-seat calculations.

Public statements were subsequently coded into explicit support, qualified or conditional support or openness, an undecided or deliberative position, and explicit rejection. Where multiple statements from the same party were available, internal differentiation or changes in position were recorded only when supported by documentary evidence. The coded positions were then compared with provincial legislative representation to identify recurring patterns of alignment and divergence; this comparison was qualitative and did not estimate a causal effect of legislative strength on party preferences. The final stage interpreted the findings through three analytical questions derived from the institutional logic of the cartel party thesis: whether established parties converged around a common preference concerning the rules governing regional executive selection; whether the parties sharing or approaching that preference already possessed substantial

representation within the provincial legislative arena that would be empowered by the proposed reform; and whether transferring final executive selection to DPRDs would increase party-mediated gatekeeping over access to regional executive office. These questions were used to assess compatibility with cartel party logic rather than to establish cartelization itself, maintaining a distinction between observed party discourse, the legislative configuration in which that discourse emerged, and the theoretical meaning attributed to their relationship.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The findings reveal two empirical patterns that structure the analysis of the contemporary discourse on indirect regional head elections. Party responses varied in support and opposition, with several established parties expressing explicit support or qualified openness to DPRD-based selection. This pattern amounts to a partial convergence of institutional preferences rather than a uniform position across the party system. The 2024 legislative elections produced a complementary structural pattern at the provincial level: outright single-party majorities were rare, while several major parties established broad representation across Indonesia's 38 provincial DPRDs. The political significance of the discourse therefore rests partly on the relationship between emerging similarities in party preferences and the legislative arena into which final executive selection would be transferred.

The discussion follows the analytical sequence specified in the Methods: it begins by mapping party representation across the 38 provincial DPRDs. Then it examines the positions articulated by national party elites toward DPRD-based regional head elections. The third section compares these dimensions to identify patterns of alignment and divergence between party preferences and legislative representation. The final section interprets the resulting pattern through the cartel party thesis, focusing on the convergence of institutional preferences, cross-partisan alignment, and the potential expansion of party gatekeeping over regional executive selection.

Post-2024 Provincial Legislative Configuration

The 2024 legislative elections produced a heterogeneous pattern of party representation across Indonesia's 38 provincial DPRDs, with assembly sizes ranging from 35 seats in North Kalimantan to 120 seats in West Java, Central Java, and East Java. Across most provinces, the party with the largest seat share remains below the threshold for an absolute seat majority, leaving substantial portions of legislative representation distributed among competing parties. Table 1 captures this pattern by combining each party's provincial seat share with the geographic extent of its representation.

Table 1. Distribution of Political Party Representation across Provincial DPRDs Following the 2024 Legislative Election

Political Party	>50%	30-49%	10-29%	Provinces ≥10%	Total Provincial Seats
Golkar	0	0	33	33	363
PDI-P	1	2	27	30	389
Gerindra	0	0	30	30	322
NasDem	0	0	24	24	265
PKS	0	0	14	14	214
Demokrat	0	0	12	12	207
PKB	0	0	11	11	220
PAN	0	0	5	5	159
PPP	0	0	1	1	82
Hanura	0	0	1	1	42
Partai Aceh	0	0	1	1	20
PSI	0	0	0	0	32
Perindo	0	0	0	0	31
PBB	0	0	0	0	12
PASA	0	0	0	0	4
PKN	0	0	0	0	4
Garuda	0	0	0	0	3
Gelora	0	0	0	0	1
PDA	0	0	0	0	1
PNA	0	0	0	0	1

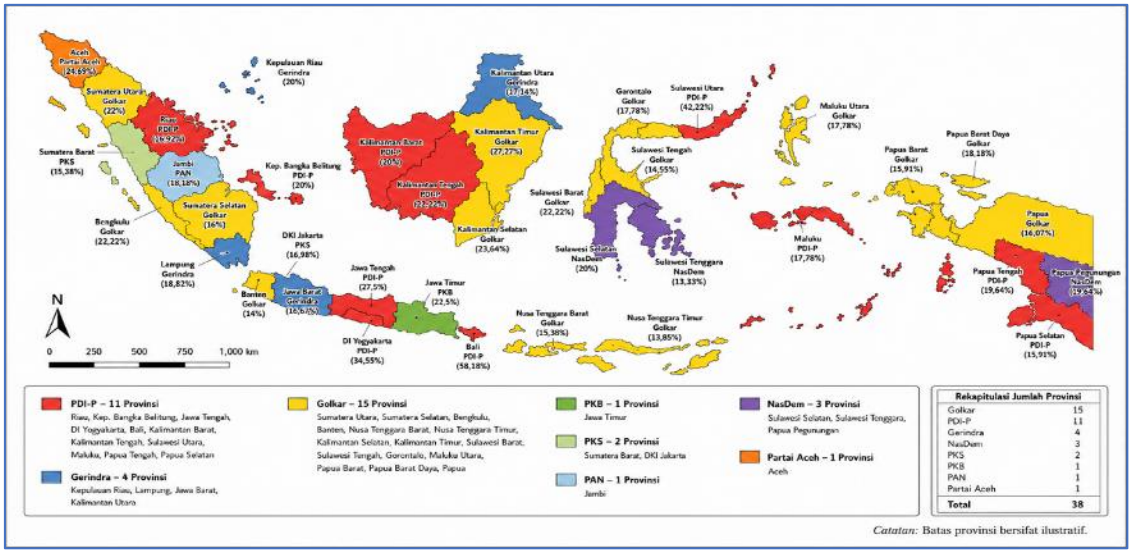
Source: Authors' calculation based on the 2024 provincial DPRD seat data.
Note: The categories follow the analytical thresholds specified in the Methods. Party-specific totals exclude special autonomy (Otsus) seats in the Papuan provincial DPRDs.

Across the post-2024 provincial configuration, absolute single-party seat majorities are rare, with PDI-P the only party to exceed the 50 percent threshold, holding 32 of 55 seats in Bali (58.18 percent). The party also records high minority representation in North Sulawesi, where it holds 42.22 percent of the seats, and in DI Yogyakarta, where its share reaches 34.55 percent. No other party reaches 30 percent in any provincial DPRD, leaving 37 of the 38 provincial legislatures without a party holding more than half of the seats. The rarity of single-party majorities shifts attention to the geographical reach of party representation across the provincial system.

Viewed from this broader geographical perspective, Golkar has the widest reach, holding at least 10 percent of DPRD seats in 33 provinces, followed by PDI-P and Gerindra in 30 provinces each and NasDem in 24. Representation becomes less extensive among the remaining parties, with PKS reaching the same threshold in 14 provinces, Demokrat in 12, and PKB in 11. Golkar, PDI-P, Gerindra, and NasDem together account for 1,339 of the 2,372 party-allocated provincial DPRD seats in the dataset, or 56.45 percent, giving these four parties a particularly broad presence across the provincial legislative system. PAN reaches the 10 percent benchmark in five provinces, while PPP, Hanura, and Partai Aceh do so in one

province each; several smaller parties hold seats but do not reach that level anywhere. The ≥10 percent benchmark is used here to compare the geographical extent of representation rather than to imply a formal level of legislative influence. The resulting distribution combines multiparty representation at the provincial level with a clear disparity in individual parties' geographical reach.

Figure 1. Provincial Distribution of Leading Party Seat Shares Following the 2024 Legislative Election



Source: Processed by the authors, 2026

Figure 1 adds a spatial dimension to this distribution by showing how differently party strength is configured across provinces. Bali records the largest single-party seat share, with PDI-P holding an absolute majority. At the same time, North Sulawesi and DI Yogyakarta give the same party comparatively high minority shares without crossing the majority threshold. Banten displays a markedly different balance, with Golkar, Gerindra, and PDI-P each holding 14 percent of the seats and PKS following closely at 13 percent. West Sumatra is similarly competitive, with PKS and Gerindra each holding ten seats and Golkar and NasDem each holding nine. Broad legislative reach across the country therefore coexists with provincial arenas in which the same major parties' relative positions can differ substantially.

The fragmented character of provincial representation is also visible in the nine DPRDs where more than one party shares the largest seat total. PDI-P, Gerindra, and Golkar each hold nine seats in East Nusa Tenggara, while Gerindra, Golkar, and Demokrat each hold six seats in North Kalimantan. Southeast Sulawesi records another three-way tie, with NasDem, PDI-P, and Golkar each holding six seats. These cases illustrate how the leading position in a legislature can itself be shared among several established parties, and similar competitive balances appear in provinces where one party leads only narrowly. If final executive selection were transferred to DPRD, the institutional consequences of that reform would therefore unfold through legislatures whose partisan composition ranges from relatively concentrated to highly balanced.

Seen across the 38 provinces as a whole, the legislative configuration combines a limited incidence of single-party majorities with substantial aggregate representation by a

relatively small group of established parties. The four parties with the widest provincial reach hold more than half of all party-allocated DPRD seats, while none possesses a nationwide pattern of unilateral legislative dominance. This distribution gives several established parties substantial institutional presence across the provincial system without producing a single party that predominates across provincial legislatures. This configuration becomes particularly relevant once final executive selection is considered within the legislative arena, where the distribution of representation would gain greater political significance under a DPRD-based mechanism. The analysis now turns to the positions these parties articulated toward the proposal for DPRD-based regional head elections.

Party Positions on Indirect Regional Head Elections

Public statements by national party leaders and senior party officials reveal differentiated responses to the proposal for DPRD-based regional head elections, with the documentary record organized into four coded positions: explicit support; qualified or conditional support or openness; an undecided or deliberative position; and explicit rejection. The classification captures the degree and direction of institutional commitment articulated publicly without assuming that every statement by a senior party figure represents a formally adopted organizational decision. This distinction matters for parties whose statements signal openness or ongoing deliberation while stopping short of unequivocal endorsement.

Table 2. Political Party Positions on the Proposal to Return Regional Head Elections to DPRD

Party	Coded Position	Representative Statement	Date	Source
Golkar	Explicit support	*"The Golkar Party proposes that regional head elections be conducted through DPRD."*	21 Dec. 2025	Bahlil Lahadalia, DetikNews
Gerindra	Explicit support	*"Gerindra supports the proposal to conduct regional head elections through DPRD."*	29 Dec. 2025	Sugiono, ANTARA
PKB	Explicit support	*"PKB has supported the election of regional heads through DPRD since the SBY administration."*	2 Jan. 2026	Muhaimin Iskandar, DetikNews
NasDem	Qualified openness	*"Regional head elections through DPRD have a legitimate constitutional basis and remain within the framework of democracy."*	30 Dec. 2025	Viktor Laiskodat, Kompas
Demokrat	Conditional support		6 Jan. 2026	Herman Khaeron, DetikNews

		"DPRD-based elections should be seriously considered as an option for the future electoral system."		
PAN	Conditional support	*"The proposal for regional head elections through DPRD is worth considering."*	5 Jan. 2026	Eddy Soeparno, Media Indonesia
PKS	Undecided / deliberative	*"PKS will not rush to declare its position and is still gathering views from various parties."*	13 Jan. 2026	Muhammad Kholid, Official Website
PDI-P	Explicit rejection	*"Our position has been clear from the beginning, and we will not change it."*	7 Jan. 2026	Deddy Sitorus, IDN Times

Source: Compiled by the authors from attributable public statements of national party leaders and senior party officials.

Note: Statements originally delivered in Indonesian have been translated into English by the authors. The coding reflects publicly articulated positions in the documentary record and does not imply a formal party decision unless the cited source explicitly reports one.

Among the parties examined, Golkar, Gerindra, and PKB offer the clearest cases of explicit support, though each frames its position differently. Golkar's 2025 Rapimnas formally recommended that regional head elections be conducted through DPRD, with Bahlil Lahadalia presenting the proposal in terms of popular sovereignty and continued public participation (Rahmawati, 2025). Gerindra articulated a similarly direct position through Secretary-General Sugiono, who associated DPRD-based selection with reductions in electoral, budgetary, and political costs (Rizaldi, 2025). PKB also expressed explicit support, with Muhaimin Iskandar describing the position as a continuation of the party's stance since the SBY administration and linking it to the high costs and alleged irregularities associated with direct elections (Rahmawati, 2026). The three parties therefore converge on the same institutional alternative even though their stated rationales are not identical.

A more qualified orientation toward the proposal appears in the statements of NasDem and Demokrat, where acceptance of DPRD-based selection is expressed with different degrees of commitment. Viktor Laiskodat, chair of the NasDem faction in the DPR RI, emphasized that selection through DPRD has a legitimate constitutional basis and could remain compatible with a democratic framework (Budilaksono, 2025). His statement signals institutional openness without reaching the unequivocal endorsement expressed by Golkar, Gerindra, and PKB. Herman Khaeron described DPRD-based elections as an option deserving serious consideration for the future electoral system, while retaining qualifications concerning openness, democratic procedure, and public participation (Khaeron, 2026). NasDem and Demokrat therefore occupy positions favorable to considering institutional change. However, the documentary record does not support placing them at the same level of commitment as the explicit-support group.

The distinction between conditional support and an unresolved position becomes especially visible in PAN and PKS. Eddy Soeparno described DPRD-based selection as an option worth considering and linked that assessment to concerns over money politics, political dynasties, and polarization under direct elections (Hutarabat, 2025), placing PAN in the conditional-support category based on the statement examined here. PKS remained more cautious, as Secretary-General Muhammad Kholid stated that the party was still gathering views from regional party structures, cadres, academics, civil society, and other political actors before determining its position (PKS, 2026; Rizaldi, 2026). The difference between the two parties is visible in the degree of institutional commitment expressed publicly: PAN indicated conditional receptiveness, whereas PKS had not yet settled on either support or rejection.

PDI-P occupies the clearest rejecting position in the documentary record, with Deddy Sitorus describing the party's stance as settled and linking its opposition to citizens' political right to select regional leaders directly (Bella & Isdiansyah, 2026). The objection centers on the democratic significance of direct participation in the final choice of regional executives and challenges the transfer of that authority to DPRD representatives. Its position provides an important counterpoint to the emerging convergence because an established party with extensive provincial legislative representation remains explicitly opposed to the same institutional alternative.

Across these statements, partial convergence appears most clearly in the institutional direction of party preferences, rather than in a common justification for reform. Golkar, Gerindra, and PKB explicitly endorse DPRD-based selection, while NasDem, Demokrat, and PAN express qualified or conditional openness or support; PKS remains deliberative, and PDI-P rejects the proposed change. Arguments from the supportive or open side remain heterogeneous, ranging from electoral efficiency and political costs to constitutional permissibility and dissatisfaction with weaknesses attributed to direct elections. What converges, therefore, is the willingness of several established parties to treat a change in the rules governing final regional executive selection as an acceptable institutional alternative, even though their stated reasons and levels of commitment differ. This distinction matters for the subsequent analysis because convergence over the institutional rule itself is the first observable condition this study uses to assess compatibility with cartel party logic.

Because documentary coding establishes only the direction and degree of publicly articulated institutional preferences, it does not, by itself, determine whether the observed convergence is cartel-compatible. That interpretation also depends on whether the parties sharing or approaching the preference possess substantial representation within the legislative arena that would be empowered by the proposed reform and on the implications of relocating final executive selection to that arena. The following section therefore places the coded party positions alongside the post-2024 provincial DPRD configuration to examine how institutional preference intersects with legislative representation.

Party Positions and Provincial Legislative Configuration

Placing the party positions identified in the preceding section alongside the post-2024 provincial DPRD configuration allows the two empirical dimensions of the study to be examined within the same analytical frame. The comparison focuses on whether similarities

and differences in institutional preference coincide with particular patterns of provincial legislative representation across the 38 DPRDs. Legislative strength is treated as part of the institutional setting in which those preferences acquire political significance, without assuming that seat distribution explains why individual parties adopt supportive, conditional, deliberative, or rejecting positions. Consistent with the descriptive framework specified in the Methods, a seat share above 50 percent denotes an absolute majority. In contrast, the 30–49 percent interval and the ≥10 percent measure are used as heuristic benchmarks for comparing the relative scale and geographical reach of party representation. These benchmarks do not represent statutory thresholds of legislative influence or voting control; here, they locate the coded party positions within the existing distribution of provincial legislative representation.

Table 3. Party Positions and Provincial Legislative Representation after the 2024 Legislative Election

Party	Coded Position	Provinces ≥10%	Provinces 30-49%	Provinces >50%	Total Provincial Seats
Golkar	Explicit support	33	0	0	363
Gerindra	Explicit support	30	0	0	322
PKB	Explicit support	11	0	0	220
NasDem	Qualified openness	24	0	0	265
Demokrat	Conditional support	12	0	0	207
PAN	Conditional support	5	0	0	159
PKS	Undecided / deliberative	14	0	0	214
PDI-P	Explicit rejection	30	2	1	389
Explicit-support group: Golkar + Gerindra + PKB	Analytical aggregation	—	—	—	905
Broader support/openness aggregation: Golkar + Gerindra + PKB + NasDem + Demokrat + PAN	Analytical aggregation	—	—	—	1536

Source: Authors' calculation based on the 2024 provincial DPRD seat data and documentary coding of party positions.

Note: The collective rows are analytical aggregations based on coded party positions. They do not denote a formal coalition, coordinated voting bloc, or evidence of inter-party agreement beyond the publicly articulated positions examined in this study.

Among the parties expressing explicit support, Golkar and Gerindra combine particularly broad provincial reach with substantial aggregate representation, reaching at least 10 percent of DPRD seats in 33 and 30 provinces, respectively. In contrast, PKB reaches the same benchmark in 11. Together, the three parties account for 905 party-allocated provincial seats and reach a combined share of at least 10 percent in every provincial DPRD. Their combined representation exceeds the 30 percent descriptive benchmark in 29 of the 38 provinces and exceeds half of DPRD membership in East Java and East Kalimantan. The 30 percent comparison indicates comparatively large combined representation rather than a statutory level of legislative influence.

In comparison, the two cases above 50 percent show only that the three parties collectively hold more than half of the seats in those legislatures. Neither aggregation implies that Golkar, Gerindra, and PKB would vote or bargain as a unified bloc. The geographical extent of their representation nevertheless establishes that explicit support for DPRD-based selection is articulated by parties with a substantial collective presence throughout the provincial legislative system.

A broader analytical picture emerges when NasDem, Demokrat, and PAN are added to the explicit-support group because their public statements indicate qualified openness or conditional support toward the same institutional alternative. These three parties contribute another 631 seats, raising the broader support/openness aggregation from 905 to 1,536 party-allocated provincial seats, equivalent to 64.76 percent of all party-allocated seats in the dataset. However, the two figures represent different levels of political commitment. The 905-seat aggregation provides the stronger measure of explicit convergence because Golkar, Gerindra, and PKB each endorse DPRD-based selection. In contrast, the 1,536-seat figure captures the wider legislative reach of positions ranging from explicit endorsement to qualified or conditional receptiveness. Viewed at this broader level, the six parties collectively exceed half of the full DPRD membership in 32 provinces and remain at or above the 30 percent descriptive benchmark in the other six. This wider aggregation therefore indicates the institutional scale associated with varying degrees of receptiveness toward DPRD-based selection, rather than the seat strength of a unified group committed to adopting the reform.

PDI-P provides the clearest counter-pattern to any interpretation that derives institutional preference directly from legislative strength. With 389 provincial DPRD seats, the party has the largest aggregate seat total among the eight national parliamentary parties and reaches at least 10 percent representation in 30 provinces. Its position is especially strong in Bali, where it holds the only single-party absolute majority at 58.18 percent. In comparison, its seat shares in North Sulawesi and DI Yogyakarta reach 42.22 and 34.55 percent respectively, placing both provinces within the high-minority category used for descriptive comparison. However, PDI-P rejects the proposed transfer of regional head elections to DPRD. Extensive legislative representation can therefore coexist with opposition to the reform, limiting any inference that seat distribution determines the direction of party preference.

Differences among parties with less extensive provincial reach reinforce the same point. PKB expresses explicit support while reaching the ≥10 percent benchmark in 11 provinces, whereas PKS reaches it in 14 and remains undecided or deliberative. Demokrat combines representation of at least 10 percent in 12 provinces with conditional support, while PAN reaches the benchmark in five provinces and occupies the same broad conditional category. The geographical reach of party representation therefore does not sort parties consistently according to their positions toward DPRD-based selection. At the same time, the comparison shows that the strongest convergence is associated with three explicitly supportive parties possessing 905 seats. In contrast, receptiveness to the same institutional alternative extends more widely among parties whose commitment levels remain distinct.

The comparison therefore reveals two nested patterns of legislative representation rather than a single six-party alignment. The strongest correspondence between institutional preference and legislative presence is found among Golkar, Gerindra, and PKB, whose explicit support is associated with 905 provincial DPRD seats. A broader pattern appears when NasDem, Demokrat, and PAN are included, extending the legislative reach of parties displaying varying degrees of receptiveness to 1,536 seats without implying equivalent commitment to the reform. PDI-P's rejection and PKS's unresolved position further demonstrate that legislative presence alone does not determine how parties respond to DPRD-based selection. These relationships provide the empirical basis for assessing the second observable condition of cartel compatibility: whether parties sharing or approaching the same preference over the rules of regional executive selection already possess substantial representation within the institutional arena that would be empowered by the proposed reform. If final executive selection were transferred to DPRDs, those differentiated preferences would operate within legislatures where several of the parties concerned already hold extensive representation. Whether relocating final selection authority to that arena would also expand party-mediated gatekeeping over access to regional executive office, the third analytical condition is examined in the following section through the cartel party thesis.

Reading the Convergence through the Cartel Party Thesis

Reading the cartel party thesis, the relationship between party positions and the post-2024 provincial legislative configuration matters because convergence appears in varying degrees of political commitment among established parties whose representation spans the provincial DPRD system. Golkar, Gerindra, and PKB expressed explicit support for DPRD-based selection, whereas NasDem, Demokrat, and PAN articulated qualified or conditional positions toward the same institutional alternative. The strongest empirical convergence therefore lies among the three explicitly supportive parties. At the same time, the latter three broaden the range of established parties displaying receptiveness to the proposed institutional change without expressing an equivalent level of commitment. PDI-P provides a clear counter-position despite possessing one of the strongest provincial legislative profiles. Legislative strength consequently cannot account for party preference on its own; analytically, the relevant pattern is that varying degrees of convergence occur within an institutional setting where existing party representation would become more consequential if final executive selection were transferred to DPRDs. Such a configuration is compatible with the institutional logic associated with the cartel party thesis, although the available

evidence does not establish the formation of a consolidated party cartel (Katz & Mair, 1995, 2009; Slater, 2004, 2018).

A central point of connection with Katz and Mair lies in the object around which these preferences converge. Indonesian party politics has long been characterized by pragmatic cooperation among parties seeking access to office under existing electoral arrangements, particularly through coalition formation and inter-party bargaining (Ambardi, 2009; Hendrawan et al., 2021; Pandey et al., 2026). The pattern identified here concerns the rules determining where the final allocation of regional executive office would take place. Explicit support from Golkar, Gerindra, and PKB places institutional redesign directly within party preference formation. At the same time, the qualified or conditional receptiveness of NasDem, Demokrat, and PAN extends that orientation without reaching the same level of endorsement. If DPRD-based selection were adopted, parties would no longer be negotiating solely over candidates and coalitions within a direct electoral system; the legislature in which they already hold seats would become the arena responsible for the final selection of governors, regents, and mayors. Cartel party theory therefore matters because it highlights the potential expansion of party influence over the institutional conditions governing access to executive office.

The documentary evidence nevertheless sets a clear boundary around how far this pattern can be interpreted. None of the materials examined in this study demonstrates a formal agreement, coordinated strategy, or joint organizational plan among the parties supporting or considering DPRD-based elections. Their public arguments and degrees of commitment also differ substantially. Golkar and Gerindra emphasize electoral costs and efficiency, PKB highlights perceived problems in the existing direct-election model, NasDem stresses constitutional permissibility, Demokrat retains qualifications about democratic procedure and public participation, and PAN expresses conditional receptiveness rather than unequivocal endorsement. The evidence therefore supports a pattern of graded convergence in institutional direction rather than a uniform inter-party commitment to reform. What can be observed with confidence is that several established parties treat DPRD-based selection as either preferable or institutionally acceptable. In contrast, the internal calculations and inter-party processes that produced those positions remain beyond the documentary evidence. This distinction prevents convergence in public discourse from being treated automatically as proof of coordinated cartel behaviour.

The legislative significance of this graded convergence becomes clearer when analysts keep the different levels of commitment analytically separate. The explicit-support group of Golkar, Gerindra, and PKB collectively holds 905 party-allocated provincial DPRD seats. Their combined representation reaches at least 10 percent in every provincial DPRD, exceeds the 30 percent descriptive benchmark in 29 of the 38 provinces, and exceeds half of DPRD membership in East Java and East Kalimantan. These figures provide the strongest empirical basis for linking an explicitly shared institutional preference to an existing pattern of legislative representation. However, they remain analytical aggregates rather than evidence that the three parties would vote or bargain as a single bloc. A broader analytical aggregation that additionally includes NasDem, Demokrat, and PAN raises the total to 1,536 party-allocated provincial seats. This wider group exceeds half of the full DPRD membership

in 32 provinces and remains at or above the 30 percent descriptive benchmark in the other six, but the larger figure represents the legislative reach associated with positions ranging from explicit endorsement to qualified or conditional receptiveness; it should not be read as 1,536 seats committed to supporting the reform. Under direct elections, political parties remain central to nomination and coalition formation while voters retain authority over the final electoral choice. Moving that final decision to DPRDs would alter the institutional sequence by making legislators, organized through political parties, responsible for determining regional executive leadership (Müller, 2000). The existing distribution of seats would consequently take on a different political function because legislative representation would become directly tied to the final allocation of executive office.

PDI-P complicates any attempt to read this relationship as a straightforward product of legislative advantage. With 389 provincial DPRD seats, representation of at least 10 percent in 30 provinces, and the only absolute single-party provincial majority in Bali, the party has substantial legislative capacity under any hypothetical DPRD-based arrangement. However, its publicly articulated position remains one of rejection. PKS introduces a different qualification: it reaches the ≥10 percent descriptive benchmark in more provinces than PKB but remains undecided or deliberative rather than supportive. These counter-patterns show that neither extensive legislative representation nor broad provincial reach is sufficient to produce support for DPRD-based selection. They reinforce the treatment of legislative configuration as an opportunity structure whose political significance depends on party preference rather than as a mechanism that determines that preference. Explaining why parties facing apparently comparable institutional opportunities adopt different positions would require evidence on internal deliberation, strategic calculations, or organizational priorities that this study lacks.

The cartel party perspective becomes analytically useful when these differentiated preferences concern the institutional rules governing access to executive office. Office-seeking approaches are well suited to explaining coalition bargaining and candidate selection once electoral rules are already established. Katz and Mair highlight a broader possibility: established parties develop shared interests in the conditions governing political competition itself, especially as their organizational position becomes increasingly connected to state institutions. Applied to the present findings, that proposition is relevant to the possible expansion of party gatekeeping from candidate nomination to the final stage of regional executive selection. Concerns over campaign costs and weaknesses in direct elections may help explain why institutional reform attracts public and elite attention. However, the particular reform under discussion would change which political actors exercise decisive authority at the end of the selection process. The theoretical relevance therefore lies less in treating all receptive parties as a unified bloc than in examining how an institutional redesign, supported explicitly by some established parties and regarded as acceptable by others, could shift final executive choice to a legislature where those parties already have substantial representation.

The evidence supports a cartel-compatible interpretation at this level of institutional change, but only when the variation in party commitment is retained. Explicit convergence is clearest among Golkar, Gerindra, and PKB, whose 905 provincial seats provide the

strongest connection between a common institutional preference and existing legislative representation. The broader 1,536-seat aggregation shows that receptiveness to the same institutional alternative extends further across the party system. However, qualified openness and conditional support cannot be treated as equivalent to explicit endorsement. PDI-P's opposition and PKS's unresolved position further demonstrate that the configuration is neither uniform nor reducible to legislative advantage. The cartel-compatible element lies in the possibility that institutional redesign could expand party-mediated gatekeeping over regional executive selection. At the same time, established parties continue to compete electorally and differ in how strongly they support the reform. Transferring final selection authority from voters to provincial legislatures would change the institutional significance of party representation itself, where the contemporary debate over indirect regional head elections intersects most directly with the cartel party thesis.

CONCLUSION

Across Indonesia's 38 provincial DPRDs, the post-2024 legislative configuration features an unusually high number of absolute single-party majorities alongside broad representation from several established political parties. PDI-P is the only party to hold an absolute majority, doing so in Bali, while Golkar, PDI-P, Gerindra, and NasDem possess the widest provincial legislative reach. The documentary analysis reveals a differentiated pattern of partial convergence in the debate over DPRD-based regional head elections. Golkar, Gerindra, and PKB articulate explicit support; NasDem expresses qualified openness; Demokrat and PAN occupy conditional positions; PKS remains undecided or deliberative; and PDI-P maintains explicit opposition. The strongest convergence therefore lies among the three explicitly supportive parties. At the same time, receptiveness to the same institutional alternative extends further across several other established parties without reflecting an equivalent level of political commitment.

Comparing these positions with provincial legislative representation separates legislative strength from party preference while revealing the institutional scale associated with different levels of commitment to the proposed reform. PDI-P holds the largest aggregate number of provincial DPRD seats and the only absolute single-party majority. However, it rejects DPRD-based selection, while PKS remains deliberative despite a broader provincial reach than some explicitly supportive parties. Golkar, Gerindra, and PKB collectively hold 905 party-allocated provincial seats, providing the strongest empirical connection between explicit convergence over the institutional rule and existing legislative representation. A broader aggregation that also includes NasDem, Demokrat, and PAN reaches 1,536 seats, but this larger figure captures legislative reach ranging from explicit endorsement to qualified or conditional receptiveness rather than a unified commitment to reform. Read through the cartel party thesis, the significance of these nested patterns lies in the possibility that final executive selection would be relocated to an arena where parties expressing varying degrees of support or openness already possess substantial representation. Such a change would increase the institutional importance of party-mediated legislative bargaining at the final stage of executive selection. The resulting configuration is compatible with cartel party logic at the level of institutional redesign. At

the same time, the available evidence does not establish formal inter-party coordination, shared strategic motives, coordinated legislative behaviour, or a consolidated party cartel.

The article extends the study of Indonesian party cooperation beyond coalition formation and candidate nomination under established electoral arrangements by examining convergence over the rules governing access to regional executive office itself. Connecting publicly articulated party positions with the actual distribution of provincial legislative representation shows how electoral institutional reform can alter the political significance of representation already held by established parties. The contribution lies in distinguishing convergence over institutional rules from ordinary cooperation within those rules and in showing how such convergence becomes politically consequential when the proposed reform would expand party-mediated gatekeeping over final executive selection. The findings also show why this relationship cannot be reduced to legislative advantage alone: parties occupying substantial positions within the same institutional opportunity structure still differ in whether they support, conditionally accept, remain undecided about, or reject the proposed reform.

The interpretation remains bounded by the documentary and aggregate character of the evidence. Public statements reveal articulated institutional positions but provide limited access to internal deliberation, strategic calculations, inter-party communication, or the processes through which those positions were formed. Provincial DPRD data establish the legislative setting in which the discourse developed. However, they cannot demonstrate how parties would actually bargain or vote under a DPRD-based selection mechanism, nor do they capture the substantial variation that may exist at the regency and municipal levels. Future research could examine these mechanisms through interviews, internal party materials, and evidence of inter-party interaction, while extending the comparison to regency and municipal DPRDs to determine whether similar relationships between institutional preference, legislative representation, and party-mediated gatekeeping appear below the provincial level.

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DECLARATION OF INTEREST

The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest regarding the research, authorship, and publication of this article.

ETHICAL CONSIDERATION

This study relied exclusively on secondary data and publicly accessible documentary materials, including official electoral data, regulations, institutional documents, media reports, and publicly attributable statements by political party leaders and senior officials. The research did not involve direct interaction with human participants, interviews, surveys, experiments, or the collection of private personal information. All documentary materials

were used for academic purposes and analyzed with attention to accurate attribution and responsible representation of publicly available information. As no human participants were recruited and no non-public personal data were collected, informed consent and institutional ethics approval were not required for this study.

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