

The Trajectory of Electoral Democracy: Legality, Systems, and the Development of Indonesian Election Outcomes

Muhammad Kevin Mulyawarman¹, Muhammad Fasya Haifa², Adi Gunawan GN³,
Zulfiqri⁴, Elviandri⁵

^{1,2,3,4,5}Universitas Muhammadiyah Kalimantan Timur, Samarinda, Indonesia

Email: Email: 2211102432074@umkt.ac.id

Abstract

Elections are a fundamental tool in a democratic system that serve to realize the rights of the people. This paper aims to examine the background and evolution of elections in Indonesia, including the legal basis, electoral system, organizing institutions, and election results over time. The approach used is a normative juridical approach with descriptive analysis of legislation and related scientific literature. The results of the discussion indicate that elections in Indonesia have experienced significant progress, starting from the 1955 election, which was considered the most democratic, then declining during the New Order era to become a tool for legitimizing power, until re-emerging as a competitive multiparty system after the 1998 reforms. Institutionally, the General Elections Commission (KPU), Elections Supervisory Agency (Bawaslu), and Elections Executive Board (DKPP) were designed as independent organizers, but still face integrity and capacity challenges. The implementation of an open proportional system and simultaneous elections brought democratic progress as well as new issues such as increased money politics and high technical burdens for election officials in the field. This paper recommends the need to strengthen election organizing institutions, reform the election system with a humanitarian perspective, and improve public political education to realize more transparent, accountable, and high-quality elections.

Keywords: Elections, Democracy, Political System, Indonesia.

A. INTRODUCTION

General elections constitute one of the fundamental instruments within contemporary democratic systems, functioning as a medium for the realization of popular sovereignty. In democratic states, elections not only serve as a mechanism for the peaceful transfer of power, but also reflect the legitimacy of governments established through the will of the people (Purba, 2024). Indonesia, as both a constitutional and democratic state, has positioned general elections as a crucial component of its governmental system, constitutionally regulated under the 1945 Constitution of the Republic of Indonesia.

Within the framework of democratic theory, the concept of general elections refers to the fundamental principle that state authority originates from the people and must remain accountable to them (Gerald, 2026). In his seminal work *Polyarchy: Participation and Opposition* (1971), Robert Dahl emphasizes that one of the essential prerequisites of a democratic political system is the existence of free, fair, and competitive elections. In this regard, elections are not merely technical procedures, but also constitute a fundamental basis for political legitimacy in modern states (Zulini, 2022).

The implementation of general elections in Indonesia is grounded in the principle of popular sovereignty as stipulated in Article 1 paragraph (2) of the 1945 Constitution (Yasin, 2022). The realization of this principle is manifested through elections conducted in a direct, general, free, confidential, honest, and fair manner, commonly referred to as the LUBER JURDIL principles. These principles have become important indicators in assessing the quality of electoral democracy within a state (Kirana et al. 2024).

From a historical perspective, the trajectory of general elections in Indonesia began in 1955. The 1955 election involved more than thirty political parties and recorded an exceptionally high level of voter participation. Numerous historians and political scientists regard this election as the most democratic in Indonesian history (Pangestu & Fatimah, 2025).

This condition changed significantly during the New Order era (1966–1998). Under the administration of Suharto, general elections were regularly conducted every five years; nevertheless, they essentially functioned as political formalities and lacked genuine competitiveness. Other political parties operated merely as democratic ornaments without any substantial opportunity to compete on an equal basis (Perdana, 2021).

Following the collapse of the New Order regime in 1998, Indonesia's electoral system underwent a comprehensive transformation during the Reformasi era. The 1999 general election represented the first election of the reform period conducted within a genuinely competitive political environment. It involved 48 political parties and produced a more representative House of Representatives (Ardiantoro, 2022).

The 2024 general election introduced a new chapter in the history of Indonesian democracy. For the first time, Prabowo Subianto successfully secured the presidency with more than 58% of the national vote, accompanied by Gibran Rakabuming Raka as vice president. This election was also characterized by the increasing influence of young voters, who accounted for more than 50% of the total electorate (Alfaruqy, 2025).

The development of general elections in Indonesia demonstrates that electoral democracy continues to evolve, while simultaneously facing persistent challenges related to implementation, institutional capacity, and the quality of political representation. Therefore, discussions concerning the history, legality, and electoral system remain essential for understanding the direction of democratic consolidation in Indonesia and evaluating the extent to which elections genuinely embody substantive popular sovereignty.

This study aims to: (1) examine and analyze comprehensively the history, legality, and electoral system of general elections in Indonesia; and (2) evaluate and describe the development of electoral outcomes in Indonesia over time as a reflection of the nation's democratic trajectory.

B. LITERATURE REVIEW

The concept of electoral democracy refers to Robert Dahl's theory (1971), which asserts that a democratic political system requires free, fair, and open electoral competition. Elections, therefore, are not merely technical procedures, but also constitute the foundation of political legitimacy within modern states.

In the context of democratic transition, Guillermo O'Donnell and Philippe C. Schmitter (1986) introduced the concept of liberalized authoritarianism, referring to situations in which electoral procedures are maintained primarily to secure international legitimacy while lacking substantive democratic characteristics. This concept is particularly relevant in analyzing elections during Indonesia's New Order era (Setiawan & Taebenu, 2025).

According to Razak (2023) the open proportional electoral system provides greater freedom for voters to directly select their preferred legislative candidates without being constrained by party-determined ranking orders. As a result, the relationship between voters and legislative candidates becomes more direct and personalized. This condition subsequently enhances legislators' accountability toward their constituents and strengthens the legitimacy of elected candidates in the eyes of the public. Meanwhile, Jurdi et al. (2024) examined the evolution of Indonesia's electoral system from a closed proportional system to an open proportional system and found that such transformation represented a concrete effort to bring candidates closer to voters while fulfilling fundamental democratic values. Nevertheless, the implementation of the open proportional system within Indonesia's simultaneous electoral framework has also generated several challenges, particularly the expansion of money politics practices, which potentially undermine the functions and roles of political parties.

Regarding electoral management institutions, Hidayat (2025) emphasizes that strengthening the roles of the General Elections Commission (KPU) and the Election Supervisory Agency (Bawaslu) constitutes a primary pillar in fostering meaningful public participation. In this regard, the KPU performs functions related to political education and electoral socialization, while Bawaslu is responsible for supervision and the prevention of electoral violations to ensure the implementation of free and fair elections. Both institutions operate independently and complement one another in maintaining the integrity of Indonesia's electoral democracy. Khoirinnisa (2024) examined the urgency of reforming the simultaneous electoral system as a strategic effort to address weaknesses in inter-institutional coordination among electoral management bodies, improve supervisory mechanisms, and maintain public trust in democratic processes, thereby supporting the effective implementation of simultaneous elections within Indonesia's presidential system.

C. METHOD

This study employs a normative juridical method, namely a legal research approach conducted through the examination of library materials and secondary data sources. The analysis is carried out descriptively by examining statutory regulations,

Constitutional Court decisions, and scientific literature relevant to the topic of general elections in Indonesia.

The data sources utilized in this study consist of primary and secondary sources. The primary sources include the 1945 Constitution of the Republic of Indonesia, Law Number 7 of 2017 concerning General Elections, and decisions issued by the Constitutional Court. Meanwhile, the secondary sources comprise books, scientific journal articles, and official reports published by the Indonesian General Elections Commission (KPU RI). Data collection techniques were conducted through library research and online document analysis.

D. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

1. History, Legality and Election System in Indonesia

General elections in Indonesia are founded upon a strong and comprehensive legal framework. The highest constitutional basis is established in Article 22E of the 1945 Constitution, which stipulates that elections must be conducted in a direct, general, free, confidential, honest, and fair manner every five years, commonly referred to as the LUBER JURDIL principles. Furthermore, Article 1 paragraph (2) affirms that sovereignty resides in the hands of the people, while Article 6A regulates the direct election of the president.

Law Number 7 of 2017 concerning General Elections serves as the principal legal framework integrating three previous laws: Law Number 42 of 2008 concerning Presidential Elections, Law Number 8 of 2012 concerning Legislative Elections, and Law Number 15 of 2011 concerning Electoral Management Bodies (Mas & Alan, 2022). This law comprehensively regulates the electoral system, candidacy requirements, electoral stages, institutional arrangements, and electoral law enforcement mechanisms.

In its development, Constitutional Court Decision Number 114/PUU-XX/2022 maintained the open proportional system for legislative elections by rejecting proposals to revert to a closed proportional system. In addition, regulations issued by the General Elections Commission (PKPU), the Election Supervisory Agency (Bawaslu Regulations), and the Election Organizer Ethics Council (DKPP Regulations) form a technical legal hierarchy governing electoral implementation in greater detail (Astuti et al. 2024).

Since the 2009 General Election, Indonesia has implemented an open proportional electoral system for legislative elections, including the House of Representatives (DPR RI), Provincial Regional Representative Councils (DPRD Provinsi), and Regency/Municipal Regional Representative Councils (DPRD Kabupaten/Kota), pursuant to Article 168 paragraph (2) of Law Number 7 of 2017 (Astawa et al., 2024). Under this system, voters are able to directly select their preferred legislative candidates, and candidates obtaining the highest number of votes are elected regardless of their party-list ranking.

With respect to executive elections, Indonesia adopts a presidential system with direct presidential elections, first implemented during the 2004 General Election.

Presidential candidates are required to secure more than 50% of the valid national vote with at least 20% distribution across more than half of Indonesia's provinces. Constitutional Court Decision Number 62/PUU-XXII/2024 subsequently abolished the 20% presidential threshold requirement for parliamentary seats, effective from the 2029 General Election onward (Aziz et al. 2024).

Simultaneous general elections, first implemented in 2019, integrated legislative and presidential elections into a single electoral process in accordance with Constitutional Court Decision Number 14/PUU-XI/2013. This system was intended to improve political efficiency and consistency; however, it also generated an extraordinary workload for election officers. During the 2019 election, approximately 894 polling station officers reportedly died due to extreme exhaustion.

The implementation of elections in Indonesia involves three principal institutions that are permanent, national, and independent, as mandated under Article 22E paragraph (5) of the 1945 Constitution. The General Elections Commission (KPU) is responsible for the technical administration of elections, encompassing the planning, implementation, and evaluation of all electoral stages. Institutionally, the KPU operates hierarchically from the national level to regency and municipal election commissions throughout Indonesia (Wardhani & Rafsanjani, 2026).

Meanwhile, the Election Supervisory Agency (Bawaslu) is tasked with supervising electoral implementation and possesses quasi-judicial authority to receive, examine, and adjudicate administrative electoral violations. During the 2024 General Election, Bawaslu recorded thousands of reports concerning alleged electoral violations, including campaigning outside the designated schedule, misuse of state facilities, and the lack of neutrality among state officials.

The Election Organizer Ethics Council (DKPP) functions as the institution responsible for enforcing ethical standards among electoral administrators. DKPP possesses the authority to investigate and adjudicate ethical violations committed by members of both the KPU and Bawaslu, with its decisions being final and binding. The collaboration among these three institutions constitutes a fundamental pillar in maintaining clean and credible electoral democracy in Indonesia.

According to Elviandri and Hidayat (2022), although the Political Party Law mandates equitable political education, the reality that Indonesian political parties remain weakly institutionalized and insufficiently democratic continues to present challenges for democracy and good governance. Consequently, the authors emphasize the necessity of revitalizing party-affiliated organizations as a strategy to strengthen political cadre development, recruitment functions, and party institutionalization. A more democratic arrangement of party wings is expected to support the development of a healthier democratic system (Elviandri & Hidayat, 2022).

Another study conducted by Akhmad et al. (2025) involving Elviandri, highlights the "disruption" within Indonesia's open proportional system, whereby broader participation has instead enabled party oligarchies and transactional political practices to dominate the democratic process. This condition has weakened

substantive representation and intensified political fragmentation, thereby obstructing democratic consolidation. The researchers therefore stress the urgency of progressive legal reforms, including strengthening political party institutionalization, enhancing campaign finance transparency, and reconstructing electoral regulations to restore representative justice within the open proportional system. Such reforms are expected to revive the substantive values of the open proportional system in safeguarding popular sovereignty through transparent, open, and fair political processes (Akhmad et al. 2025).

Overall, the foregoing discussion demonstrates that the history of Indonesian elections is deeply rooted in constitutional principles and continuously evolving regulatory frameworks designed to strengthen democracy. Core legal instruments, including Article 22E of the 1945 Constitution, Law Number 7 of 2017 in conjunction with Law Number 7 of 2023 concerning General Elections, and Law Number 7 of 2022 concerning the KPU, mandate the implementation of elections that are honest, fair, and democratic. Although the currently implemented open proportional electoral system is expected to enhance political accountability, academic studies continue to reveal challenges related to representative justice and political fragmentation. Therefore, continuous reforms involving political party institutional strengthening, campaign finance transparency, and electoral regulatory revision remain essential for reinforcing democratic values and ensuring popular sovereignty in Indonesia.

2. The Development of Electoral Outcomes in Indonesia Over Time

The 1955 General Election represented Indonesia's first post-independence election and was conducted in two stages on 29 September and 15 December 1955. The election involved 28 political parties and recorded an exceptionally high voter participation rate of approximately 91%. The results were dominated by four major political parties: the Indonesian National Party (PNI) with 22.3% of the vote, Masyumi with 20.9%, Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) with 18.4%, and the Indonesian Communist Party (PKI) with 16.4% (Nur, 2024) This election is widely regarded as the most democratic election in Indonesian history.

During the New Order era (1971–1997), elections were conducted regularly but lacked genuine competitiveness. Golkar consistently dominated electoral outcomes with vote shares ranging between 60% and 74%, while the United Development Party (PPP) and the Indonesian Democratic Party (PDI) functioned primarily as symbolic democratic actors (Rumyati, 2023). Political scientists have consequently categorized elections during this period as hegemonic elections that lacked substantive democratic characteristics.

The Reformasi era began with the 1999 General Election, which involved 48 political parties competing within a more open political environment. The Indonesian Democratic Party of Struggle (PDI-P) emerged victorious with 33.7% of the national vote. The 2004 General Election marked another significant milestone through the implementation of Indonesia's first direct presidential election, won by the ticket of Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono and Jusuf Kalla. The 2009 election further reflected

democratic consolidation through the reelection of Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono alongside Boediono.

The 2014 and 2019 elections were characterized by intense political polarization between supporters of Joko Widodo and Prabowo Subianto. In 2014, the ticket of Joko Widodo and Jusuf Kalla secured victory with 53.15% of the vote and a voter turnout of 75.11%. The 2019 election represented Indonesia's first simultaneous election, integrating presidential and legislative elections, with voter participation increasing significantly to 81.97%. The election was won by Joko Widodo and Ma'ruf Amin with 55.50% of the vote (Zain et al. 2024).

The 2024 General Election, held on 14 February 2024, involved more than 204 million registered voters. The ticket of Prabowo Subianto and Gibran Rakabuming Raka secured victory in a single round with 58.59% of the national vote. Several significant phenomena characterized this election, including the dominance of young voters, who accounted for more than 50% of the electorate, the extensive use of social media in political campaigns, and various controversies surrounding the neutrality of electoral management bodies (Syam, 2024).

During the New Order era, elections were marked by Golkar's dominance and limited public participation. According to the Sukabumi General Elections Commission (2026), "the implementation of elections during the New Order period was dominated by a single political force, namely Golongan Karya (Golkar)." The 1973 political party fusion policy reduced electoral participants to only three parties Golkar, PPP, and PDI thereby creating a political process that remained heavily co-opted by the state despite the routine conduct of elections. Consequently, public political participation became highly restricted. Following the 1998 Reformasi movement, the 1999 General Election was widely recognized as Indonesia's most democratic election due to the participation of 48 political parties and the broader opportunities for public political engagement created by the proportional electoral system. Nevertheless, many aspects of electoral law remained under institutional reconstruction. Elviandri et al. (2023) emphasized the necessity of legal reconstruction to accommodate political party rights concerning the presidential threshold mechanism and coalition formation, thereby ensuring that political coalitions are established based on clear political interests rather than solely pragmatic electoral considerations. This recommendation aligns with the findings of Taufiq et al. (2025) who argue that despite the comprehensive legal framework governing elections, implementation continues to face significant challenges, particularly weak law enforcement and conflicts of interest among party elites. In other words, Indonesia's electoral governance continues to evolve through institutional strengthening, particularly within the General Elections Commission (KPU) and the Election Supervisory Agency (Bawaslu), as well as through internal reforms of political parties to ensure genuinely democratic elections.

From the 2000s onward, democratic consolidation has become increasingly visible through improvements in electoral quality and voter participation. Official KPU data from 2024 indicate that the Indonesian Democratic Party of Struggle (PDIP)

remained the largest party with 16.7% of the valid national vote, marking a hat-trick of electoral victories from 2014 to 2024 and demonstrating continuity within Indonesia's party system. Another notable phenomenon is the dominance of young voters. Data from Open Data West Java indicate that approximately 55% of voters in the 2024 election originated from Generation Z and millennial groups. However, the disruption generated by the open proportional electoral system has created a democratic paradox. According to Akhmad et al. (2025), expectations regarding enhanced popular legitimacy have instead been "replaced by the dominance of party oligarchies," thereby weakening substantive representation and exacerbating political fragmentation. This condition demonstrates that electoral outcomes are shaped not only by numerical vote counts but also by party power structures and the integrity of electoral governance. Furthermore, retention studies conducted by (Elviandri et al. 2024) advocate limiting the tenure of political party chairpersons to prevent excessive concentration of personal power that may undermine public aspirations. Overall, both official data and academic studies reveal a trend of increasing political participation and stronger electoral institutions, although further reforms remain necessary, particularly regarding electoral thresholds, permanent coalition mechanisms, and internal party controls to ensure that election outcomes genuinely reflect the will of the people.

The development of electoral outcomes in Indonesia reflects a democratic trajectory that continues to evolve while remaining confronted by structural challenges. From the New Order period to the Reformasi era and the contemporary digital era, public participation has remained relatively consistent despite continuous transformations in electoral mechanisms, including direct presidential elections since 2004 and simultaneous elections since 2019. Lessons derived from the studies of Elviandri and colleagues demonstrate that democratic achievements must be accompanied by the restructuring of legal frameworks and electoral institutions. With the increasing dominance of young voters and the emergence of digital information systems, further reforms such as implementing a more equitable open proportional system and limiting excessive party power have become increasingly important to ensure that elections consistently uphold the principles of being direct, general, free, confidential, honest, and fair (LUBER JURDIL). Consequently, electoral outcomes across different periods illustrate a dynamic process of democratic consolidation, while also indicating that the perfection of democratic practices ultimately depends upon regulatory consistency and institutional integrity.

E. CONCLUSION

General elections in Indonesia have undergone a long historical trajectory from 1955 to 2024, reflecting a democratic evolution that has not developed in a linear manner. Elections initially emerged as a highly democratic mechanism in 1955, subsequently transformed into an instrument of political legitimacy during the New Order era, and later reemerged as a competitive multiparty system following the Reformasi movement of 1998.

The legal foundation of Indonesia's electoral system is relatively strong, primarily grounded in the 1945 Constitution and Law Number 7 of 2017 concerning General Elections. The open proportional electoral system implemented since 2009 has provided greater electoral freedom for voters; however, it has simultaneously created wider opportunities for money politics practices. Likewise, the simultaneous electoral system introduced in 2019 has improved electoral efficiency but has also generated substantial administrative and operational burdens for polling station officers (KPPS).

The General Elections Commission (KPU), the Election Supervisory Agency (Bawaslu), and the Election Organizer Ethics Council (DKPP) were institutionally designed as independent pillars of democratic governance. Nevertheless, these institutions continue to face significant challenges, including limited institutional resources, political pressures, and concerns regarding organizational integrity. The 2024 General Election ultimately demonstrates that Indonesia remains within an ongoing and incomplete process of democratic consolidation.

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