

# **Ethical Democracy: An Analysis Of The Ethicality Of Post-Reform Election Organizers From The Perspective Of Historical Institutionalism**

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## **ABSTRACT**

The phenomenon of ethical violations by election organizers in post-reform Indonesia has intensified, extending to regional and city-level election organizers. From 2012 to 2024, the Election Organizer Honorary Council (DKPP RI) recorded 5,670 complaints of ethical violations against the General Elections Commission (KPU) and the Elections Supervisory Agency (Bawaslu). This high rate of ethical violations has created a decline in modern substantive democracy. Ethical violations by election organizers post-reform are not simply individual deviations, but rather the result of structural vulnerabilities created by institutional design, power configurations, and electoral political incentives. A case study from 2025 revealed that the DKPP RI imposed a strict sanction of dismissal on a member of the Bogor City KPU after being found guilty of using his authority for transactional gain, seeking the favor of one of the Bogor mayoral candidates. This study explains that ethical violations by election organizers are the result of a structural configuration between institutional design, electoral political incentives, and oligarchic pressure. The method used is descriptive analysis, a research method that focuses on current and ongoing solutions by collecting and compiling data, which is then analyzed to find answers. This research seeks to contribute to strengthening the electoral system and democracy in Indonesia by using a historical institutional approach to interpreting ethical violations of election officials in Indonesia. Therefore, this research seeks to examine the recruitment process of election officials in Indonesia after the reform era and analyze the phenomenon of structural and recurrent ethical violations.

**Keywords : Election Organizers; Ethical Violations; Reform.**

## INTRODUCTION

Modern democratic systems require that elections be held not merely as a ritual for national or regional leadership succession. More than that, elections are expected to truly actualize and manifest popular sovereignty. To uphold this popular sovereignty, election administration must be based on the principles of free and fair elections. The principles of free and fair elections have been the guiding principle for modern democratic countries in organizing elections for the past several decades.(Burhanudin Muhtadi, 2019)(Jamila Michner & Mallory, 2026).

Electoral integrity is largely determined by the professionalism and neutrality of the election management body (Electoral Management Body/EMB).(Goldberg, 2024)(Grishin & Leenders, n.d.) When election organizers violate ethical principles, public trust in election results can be eroded and lead to the delegitimization of the elected government. Democracy is an institutional method for reaching political decisions through competition for the people's votes. For this competition to be fair (free and fair elections), election organizers must be independent, impartial, and possess integrity.(Birch & Loeber, 2023) (Kelley, n.d.)(Garnett et al., 2022).

The concept of electoral integrity in the Election Integrity Project draws on international standards and global norms governing the proper conduct of elections. These standards have been endorsed in a series of authoritative conventions, treaties, protocols, and guidelines by international institutions, particularly by decisions of the United Nations (UN) General Assembly, by regional bodies such as the OSCE, the Organization of American States, and the African Union, and by UN member states. (Norris et al., 2014)(Esteban Ortiz-Ospina, Bastian Herre, Lucas Rodés-Guirao, 2024)The organizers of general elections or regional head elections are the responsibility of the state which is given the task of implementing the stages of general elections and supervising general elections in accordance with general election and regional election laws. (Daerah, 2017)(Ramadhan et al., 2022) However, in practice, the recruitment process involving the House of Representatives (which is dominated by political parties) opens up the potential for reciprocal loyalty. As a result, agents potentially have dual loyalties to the public and to the political actors involved in the selection process. In a political system with strong clientelism, personal relationships prevail over impersonal norms. The closeness of organizers to political parties can become part of a patronage network, where positions are exchanged for political loyalty.(Palmer, 2024)(Laura Clancy, Moira Fagan, 2024).

Election violation cases released by the Election Supervisory Body (Bawaslu) and the Election Organizer Honorary Council (DKPP) show significant violations of the code of ethics by election organizers post-reform. According to Bawaslu RI data reports throughout 2024, there were 2,687 election violations, with 311 cases of violations of the code of ethics by election organizers spread across regencies and cities across Indonesia. The most common violations involved abuse of authority and unprofessional conduct in carrying out their duties as election organizers. Meanwhile, this phenomenon demonstrates that ethical issues are not merely individual issues, but also related to institutional design, political culture, and the pressures of power. (Ni'matul Huda, 2017)(Umum et al., n.d.)

From a historical institutional perspective, ethical violations by election organizers can be understood as a form of path dependency, (Paul Pierson, 2004) namely the reproduction of institutional practices formed from past experiences and persisting, and power evolving historically. This concept is based on the assumption that institutions do not develop neutrally or entirely rationally, but rather are shaped by historical processes that create certain patterns and are then repeatedly reproduced in political life. In the context of ethical violations in elections, path dependence indicates that ethical violations in elections have a structural dimension, not simply an individual moral dimension. Election violations operate within an institutional environment shaped by the history of specific political practices. The current environment is filled with a culture of patronage and elite intervention, so individual organizers are compelled to adapt to existing patterns. Under these conditions, institutions not only fail to prevent violations but also reproduce these behaviors through the social and bureaucratic mechanisms of elections. Furthermore, within the historical institutional approach, the distribution of power positions electoral institutions as arenas for contestation of political interests, informal networks, and entrenched political practices. In addition, the perception that elections are fair strengthens other forms of democratic legitimacy, generating trust in institutions and leaders. (Grishin & Leenders, n.d.) (Yusri, 2022). Third, the current institutional recruitment process does not guarantee that there will be no ethical violations by election organizers, the ethical sanctions decided do not make or create improvements in the ethical morality of election organizers, but rather ethical violations continue to occur and become a recurring phenomenon. (Umum et al., n.d.) (Programme et al., 2016)

Research findings from Zulfikar (2023) (Sebuah & Teori, n.d.) in the journal *Electoral Governance*, Volume 5, No. 1, 2023. This study found that election organizers are capable of remaining faithful to the code of ethics but also capable of violating it. This depends on whether election organizers, as sovereign agents, are able to resist the partisan bias that plays out within our electoral structure. Another earlier study, by Valere Gaspard (2025) in the journal *Politics and Governance* 2025, Volume 13, highlights three main findings: first, although electoral integrity influences politicians' levels of democratic satisfaction, it is more important for politicians who lose elections. Second, the independence of the election management body does not influence the level of satisfaction of democratic politicians. Third, although the capacity of the election management body influences the level of satisfaction of democratic politicians, the strength of this influence varies for politicians on the right and left ideological wings.

The gaps and contributions of previous research lie in the analysis of the historical institutional approach to the concepts of path dependency and power distribution. Ethical violations by election organizers cannot be addressed solely through individual action, but rather by breaking the chain of historical reproduction that has maintained a culture of tolerance within the institution. Research seeks to establish a new paradigm that violations of the code of ethics by election organizers are the result of a structural configuration between institutional design, electoral political incentives, and oligarchic pressures. Therefore, these violations are no longer understood as individual deviations, but rather as the product of a democratic procedural system vulnerable to political control. In the context of the violations of the code of ethics by election organizers mentioned above, as a structural and systemic phenomenon and potentially leading to ethical violations, these violations are often structural and repetitive. In the context of violations of the code of ethics by election organizers above, as a structural and systemic phenomenon and having the potential for ethical violations, they are often structural and recurring. (Beramendi et al., 2024) (Rekker, 2024). Ultimately, protecting and promoting election integrity is the responsibility of all national stakeholders. (Role & Organizations, n.d.)

### **Method**

The research used in this study is a descriptive method with a qualitative approach. (Miles dan Huberman, 1992). (Sugiono, 2021). This study employs a descriptive-qualitative method grounded in a historical-institutional perspective and is built upon accurate facts regarding the characteristics of and relationships between the phenomena under investigation. Data collection and interpretation involved a data reduction process—specifically, selecting relevant information from various sources such as rulings by the Election Organizer Ethics Council (DKPP), oversight reports, official records, election laws and regulations, election-related journals, literature on ethical violations in democracies, and relevant legal documents. Additionally, a comparative study approach was used to gather data by examining and identifying elements relevant to the issues under study. Categorization was then carried out by analyzing the interconnections between ethical violations spanning the post-reform era to the 2025 general election, rather than viewing these violations merely as isolated incidents. Subsequently, interpretation was conducted by linking this empirical data to the conceptual framework of the historical-institutional approach. The data obtained through the reduction process were analyzed using a theoretical framework, resulting in a narrative presentation of the data. This presentation facilitated the drawing of conclusions and the determination of courses of action. Finally, the conclusions aim to provide answers to the research questions. Informants providing insights for this study included: leaders of the West Java Provincial General Elections Commission (KPU); leaders of the DKPP of the Republic of Indonesia; members of the House of Representatives (DPR RI) commission overseeing elections; public policy and development economics research institutes; election observers; academics; and the general public.

### **Results And Discussion**

#### **Ethical Violations by Election Organizers Post-Reform: As a structural and recurring phenomenon.**

Violations of the code of ethics by election organizers are an old phenomenon that continues to recur from year to year even though it is normatively stated firmly in election law number 7 of 2017 concerning general elections which stipulates 11 principles for election organizers. (Daerah, 2017). (BAWASLU, n.d.) In the context of regulations, they warn election organizers to act and adhere to principles in accordance with election law. Another fact on the ground is that quite a number of election organizers have been caught up in ethical violations year after year. According to the recapitulation report of the handling of cases of code of ethics violations by the Election Organizer Honorary Council (DKPP), from 2012 to 2020, there was a significant increase in ethical violations. In another case, the Election Supervisory Agency (Bawaslu) of the Republic of Indonesia reported 311 code of ethics violations throughout 2024.

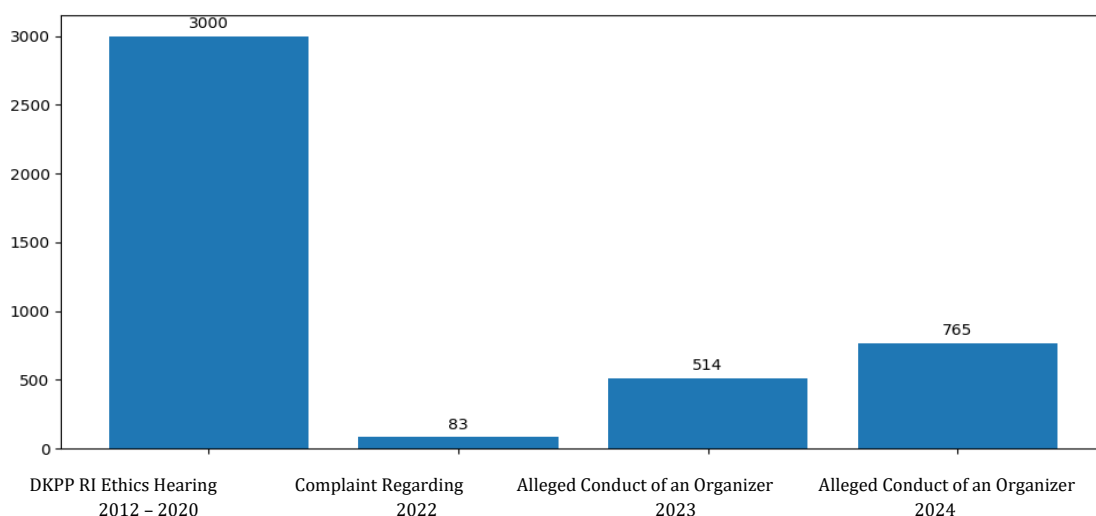
Data: Recapitulation of the handling of cases involving code of ethics violations by the Ethics Council of the Election Organizers of the DKPP from 2012 to 2020

No.	Year	Person
1	2012	72
2	2013	665
3	2014	1281
4	2015	465
5	2016	610
6	2017	493
7	2018	1332
8	2019	1504
9	2020	140

Source: DKPP RI

Throughout 2012-2024, the Indonesian DKPP handled code of ethics customers with decisions, permanent dismissal 10% (631), temporary dismissal 1% (65), written warning 33% (2,168), dismissal from the position of chairman 1% (53), decree 4% (267), rehabilitation 51% (3,378). Thus, the large number of cases handled by the Indonesian DKPP shows that ethical issues in the implementation of elections are issues that continue to arise from year to year from general elections and regional elections and become crucial problems in substantive democracy. In the code of ethics for election organizers, it is regulated in detail in the DKPP regulations. (Kehormatan et al., 2017).

Data on Code of Ethics Violations by Election Administrators in Indonesia (2012–2024)



Source: processed by the author from the DKPP RI report

Data on Code of Ethics Violations by Election Organizers in Indonesia from 2012 to 2024 shows that ethical violations in election administration are an ongoing issue and are likely to increase in the context of electoral democracy in Indonesia. Data show that throughout the 2012–2020 period, the Elections Commission (DKPP) held more than 3,000 hearings for code of ethics violations. This number indicates the high intensity of ethical cases involving election organizers, both at the central and regional levels. Furthermore, in 2022, there were still 83 complaints filed, even though the regional elections (Pilkada) had concluded. This situation indicates that ethical problems not only arise during electoral momentum but are also inherent in the ongoing dynamics of election organizer institutions.

From a historical institutional perspective, this recurring phenomenon of ethical violations can be explained through the concept of path dependence. This concept explains that an institution tends to maintain pre-established patterns and practices due to the reproduction of its structure, organizational culture, and power relations over time. Thus, ethical violations by election organizers are not solely caused by individual behavior, but also the result of institutional patterns that are consistently inherited within the political system and electoral bureaucracy. The practice of political patronage, weak recruitment mechanisms, and close ties between political elites and election organizers create an institutional environment that allows ethical violations to continue to occur repeatedly.

Professional misconduct is the most prevalent type of ethical code violation and occurs almost annually in the administration of elections in Indonesia. These violations generally relate to negligence in carrying out duties, administrative carelessness, unprofessional decision-making, and failure to uphold the principles of independence, accountability, and transparency throughout the election process. In addition to professional misconduct, cases of abuse of authority are also a significant form of serious violation in the Elections Supervisory Board (DKPP) decisions. These violations generally involve the use of office and authority for specific interests, whether political, personal, or group interests. In many cases, abuse of authority occurs through hierarchical power relations, where election officials exploit their positions and authority over subordinates to influence decisions or actions. This situation demonstrates the unequal power relations within the institutional structure of election organizers.

From a historical institutional perspective, the prevalence of professional misconduct and abuse of authority indicates that election organizers are still influenced by a long-standing patrimonial bureaucratic culture and political patronage relationships. The institutional structure, established from the outset, tends to reproduce patron-client relationships, so that power within the institution is often exercised not based on principles of professionalism and meritocracy, but rather on political loyalty and personal closeness. As a result, ethical violations continue to recur because institutions fail to make structural changes capable of breaking the chain of path dependence in the governance of elections in Indonesia.

In the 2024 Election, the Elections Supervisory Board (DKPP) declared a member of the Indonesian General Elections Commission (KPU) to have violated the code of ethics by accepting Gibran Rakabuming Raka's candidacy as a vice presidential candidate. This case reflects the issue of independence and professionalism of election organizers in the face of political pressure. Furthermore, the Chairman of the Indonesian General Elections Commission (KPU), Hasyim Asy'ari, was found guilty of ethical violations by failing to meet the 30% quota for female candidates for the DPR/DPRD (Regional People's Representative Council) and was deemed to have failed to uphold professionalism and the public interest. In the same year, the DKPP also imposed a sanction of permanent dismissal on Hasyim Asy'ari for ethical violations related to an immoral case that violated KPU Regulation Number 4 of 2023 and DKPP Regulation Number 2 of

2017. This case demonstrates that the personal integrity of election organizers has direct implications for institutional legitimacy and public trust in electoral democracy. From a historical institutional perspective, this phenomenon demonstrates a path dependence pattern, namely the tendency of institutions to reproduce entrenched power relations within the political system. The repeated ethical violations by election organizers demonstrate that weaknesses in the integrity of election institutions do not emerge spontaneously, but rather are formed through historical processes and recurring patterns of power relations.

At the Regency/City and Provincial Election Commission (KPU) levels, ethical violations in 2025 demonstrated the dominance of abuse of office for partisan gain. The Elections Supervisory Board (DKPP)(DKPP RI, 2025) imposed permanent dismissal sanctions on Firman Iman Daeli (West Nias Regency KPU), Muhammad Habibi (Bogor City KPU), and Adi Wetipo (Papua Pegunungan Province KPU) for violating the principles of independence and professionalism of election organizers. Muhammad Habibi, for example, was found to have empowered ad hoc election organizers to favor a particular candidate pair in the 2024 Bogor City Pilkada.

From a historical institutional perspective, this case demonstrates the reproduction of political patronage within election institutions through path dependence mechanisms. Entrenched power relations make election organizers vulnerable to political intervention and abuse of authority. Thus, ethical violations are not only individual in nature, but also reflect structural weaknesses in the institutional design and political culture that shape the relationship between political actors and election organizers.

The mechanism of fraud involving members of the House of Representatives (DPR) in Indonesia's electoral political system can create patron-client relationships that ultimately strengthen political control over election organizers. This phenomenon occurs because the political recruitment process is not entirely based on meritocracy and competence, but is instead heavily influenced by party power structures, political capital, and the patronage networks that develop within the electoral democracy system. From a patron-client perspective, political relationships are built through the exchange of resources and loyalty between political elites and actors seeking access to power.(Drochon, 2020)

The DPR's party-dependent recruitment system reinforces these patronage relationships. Legislative candidates require the support of elite parties to obtain nomination recommendations, strategic ballot numbers, and logistical support for their campaigns. In this context, the candidacy process tends to be oligarchic because political decisions are made by specific party elites. Consequently, elected DPR members are politically dependent on patrons who facilitate their electoral careers. This phenomenon of party oligarchy and elite dominance was explained by Robert Michels through the concept of the iron law of oligarchy, namely the tendency for political organizations to be controlled by a small elite. (Drochon, 2020)In the Indonesian context, this condition is also explained by Winters regarding oligarchy in post-Reformasi democracy.

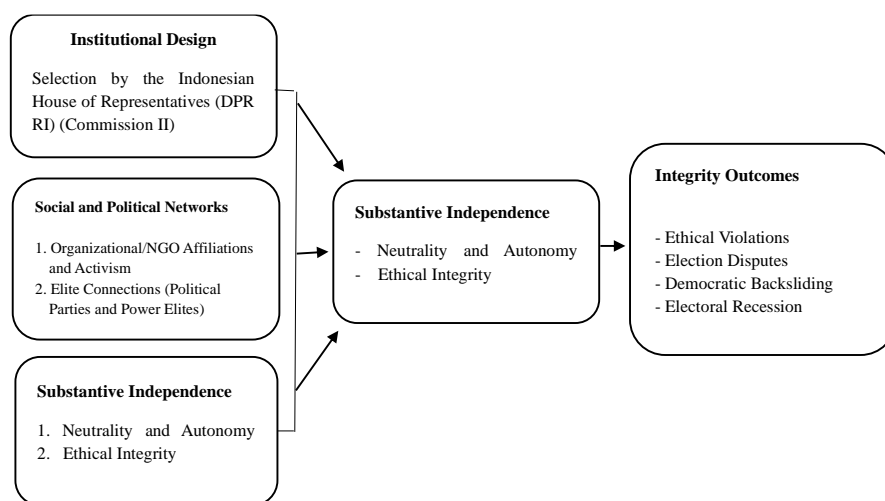
Once members of the House of Representatives (DPR) are embedded within the state power structure, these patronage relationships are transformed into instruments of control over other institutions, including election organizers. This occurs because the DPR has strategic authority in formulating election laws, overseeing election institution budgets, and participating in the political process that determines the direction of election institutions. From an institutional historical perspective, the distribution of power within state institutions allows political elites to maintain their influence through formal institutional mechanisms. These violations often do not occur in isolation, but involve multiple actors and are influenced by the competitive political

environment. That the government should be elected by citizens on a regular basis is a fundamental principle of democracy. (Siachiwena & Saunders, 2021). We can see democratic countries in the world starting to modify their general election systems by using e-voting systems, whether as an alternative to election fraud or to prevent the practice of manipulation and ethical violations. (IDEA, 2011)(Zafar & Pilkjaer, 2007)(Balaga Nur Muhammad & Ristina Yudhanti, 2025).

### Restructuring Election Organizing Institutions and Election Organizer Recruitment Relations

This research analysis shows that violations of the election organizers' code of ethics are not simply individual deviations, but rather the result of an institutional configuration established since the early stages of reform. The recurring pattern of violations demonstrates path dependency operating through self-reinforcing mechanisms.(Palmer, 2024) From the perspective of Historical Institutionalism, this condition cannot be resolved through a moralistic approach or incremental reform, but rather requires structural intervention.(Orfeo Fioretos, 2017).

**Figure: Relationship between Election Institutional Design and Election Implementation**



Source: Processed by the author

The relationship between political parties, stakeholders, and election organizers presents a paradox. Normatively, they must act and adhere to the values of independence as stipulated in Law No. 7 of 2021 concerning general elections. Furthermore, the process from the recruitment of organizers to the implementation of elections cannot be separated from the influence of political parties and those in power. Meanwhile, the internal neutrality of election organizers is paradoxical, as communication relationships contain vested interests and are part of the configuration of power.(Hukum et al., 2021). Moreover, the prevalence of election fraud can perpetuate a cycle of distrust and cynicism among voters, further weakening the performance of political incumbents. (Malpractice & Incumbents, n.d.).

The institutional design of elections, formed through historical political compromise, creates path dependence. This can be seen in the recruitment process of election organizers at the highest levels, namely the Indonesian General Elections Commission (KPU) and the Indonesian Elections Supervisory Agency (Bawaslu), where commissioner candidates are appointed by Commission II of the Indonesian House of Representatives (DPR RI). In this context, the position of organizers is highly vulnerable to power practices. In other contests, with limited state budgets supporting the continuity of elections at the provincial, district, and city levels, the KPU and Bawaslu propose to their respective regional heads to support the continuity of election organizers under the pretext of synergy and election success. In this case, it becomes a crucial problem point and degrades democracy with the relationship between organizers that creates an asymmetrical relationship.

The problem is that improvements to the electoral system and recruitment of election organizers have only added layers of regulations and institutions. This can be seen from the transition from ad hoc Regency/City Election Supervisory Agency (Bawaslu) to permanent institutions in each region. Mitigating ethical violations by election organizers without changing the basic structure of political power relations and the requirements for political interests actually reinforces the pathology of the election bureaucracy, producing the same problems in different forms. The paradigm shift in the electoral system has at least begun to shift toward a historical structural approach and a historical institutional approach. This can be seen in the historical institutionalism approach, which views institutional change as not occurring neutrally but often triggered by conflicting interests between dominant actors and other actors in the system. This conflict can be manifested through veto mechanisms, the formation of alliances or coalitions, and various strategic actions that function to both restrain and accelerate change. Consequently, layering can shift the balance of power in favor of change agents by removing veto players who might oppose or bypass the change process. In this perspective, it shows that reform of election organizers is not only by layering institutions or layering regulations that ensnare election organizers or not focusing on incremental reform, but requires structural intervention in the form of path-breaking institutional reform.

Emphasis is needed on creating negative incentive returns. The more frequent violations, the more severe the structural consequences. This can be seen in the case of Hasyim Asyari, the former chairman of the Indonesian General Elections Commission (KPU), where the Elections Supervisory Agency (DKPP) firmly ruled several times against Hasyim Asyari for ethical violations. However, the DKPP was deemed slow in creating negative incentive returns with severe sanctions at the outset. Therefore, the DKPP's leniency or dynamic sanctions often provide loopholes for election organizers to commit repeated ethical violations. Moreover, not all violations of the integrity of the electoral process are equally damaging to political legitimacy and the quality of democracy. Widespread election fraud, the arrest or assassination of opposition candidates, and military coups signal the end of democracy in ways different from vote-buying and electoral district manipulation. (Tan, 2023).(Gaspard, 2025) A rapidly growing literature on 'color revolutions' in Central and Eastern Europe documents how in numerous cases, worsening electoral irregularities led groups of citizens to take to the streets in protest. (Toby S James, 2019).

This research focuses on efforts to build a historical paradigm of institutionalism by restructuring institutions or those involved in the election organizer recruitment process. An alternative approach is to separate actors or institutions closely tied to political interests from the election organizer recruitment process. The resulting culture of recruitment has the potential to foster political patronage and cliques. Reforming the separation of institutions or actors with

vested interests would reduce patronage bias, prevent power interference, and separate selectors from actors with vested interests.

### CONCLUSION

Historical institutionalism can explain the reproduction of ethical violations in the Indonesian electoral system by understanding that institutional behavior is not formed suddenly, but rather is the result of historical processes, patterns of power relations, and continuously evolving institutional structures. From this perspective, ethical violations by election organizers are seen not simply as individual actions, but as a consequence of institutional patterns that have been historically reproduced within the Indonesian political system and electoral bureaucracy.

One of the key concepts in historical institutionalism is path dependence. This concept explains that institutions tend to maintain pre-established patterns, norms, and practices due to the mechanisms of structural reproduction and organizational culture. In the context of Indonesian elections, ethical violations such as lack of neutrality, abuse of authority, and conflicts of interest continue to recur because the institutional system of election organizers remains influenced by the legacy of patrimonial bureaucracy and political patronage relations. Consequently, despite continuous improvement of regulations and oversight mechanisms, violations persist because the underlying power structure has not undergone fundamental change. Thus, ethical violations in the Indonesian electoral system can be understood as a product of the historical continuity of power relations, bureaucratic culture, and patronage structures that continue to be reproduced within the institutions of electoral democracy.

One important policy implication is reforming the recruitment process for election organizers. Selection mechanisms that still involve the dominance of political actors, particularly the House of Representatives (DPR) and political party elites, have the potential to create patron-client relationships that compromise the independence of election organizers. Therefore, the recruitment process needs to be directed towards a system based more on meritocracy, transparency, and professionalism. The establishment of an independent selection committee involving academics, civil society, and professional institutions is crucial to minimize political interference in the selection process. Furthermore, standards of ethical track record, technocratic competence, and political independence need to be strengthened as key indicators in the recruitment of election organizers.

From a historical institutionalist perspective, strengthening the position of the General Elections Commission (KPU) and the Elections Supervisory Agency (Bawaslu) as the fourth and fifth branches of government is crucial to stop the proliferation of ethical violations influenced by political patronage relations and power interference. Institutional dependence on political actors often weakens the independence of election organizers, opening up space for abuse of authority, conflicts of interest, and lack of neutrality. Therefore, strengthening the institutional status of the KPU and Bawaslu must be accompanied by reforms to their institutional design that can guarantee greater political, administrative, and financial autonomy.

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