

## Inequality of Political Party Representation in the Indonesian Legislative System: Critical Study and Recommendations for Reform

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**Background.** Indonesia's post-reform open proportional electoral system was intended to enhance democratic representation. However, in practice, it has strengthened the dominance of large parties, marginalized small parties, increased the cost of politics, and weakened the function of opposition and legislative oversight. These systemic flaws hinder democratic quality and accountability.

**Purpose.** The study aims to identify structural problems in Indonesia's legislative system caused by the open proportional model and to propose reform strategies that can strengthen opposition forces and improve the quality of representation in parliament.

**Method.** This research employs a critical approach and comparative study method. It critically analyzes Indonesia's current political and legislative structure and compares it with the South Korean system to draw lessons and formulate contextual reform recommendations.

**Results.** The study proposes two key reforms: Strengthening the opposition through public image reform, better internal party democracy, and revision of the Political Party Law. Reforming the electoral system into a mixed model that combines proportional and district-based elements. These solutions aim to enhance parliamentary balance, representation quality, and democratic resilience.

**Conclusion.** Inequality in Indonesia's legislative representation stems not only from the open proportional system but also from power-dominated coalitions that weaken opposition. Strengthening the opposition, reforming the electoral system into a mixed model, and improving internal party democracy—drawing lessons from South Korea—are key to restoring public trust and representative democracy.

### KEYWORDS

Open proportional system, Dominance of major parties, Parliamentary opposition, Electoral system reform, Representative democracy

### INTRODUCTION

The After the reform era, the Indonesian political system underwent a significant transformation through the implementation of a multi-party system and open proportional elections. This system was designed with the hope of strengthening the principles of democracy,

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especially in ensuring broader and people in the political process. By being given the freedom more direct representation of the to directly elect legislative candidates, the people have the space to determine for themselves the candidates who are considered most capable of representing their interests and aspirations. Normatively, this approach is expected to strengthen the bond between people's representatives and their constituents and encourage higher accountability in the parliament.

However, in practice, the implementation of this system has not fully run as idealized. Over time, various serious problems have emerged that have given rise to inequality in political representation, especially in the Indonesian House of Representatives. One of the main problems is the dominance of large parties that have much stronger logistical capacity and political infrastructure than small parties. This inequality has a direct impact on the distribution of legislative seats, where small parties find it increasingly difficult to get space to appear and speak out. Based on data from the 2019 Election results, for example, only nine parties made it to Senayan out of a total of 16 participants, and the majority of seats were controlled by old parties such as PDI Perjuangan (19.33%), Golkar (12.31%), and Gerindra (12.57%) (Siregar, M. 2019). This confirms that large parties have an unequal advantage in this open system.

Not only that, this system also encourages internal competition between candidates in one party, which in reality often leads to transactional practices, such as money politics and expensive campaign costs. Legislative candidates are willing to spend hundreds of millions to billions of rupiah just to compete for votes, especially because this system places the most votes as the main factor in determining electability (Pratiwi, DA 2018). As a result, many legislative candidates feel financially pressured and are encouraged to prioritize capital, not the quality of representation.

This representation problem is exacerbated by the internal character of political parties in Indonesia which tend to be elitist and closed. The full authority held by party elites over the political recruitment process often makes the people's voice not a primary consideration. In many cases, legislative candidates who have been directly elected by the people can be dismissed for internal reasons that are not transparent. This situation shows a contradiction in our democracy, where the people have the right to directly elect their representatives, but internal party decisions can ignore the results of that choice.

This condition illustrates that although the open proportional system is intended to encourage participation and strengthen the relationship between the people and their representatives, the reality on the ground shows that this system actually strengthens the position of large parties and narrows the space for fair political participation. Therefore, there needs to be a comprehensive evaluation and critical study of the current election system. Reforms that are oriented towards fair representation, internal party transparency, and a balance of political

opportunities must be pushed immediately. That way, our legislative system will not only be more open and inclusive, but will also be able to truly represent the diversity of voices of the Indonesian people fairly and democratically

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study uses a qualitative approach combining critical analysis and comparative research methods. The research critically examines the shortcomings of Indonesia's post-reform open-list proportional electoral system, especially its impact on political representation, legislative oversight, and party dynamics (Chang, 2025).

The analysis draws on secondary data sources, including academic literature, legal documents, news reports, and policy papers related to Indonesia's electoral system and political party structures. Additionally, the study incorporates a comparative case study of South Korea, which has implemented electoral and institutional reforms to address similar issues. This comparison helps formulate reform-oriented recommendations that are both theoretically grounded and contextually adaptable to Indonesia (Yin, 2018).

By integrating structural critique with practical reform models, this method provides a foundation for proposing systemic changes—specifically, strengthening opposition parties and transitioning to a mixed electoral system—to improve democratic representation and institutional accountability in Indonesia (Ufen, 2008).

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

### Fat Coalition Domination in Parliament

The practice of democracy in the Indonesian parliament is currently experiencing a worrying period due to the phenomenon of the dominance of fat coalitions initiated by political parties. A fat coalition can be interpreted as where almost all major parties join together in a government that aims to maintain their status quo, including parties that were originally in opposition during the election and the previous government. The impact caused by this phenomenon is the creation of a parliament that tends to have one voice politically, and loses its critical role as a representative and supervisor of executive power. In the second term of President Joko Widodo and the first term of President Prabowo Subianto, this phenomenon was very prominent, where parties such as Golkar, Nasdem, PPP, PAN, PKS, PSI, PKB, Gerindra also joined the government coalition, leaving the opposition space that was felt to be narrow and less beneficial to these parties.

The direct impact of this condition is the weakening of the legislative oversight function. The control function that should be carried out by parliament is paralyzed, because almost all parties are in power. The DPR's control function over executive power becomes very weak and

symbolic, because the majority of legislators are under pressure to secure the government's agenda, so that the DPR is present without significant criticism of the executive (Efriza. 2024). The transactional political culture that encourages parties to prioritize access to power over the principle of opposition exacerbates the problem. Political habits without opposition or weak opposition increase the potential for uncontrolled executive power, because parliament loses its function as a counterweight (Maharani & Benny. 2024).

A number of controversial legislative events appear to have occurred as a consequence of the dominance of the big coalition. One of the clearest examples is the ratification of the Revised TNI Law in 2025 and the ratification of the Job Creation Law (Omnibus Law) in 2020. Despite protests and opposition from civil society, NGOs, and academics, the bill was still passed quickly. There were no voices of rejection from the opposition, and the people who demonstrated did not have significant power to influence the decisions taken by parliament. Without a strong deliberation and discussion mechanism, this legislative process is clear evidence that the big coalition has eliminated the space for substantive debate in parliament. Another case is the revision of the Corruption Eradication Commission Law (UU KPK) in 2019. This amendment is considered to weaken the independence of the KPK by making KPK employees ASN and forming a Supervisory Board that controls the wiretapping and prosecution process. The process took place quickly with the support of the majority of large factions, without criticism, suggestions, and meaningful input from within parliament. Again, parties outside the coalition, which are small in number, are unable to stem the flow of legislation that is full of power interests. This is in line with the definition of oligarchic politics, namely a system in which important political decision-making is controlled by a group of ruling elites of political parties. (Koho. 2021). Another example occurred in the ratification of the Draft Criminal Code (RUU KUHP) in 2022. Although various groups criticized the articles that were considered to limit civil liberties, such as the prohibition on insulting the president and the article on private morality, almost all factions in the DPR still approved the bill. This strengthens the picture that parliament has shifted from a deliberative arena to an affirmative institution for executive policy. The design of checks and balances has actually been institutionalized in the 1945 Constitution of the Republic of Indonesia, but with an unbalanced position and function, this has caused the legislature to be weak in controlling the executive, especially in the process of forming and testing laws (Lailam. 2021).

The impact of this fat coalition not only harms the control function, but also damages the quality of political representation. Small parties that are not part of the coalition often do not get proportional space to convey the aspirations of their constituents. Public aspirations that differ from the government's wishes have almost no institutional channels. The opposition in a democracy is not a complement, but the main pillar that maintains the accountability of power. When the

opposition weakens, the public loses the channel of control over power (Noor. 2016). In this context, the dominance of the fat coalition cannot be considered a form of healthy stability. Instead, it becomes a form of pseudo-stability, calm on the surface, but fragile in the foundation. Democracy loses its critical power when the opposition is sidelined and parliament becomes a confirmation space for executive policies. Democracy is not just an electoral procedure, but a system that requires differences, resistance, and substantial debate. Therefore, it is urgent to strengthen opposition institutions and reform election designs to avoid the dominance of the fat coalition to restore parliament as a true arena for people's representation.

### **Comparative Study with South Korea**

To get out of the problem of power dominance and inequality of representation, we need to look beyond national borders and learn from the experiences of other countries. Comparative studies with other countries can provide valuable insights and positive references regarding how political mechanisms and electoral systems can be arranged to minimize these inequalities. This comparative study can be taken from South Korea, a country that has reformed its legislative election system in late 2019 to increase political representation. However, the real implementation of this electoral system only began to be seen in the April 2020 Legislative Election. In the process of reforming the South Korean electoral system, there were long political negotiations, full of debate, and compromise for more than a year before this new election law was passed (Kim, 2021).

The new electoral system allocates 30 of the 47 PR (Proportional Representation) seats based on a mechanism that reduces the seats obtained by parties from electoral districts and divides the rest, so that the proportion of seats more reflects the votes of small parties (Saxer, 2025). This has a positive impact because it can reduce party dominance in parliament. However, this system allows the formation of satellite parties, namely parties that only compete in PR seats to exploit the proportional system. This has happened in practice in South Korea, where in the 2020 election, the main parties and their satellite parties controlled the majority of seats in the DPR. This shows that changing the system alone is not enough without being accompanied by strengthening regulations and strict political oversight.

For Indonesia, the development of the application of the principles of this mixed system can be a strategic step in reducing inequality of representation, expanding space for small parties, and reducing internal competition that is detrimental to the quality of people's representatives. However, this reform must be accompanied by strengthening political institutions, setting a more inclusive threshold, and an effective public oversight mechanism so that the goals of substantive democracy can be achieved. To understand more easily the comparison of parliaments in Indonesia and South Korea can be understood from the following table:

Aspect	Indonesia	South Korea
Election System	Open Proportional (voters choose legislative candidates, the results are proportional without correction)	<i>Mixed Member Proportional</i> (election results are corrected nationally to make the number of seats more reflective of the proportion of votes, particularly protecting the votes of small parties)
Seat Distribution	All seats are based on the most votes (most candidates from the party)	253 district seats (FPTP) + 47 proportional (compensatory) seats
Parliamentary Threshold	4% of the national vote	Not as high as Indonesia and there is a compensation system (a compensation system where there is an allocation of additional seats for small parties so that the results of their seat acquisition are more proportional to the number of votes they receive nationally, especially when the district system (FPTP) is detrimental to them)
Representation of Small Parties	Weak, many votes not converted into seats	Strengthened through proportional allocation
System Manipulation (loophole)	There are no satellite parties, but there is manipulation of the legislative candidate list	There are satellite parties, utilized by large parties for PR (Proportional Representation) seats.

Electoral Reform	There have been no major reforms in the proportional system	Already in place with the aim of reducing disparities in representation & regional election patterns
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Table 1.1

Comparison of Parliaments in Indonesia and South Korea

Although South Korea’s electoral system is not perfect, the reforms that have been carried out provide important lessons on the importance of courage and innovation in electoral system design to address inequality of representation. Indonesia can learn from this experience by conducting in-depth studies and contextual adaptations to make its legislative system more representative and democratic. This approach must be accompanied by strong political and regulatory commitments to avoid manipulation practices and maintain democratic legitimacy.

Solution Design

Strengthening the Function of the Opposition in the Indonesian Parliament

The existence of an opposition party is a must as a vital part of a democratic country, especially in Indonesia. Unfortunately, in recent years, the role of the opposition party in parliament seems to have disappeared due to the large number of parties that have joined the incumbent (Liyanto, 2022). In fact, according to research conducted by (Rishan, 2020), the percentage of opposition from the SBY-Jokowi era was only around 13-20%. This certainly triggers an imbalance in people's representation in parliament which is caused by the fat coalition of government parties. Due to this problem, the author and his colleagues recommend a solution design in the form of strengthening the function of the opposition in parliament. Strengthening the function of the opposition is expected to be a solution to balance the imbalance of representation in our parliament that has occurred since the SBY era.

Based on research conducted by (Liyanto, 2022), there are at least three ways that can be done to strengthen the function of the opposition in our parliament. Here is the explanation:

Strategy	Explanation
Increasing the positive stigma regarding the Opposition Party	Positive framing from mass media.
Improving the internal conditions of political parties	Improvement of the party cadre system, improvement of party human resources, and improvement of internal party regulations.



Revision of the Political Party Law (Law No. 2 of 2011)	Specific revisions regarding the role and function of the Opposition Party, especially in the legislative process. Regulation of the percentage of the Opposition Party in parliament.
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Table 1.2

### **Explanation regarding how to strengthen the function of the opposition in parliament**

#### **Indonesia according to (Liyanto, 2022)**

#### **Increasing the positive stigma regarding the Opposition Party**

Since the Old & New Order era, the opposition has been framed as something negative by both regimes. Maybe even until now, this negative view is still in the minds of the public. Therefore, the role of the mass media is needed to positively frame the opposition parties in parliament today. Public support for the opposition will have a positive impact on the performance of the opposition.

#### **Improving the internal conditions of political parties**

Strengthening the internal conditions of a Political Party is needed so that a party can focus on developing principles, democratic practices, and the maturation of party ideology. Improvement of the cadre system, for example, a good cadre system will produce quality cadres who will support the party's performance in the future. With cadres who have quality human resources, it is hoped that if they sit in parliament they will prioritize the interests of the people, the state, and the party over personal interests. Improvement of internal party regulations can also strengthen internal party democracy and can eliminate the influence of oligarchy within the party.

#### **Revision of the Political Party Law (Law No. 2 of 2011)**

There needs to be a revision to the Political Party Law (Law No. 2 of 2011), especially regarding the role and function of the opposition specifically. Especially in the legislative process in the DPR. In addition, there needs to be a revision regarding the minimum percentage of opposition in parliament. This is necessary so that the opposition does not have an imbalance with the incumbent, especially during the process of making legal products. This revision must be carried out immediately so that the opposition has the power to influence decision-making in parliament.

#### **Mixed Electoral System Design**

The election system implemented in Indonesia itself from 1955 to 2019 was carried out using a proportional election system. Indonesia uses a proportional election system because it is considered the most appropriate for the country of Indonesia, although in its implementation it still causes many problems. The problems that occur in the proportional election system implemented in



Indonesia can be seen from the very low quality of legislative members and the elected legislative members do not have adequate capabilities. In addition, the existence of a proportional-multiparty system implemented in Indonesia has resulted in the formation of minority parties which makes it very difficult for seats in parliament to produce a large force to provide support for the president's policies (Syaiful, 2018).

With the existence of a problem of the proportional election system in Indonesia, the solution that can be done to reform the existing system in Indonesia is to change the election system that was originally proportional to a mixed election system. The mixed election system is considered very profitable because this system still adopts part of the way the proportional system works which has the function of filling the weaknesses of the majoritarian system by trying to fill the political representation space in a parliament. The mixed election system itself connects the proportional system and the district system so that it has more advantages compared to other election systems. The mixed election system that can be applied in a country can be seen through several things such as electoral districts that are divided into electoral districts based on the district system and electoral districts based on the proportional system. Then the second is that the votes produced are votes that are addressed to individual candidates for the district system and party lists. And the third is that there are two candidates who compete in the district system which is carried out directly and candidates who are on the closed list in the proportional election system.

The mixed election system is very effective for the sustainability and reform of parliament in Indonesia because it will force each party to create a strategy to win an election in two chambers at once. With this, political parties participating in the election will not be careless in choosing candidates in an electoral district. This is because the mixed system eliminates the nomination of people in the electoral district that the candidate does not live in or is not known to the public. The mixed election system itself can also be used to overthrow the oligarchy that has been embedded in the bodies of political parties in Indonesia. This is because the change in the system will change the way the party works in the process of finding candidates who will advance in a general election (Nurhasim, 2016).

Both election systems, namely the proportional and district election systems, have their own advantages and disadvantages. However, when these advantages and disadvantages are combined, there will be many benefits that will be obtained. The combination of the advantages and disadvantages of the proportional election system and the district election system produces:

- 1) High degree of proportionality Encourage minority parties;
- 2) Encourage consensus-based policy making.
- 3) Turn-outs are high.
- 4) Maintain one district one representative.

- 5) Parties can appoint women, experts, or minorities as legislative candidates.
- 6) Flexible.
- 7) Few wasted votes.
- 8) Can retain qualified candidates even if they lose in district elections, through the PR list system.
- 9) Gives the party the opportunity to still have representatives even if they fail to win district seats in that electoral district.
- 10) A moderate number of political parties (including their coalition choices) creates stability and encourages the birth of policies (Yanuarti, 2020).

Based on the explanation of the mixed election system, the election system in Indonesia should transform from a proportional election system to a mixed election system (proportional and district). This must be done to prevent or even destroy the incompetence of people working in parliament. With the existence of a mixed election system, the selection of candidate candidates will be more selective and not reckless compared to using a proportional election system that is full of oligarchy.

## CONCLUSION

From the various discussions that have been explained, it can be concluded that the inequality of political party representation in the legislative system in Indonesia is not only caused by the design of the open proportional election system, but is also exacerbated by political practices dominated by fat coalitions. When almost all major parties choose to be in the circle of power, the role of the opposition as a counterweight becomes weak and almost unheard of. This condition makes the DPR not carry out its function optimally in overseeing executive policies, so that the legislative process often takes place quickly without significant criticism, as seen in the case of the ratification of the Job Creation Law and the revision of the KPK Law. This reflects a decline in the representative function of parliament which should be the main forum for public aspirations. Therefore, encouraging political system reform is very important. These efforts can be started by strengthening the presence of the opposition in the DPR, reviewing the election system towards a fairer direction through a mixed model, and encouraging internal party improvements to be more democratic. South Korea can be an important lesson, where the reform of the election system accompanied by the active role of the community and independent supervisory institutions succeeded in reducing the dominance of large parties. If Indonesia can do the same thing consistently, then public trust in parliament can be improved, and a more open and representative democratic system can truly be realized

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