

# **Electoral Competition and Candidate Selection: Revealed the Informal Connections in the 2024 Indonesian Legislative Election**

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## **Abstract**

Despite the importance of politicians and their selection processes, empirical studies have paid little attention to what drives party selectors to choose some political candidates over others. Electorates vote secretly during the election. However, political parties only provide them with a list from which they can choose. Therefore, the study explores the dynamics of candidate selection in Indonesia's 2024 legislative election, focusing on the informal connections between political party elites and candidates, specifically examining clientelism. While electoral competition is often viewed through formal processes, informal patron-client relationships can significantly influence who is selected for candidacy.

The research investigates how party selectors balance criteria such as partisanship, popularity, competence, and immutability (inherent socio-demographic traits like ethnicity and family background). Through in-depth interviews with party selectors and candidates, the preliminary results reveal that selectors often prioritize short-term electoral gains over long-term policy effectiveness. Popularity, frequently driven by a candidate's connection to party elites, tends to be favored over competence.

The study emphasizes how previous activism background of candidates, play a significant role in shaping enhancing partisanship. The study also introduces immutability as a distinct criterion in candidate selection, showing how socio-demographic traits, often tied to clientelism, shape the decision-making process. Selectors compromise between the formal and informal criteria, highlighting how informal networks, such as family or ethnic ties, play a critical role in the nomination process. These findings contribute to the understanding of the candidate selection process in transitional democracies, where informal dynamics like clientelism are deeply embedded.

The research underscores the need for further exploration into how these informal mechanisms affect governance and electoral integrity in Indonesia. Future studies could benefit from using ethnographic methods to delve deeper into the role of clientelism and its impact on political processes in similar contexts.

Keywords: clientelism; elite interviews; intraparty competition; Indonesia; political parties

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## 1. Introduction

Political parties play a vital role in educating, recruiting, and selecting candidates who become elites to rule the country afterward (Buchler 2011; Hazan and Rahat 2010; Moraski and Moraski 2022). Political parties must make crucial decisions regarding who to nominate on electoral lists (Vandeleene et al. 2016; Vandeleene and van Haute 2021). Nevertheless, political parties often describe the process of candidate recruitment and selection as an internal process, rather than being transparent to the public. On the other hand, the public secretly voted during elections. However, when voters cast their ballots, they were limited to choosing from a menu defined by political parties (Rahat 2009; Tuttnauer and Rahat 2023; Vandeleene 2024). There are no other options for citizens if they wish to vote for somebody else.

The importance of candidate selection has become increasingly apparent, yet previous research has mainly concentrated on the process of candidate selection within a political party. The formal processes of candidate selection have been studied extensively. There are at least four key dimensions that have been discussed when examining candidate selection: First, the inclusivity of the party body's selection process, including the range of party elites, delegates, members, or voters involved. The next aspect is the degree of decentralization, whether centralized or at the constituency level. The political party method of decision making is also crucial, whether through the acclamation, nomination, or voting process. The final dimension is related to the openness of the selection criteria, which determine the eligibility for applying candidates (Cerruto et al. 2016; Field and Siavelis 2008; Hazan and Rahat 2010b; Rahat et al. 2008; Siavelis 2009; Siavelis & Morgenstern 2008; Vandeleene et al. 2013 2016). Hence, less is known about the factors that drive party selectors' decisions to choose certain candidates.

Existing research suggests that party selectors consider a range of factors beyond formal criteria when choosing candidates. Studies have found that delegates often favor candidates with similar sociodemographic characteristics (Berz and Jankowski 2022; Rehmet 2022) and that gender plays a significant role in shaping candidate selection (Ashe 2019; Aspinall et al. 2021; Escobar-Lemmon and Taylor-Robinson 2008; Hennings and Urbatsch 2016; Hinojosa 2012; Meserve et al. 2018; Prihatini 2019; Woon and Kanthak 2014). Building on Vandeleene's (2024) work, this study examines how party selectors balance three key criteria when choosing candidates: Partisanship: Alignment with the party's ideology and values; Popularity: Electoral appeal and likelihood of attracting votes; and Competence: Skills, experience, and qualifications relevant to the political office. The findings showed that selectors employ a balancing act, trading off these criteria to achieve strategic objectives and maximizing electoral outcomes (Vandeleene 2024). However, her research does not go into the specific circumstances that lead selectors to prioritize one criterion over another.

This study aims to address this gap by investigating the factors that influence the relative importance of partisanship, popularity, competence, and **immutability** in the candidate-selection process. By understanding these dynamics, we can gain deeper insights into the motivations and decision making of party selectors. This study proposes informal connection, specifically clientelism as a dyadic relationship that influences the candidate-selection process by adapting Vandeleene's framework. Building on research highlighting clientelism's impact during elections (Berenschot 2015, 2018; Shchukin and Arbatli 2022), it hypothetically argues that selectors favor candidates demonstrating both strong partisanship (Allen 2015; Dettman et al. 2017; Tomsa and Ufen 2012; Vandeleene 2024) and advantageous "immutable" characteristics. While Vandeleene

categorizes individual traits as part of popularity, this study introduces “immutability” as a distinct criterion encompassing race, ethnicity, religion, age, education, family background, and gender. This aligns with research suggesting that these factors influence electoral success (Dettman et al. 2017; Dettman and Pepinsky 2023; Hassell and Visalvanich 2024; Prihatini 2019; Scott and Medeiros 2020). In addition, the backgrounds of the candidates' activist organizations, which may prioritize certain issues that resonate with their partisan base. Specifically, connections to political elites or influential networks can significantly impact a candidate's ability to secure a favorable position on the nomination list (Budi et al. 2021; Buisseret et al. 2022; Dettman et al. 2017; Ecevit and Kocaplınar 2018; Hellmann 2014; Meserve et al. 2020; Prihatini 2019).

The primary research question of this study is why do political party selectors choose specific candidates over others? This question is further explored through the following sub-questions: What candidate characteristics do party selectors prioritize? What factors influence their decisions beyond the formal criteria? What underlying reasons or factors drive political parties to select particular candidates? And to what extent does clientelism affect or influence the candidate selection process in the 2024 Indonesian legislative election?

Through interviews with selectors and candidates in the 2024 Indonesian parliamentary election, this study investigated the prioritization of four selection criteria: partisanship, electability, competence, and immutability. We aim to illustrate whether there is the significance of acceptability and electability, particularly its connection to informal networks, namely, clientelism. This preference is especially evident for candidates in practical roles, namely, those who are most likely to become members of the party's parliamentary faction.

This study is organized into four main sections. The first section provides a concise review of the literature on clientelism and candidate selection, followed by an in-depth discussion of the theoretical framework tested in the research. Next, the article outlines the data and research methodology used in the study. The empirical findings, based on insights from key respondents involved in the candidate selection process, are then presented. Finally, the study concludes with a summary of key points and reflections.

## **2. Literature Review**

### **2.1. Clientelism: Definition and Characteristics**

The influence of informal connections on legislative candidate selection is a critical area of study within political science, particularly in transitional democracies where clientelism plays a pervasive role. This literature review explores how informal networks, often manifesting as clientelism, shape candidate selection processes in various political contexts. It does so by addressing two fundamental arguments: first, it outlines the definition and characteristics of informal connections, particularly clientelism, and second, it examines how these informal dynamics influence the candidacy process, from recruitment to nomination.

Clientelism is traditionally defined as a transactional relationship wherein material goods or services are exchanged for political support (Berenschot & Aspinall, 2020; Gans-Morse et al., 2014; Hicken, 2011). At its core, clientelism creates a mutual dependency between political elites, candidates, and voters, often characterized by patron-client relationships. This practice is widespread in political environments with weak party institutions, where candidates rely on informal institutions or personal networks and immediate material benefits to secure electoral support (Crutzen & Sahuguet, 2023; Helmke & Levitsky, 2004; Hicken, 2011; van Dijk, 2023). As

a result, in these systems, long-term policy considerations are often sidelined in favor of short-term electoral gains facilitated by the exchange of favors.

Recent scholarship has highlighted how clientelism has evolved, particularly in transitional democracies. Earlier models of clientelism emphasized its hierarchical nature, where relationships between patrons and clients were deeply unequal, often mirroring socio-economic hierarchies (Berenschot, 2015, 2018). However, modern forms of clientelism are more reciprocal, with both parties—patron and client—exchanging benefits in a more balanced manner (Berenschot & Aspinall, 2020; Higashijima & Washida, 2023). This shift is evident in the growing research on the long-term clientelism, networks establishment, and mutually beneficial relationships that develop between political actors and their networks

These developments in clientelism research have broadened the scope of inquiry to include "political clientelism," where the focus is on electoral strategies such as vote-buying, pork-barrel politics, and the use of state resources for political advantage (Berenschot & Aspinall, 2020; Frey, 2019; Golden & Nazrullaeva, 2023; Higashijima & Washida, 2023). Relational clientelism, on the other hand, highlights the long-term nature of these exchanges, with candidates relying on established networks to secure political capital, often over multiple electoral cycles (Berenschot & Aspinall, 2020; Nichter, 2012; Weiss, 2020; Yıldırım & Kitschelt, 2020). In countries like Indonesia, Thailand, and the Philippines, clientelism persists as a dominant feature of electoral competition, shaping the ways in which candidates are selected and supported by party elites (Aspinall & Hicken, 2020; Berenschot, 2015; Berenschot & Aspinall, 2020).

## **2.2. Clientelism and the Candidate Selection Process**

Clientelism plays a critical role in shaping informal institutions that influence the candidate selection process. While formal institutions, such as electoral laws and party regulations, establish the procedural framework for candidate selection, informal institutions like clientelistic networks often dictate how these formal rules are applied (Bjarnegård, 2013; van Dijk, 2023). In environments where formal processes are inelastic or weakly enforced, informal connections become the primary means through which candidates secure party nominations.

This reliance on informal networks creates a cycle of clientelism, where the same political elites and candidates maintain control over the selection process. Political parties, particularly in transitional democracies, often prefer candidates with established clientelistic ties, as these networks ensure loyalty, access to resources, and local electoral support (Funk et al., 2017; Lewis & Hossain, 2022; Piscopo, 2016). As a result, formal selection criteria such as competence, qualifications, and party loyalty are often secondary considerations to a candidate's ability to leverage personal connections (Vandeleene, 2024).

Existing literature has identified various forms of clientelism that affect the candidate selection process. These include "electoral clientelism," where short-term, immediate exchanges such as vote-buying are prevalent, and "relational clientelism," which involves more sustained, long-term relationships between candidates and their networks (Berenschot & Aspinall, 2020; Shchukin & Arbatli, 2022). Electoral clientelism typically occurs in the lead-up to elections, with candidates offering material incentives to secure votes (Hicken, 2011). These exchanges are often

facilitated through temporary, personal networks and have immediate but short-lived effects (Berenschot & Aspinall, 2020).

In contrast, relational clientelism is embedded within more robust organizational structures, such as political parties or centralized government institutions. This form of clientelism relies on continuous relationships, often involving the distribution of long-term benefits such as employment, public contracts, or political favors (Higashijima & Washida, 2023). As such, it has more durable effects on the political landscape, reinforcing the dominance of political elites and entrenching clientelistic practices in the candidate selection process (Golden & Nazrullaeva, 2023).

The forms of clientelism that influence candidate selection vary across political contexts. In many African countries, such as Cameroon, Nigeria, and Kenya, high political nomination costs exclude poorer candidates from the electoral process, reinforcing clientelism and the dominance of wealthy elites (Dyzenhaus, 2021; Morse, 2022). In these environments, candidates must rely on informal networks to secure party nominations, often entering into clientelistic relationships with political patrons who can provide the necessary resources (Sulaiman, 2014).

In Latin America, political clientelism has been shown to create gender disparities in political representation. Women often lack access to the same clientelistic networks as their male counterparts, making it more difficult for them to secure nominations or electoral success (Funk et al., 2017, 2021; Maddens et al., 2023). However, gender quotas have helped mitigate these disparities, although informal practices still favor male candidates with elite connections (Chiva, 2014; Buckley, 2020).

In Southeast Asia, clientelism is equally pervasive, with countries like Indonesia, Thailand, Malaysia, and the Philippines relying heavily on personal connections and local patronage networks to secure electoral support. In these countries, clientelism often overshadows formal qualifications or party loyalty, with candidates leveraging their personal networks to gain party support and voter appeal (Muhtadi, 2018; Tomsa & Ufen, 2012). For instance, in Indonesia's open-list proportional representation system, candidates must secure not only voter support but also the backing of party elites, who often rely on clientelistic networks to determine nomination lists (Aspinall & Hicken, 2020).

### **2.3. Informal Institutions and the Candidate Selection Process**

The role of informal institutions, such as clientelism, in shaping candidate selection is a critical area of inquiry for understanding electoral outcomes in transitional democracies. While formal criteria such as qualifications, party affiliation, and adherence to electoral regulations are often emphasized, informal criteria—namely clientelism—play an equally significant role in determining which candidates are selected (Berenschot & Aspinall, 2020; Bjarnegård & Kenny, 2015; Gans-Morse et al., 2014; Piscopo, 2016; van Dijk, 2023)(Gans-Morse et al., 2014; Berenschot, 2018).

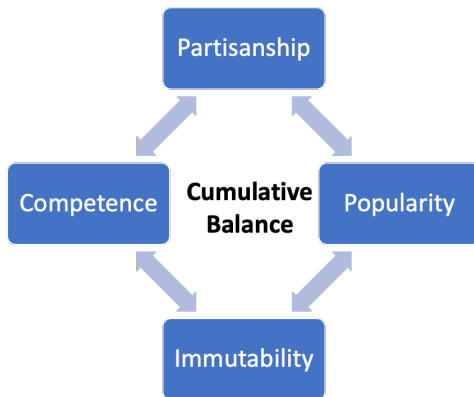
The process of candidate selection typically involves multiple stages, including recruitment, certification, selection, nomination, and election (Rahat, 2007; Siavelis & Morgenstern, 2008; Verge & Wiesehomeier, 2019). During recruitment, political parties decide who to consider for nomination, often favoring candidates with established clientelistic networks (Evrenk et al., 2013; Schumacher & Giger, 2017; van Dijk, 2023). Certification involves determining which candidates

meet formal legal requirements, but this stage is often influenced by informal networks, as candidates with clientelistic ties are more likely to navigate the process successfully.

The nomination stage is where clientelism plays its most significant role. Party elites, particularly in centralized political systems, control nominations, often choosing candidates based on their ability to leverage clientelistic networks rather than their formal qualifications or political competence. As a result, the candidate selection process is often opaque, with party elites favoring candidates who can ensure electoral success through informal connections (Buisseret et al., 2022; Dettman et al., 2017; Ecevit & Kocapinar, 2018; Meserve et al., 2020).

Building on Vandeleene’s (2024) framework of candidate selection, which emphasizes the trade-offs between partisanship, popularity, and competence, this study introduces immutability as a fourth criterion. Partisanship is critical, especially on how previous activism background of candidates, play a significant role in shaping enhancing the party unity result in the opportunity for being nominated (Hennings & Urbatsch, 2016; Venkatesh, 2020). In addition, this study introduces the importance of immutability refers to inherent socio-demographic traits such as race, ethnicity, religion, age, and family background, which often play a crucial role in shaping candidate selection in clientelistic environments. These traits act as social markers that influence both voter perception and party selectors’ decisions (Aspinall et al., 2021; Dettman et al., 2017).

Clientelism intersects with immutability in significant ways. Candidates from influential ethnic or religious groups often have access to established clientelistic networks, which enhance their chances of being selected by party elites (Budi et al., 2021a; Cirone et al., 2021; Dettman & Pepinsky, 2023). These relationships create a feedback loop where candidates with strong clientelistic ties and favorable immutable traits are more likely to secure nominations and electoral success.



This literature review has demonstrated the significant role those informal institutions, particularly clientelism, play in shaping candidate selection processes. While formal criteria such as partisanship, popularity, and competence remain important, the influence of informal networks, especially in transitional democracies, cannot be overstated (Berenschot & Aspinall, 2020; Shchukin & Arbatli, 2022). Candidates with both strong partisanship and advantageous immutable characteristics are more likely to rise in the ranks due to their ability to secure both the party’s internal loyalty and external electoral support (Cirone et al., 2021; Dettman et al., 2017; Dettman & Pepinsky, 2023; Meserve et al., 2020). By expanding existing frameworks to include immutability and emphasizing the role of clientelistic networks, this study offers a more

comprehensive understanding of how candidates are selected and how informal dynamics influence electoral outcomes. In doing so, this research contributes to a growing body of literature that recognizes the importance of informal institutions in political processes, particularly in contexts where clientelism remains a dominant force in electoral competition.

### **3. Research Design**

#### **3.1. Data**

Data collection techniques in this study were carried out in two ways, which are in-depth interviews, and desk study data collection. The interviews were conducted in February and June 2024, both face-to-face and online, depending on the respondent's availability and inquiry. Further, the secondary data was also collected by tracing documents related to the process and results of the 2024 legislative election in Indonesia.

Based on the provisions contained in Law No. 7 of 2017 is the adoption of an open-list proportional system with the implementation of the Saint-Lague method, to convert votes into parliamentary seat allocation (Budi et al., 2021b; Pierskalla & Sacks, 2020). The effect of the open proportional system makes personal factors of legislative candidates (legislative candidate candidates) become more important factors that voters pay attention to when voting in elections compared to party factors. Apart from that, the open proportional system also causes competition within parties to increase sharply because legislative candidates compete to get seats in an electoral district (Dettman et al., 2017). The adoption of the open-list proportional system with the Saint-Lague method has not only changed the election management system but also significantly influenced the behavior of political parties and candidates.

The first step of study relies on insights from interviews with party selectors and candidates that run for the Indonesian 2024 legislative election. To open the interview, I asked the deliberately broad question “what is a good candidate based on your perspective?” followed by more specific questions on selection criteria and on differences following the safeness of the list position. To wrap-up, I stimulated party selectors’ answers by presenting them about what to extent the legal formal that regulate the selection process was implemented and how they balance the selection criteria. The questions that interviewed were not specifically mentioned about each selection criteria mentioned on the framework. The respondents explain about the process of candidate selection, and to ensure comparability with the selection criteria, the interviewers will make a confirmation before jump into a conclusion. This procedure ensured comparability between respondents (so that even respondents who did not raise a point were stimulated to discuss it) and helped broadening the focus from personal to more abstract issues (Vanderveene, 2024).

The second phase involved the collection of secondary data. This data was sourced from the official website of the General Election Commission and prominent online media channels in Indonesia that reported about the 2024 general election. To mitigate potential reporting bias, data were cross-referenced with multiple online sources to account for possible conflicts of interest or partiality, whether arising from the media companies or the journalist’s subjectivity covering the news.

### 3.2. Method

The study uses a descriptive qualitative method, which specifically describes the Indonesian Legislative Election in 2024. This research employs qualitative methodology through in-depth interviews to uncover the mechanisms behind politicians' preferences (Vanderveene, 2023). As mentioned, the in-depth interviews were conducted in February and June 2024, both face-to-face and online, depending on the respondents' availability. The interviewees were carefully selected, including members of political party list committees who play a pivotal role in candidate selection, and candidates themselves, who are at the forefront of the political process. This study interviewed eight selectors, six of whom were candidates or legislative members. One selector did not participate in the election to minimize conflict of interest. Additionally, eight candidates running in the 2024 legislative election were also interviewed.

## 4. Preliminary Finding and Discussion

This study try to investigate how political party selectors in Indonesia prioritize selection criteria—partisanship, popularity, personal immutability, and political competence—during the candidate selection process for the 2024 legislative election. Through interviews three key aspects were explored: (1) the prioritization of selection criteria, (2) the balancing of nomination-list strategies, and (3) strategies indicative of clientelistic behavior in candidate selection.

The way selectors prioritize among selection criteria: During interviews, when selectors were asked the question of 'what characteristics of a good candidate,' all party selectors agreed that four selection criteria are an ideal cumulative balance. However, they emphasized the difficulty of recruiting ideal candidates who meet all desired criteria. Almost all selectors mentioned the importance of combining four selection criteria, which can be described as a threshold requirement when someone does not display all qualities.

Most selectors mentioned the importance of popularity and partisanship, which are irreplaceable in describing the minimum individual aspects of a candidate, especially in an open-list proportional system. A popular candidate must first be well-known before engaging with and, ultimately, convincing the voter to elect them. A selector from Gol (Golkar Party) specifically also spoke of the necessity of adding immutability to strengthen the magnitude of electability.

*“If you have a reputation in your area, and at the same time you have built a network with many parties’ elite, then it would be a basic rule either most likely will be supported by voters or to be selected by the party.” (P1)*

*“To enter the first stage of candidacy, the party has to know the candidate's political history, what the candidate has done to the party, and whether the candidate has the fighting spirit and is eager to gain vote share before they can continue to another step. However, it is difficult if the candidate is unpopular since the current election system is open-list representative. In addition, if they have such resources and informal networks, then it will definitely add to their winning probability.” (G1)*

Regarding partisanship and immutability, selectors also acknowledge this criteria variation as another threshold requirement when selecting a candidate. The partisanship will ensure the candidate follows the party’s policy while the party also finds a balanced person with reputable

and suitable individual traits, regardless of who has the financial resources. This circumstance is important since the similarity's characteristics between candidates and the electorates in electoral districts also become a consideration. A selector from PSI highlighted the vital role of the immutability factor of the candidates during the selection process and its relationship with the probability of being elected.

*"We have experienced that a popular, yet elected candidate will give nothing to the party without their loyalty. As a result, they can easily move to another party. This means that loyalty to the party line always comes first. Another strategy is always to put the potential candidate in the electoral district that meets their socioeconomic and demographic characteristics. We call it "crystallization, and it will boost their probability to win the election." (I1)*

*"It's not all about winning, but also how to manage the elected candidate afterward. It is necessary to find a balanced person who has proven their deeds to the party and can represent their voters." (G2).*

Regarding the degree of comparison among competence and other selection criteria (partisanship, popularity, and immutability) shows interesting result. When considering the trade-off between competence and other selection criteria, party selectors tend not to overlook the importance of a skillful candidate as the first option. As mentioned, a popular or strong personal characteristics candidate may seem appealing, complexity of politics necessitates a candidate who is has balance score both competent and popular. Similar decisions will also happen if the option is between a competent or partisanship person and a competent or personally immutable.

*"It's more important to have someone who's willing to fight, even if they're not as skilled. Competence can be gained through involving in party life or getting more training after running in an election." (G1)*

*"It is evident that an elected candidate will represent their party by being assigned to a specific field in parliament. Therefore, having expertise in a particular area is essential. However, expertise alone is not enough to secure an election. Other factors such as popularity or a strong track record are also necessary for a candidate to be elected." (G2).*

Nevertheless, selectors have different ways to compromise depending on the situation. Since not everyone suits the ideal profile of legislative members, the selector considers some candidates only for their campaigning assets. For instance, the selector uses candidates' popularity to increase the party's vote share and applies stricter conditions for candidates with eligible positions to admit balance situations. This means that candidates in the safest positions are expected to score high on both popularity and competence. At the same time, those who fill out the list do not always have to be politically competent or personally immutable. For the sake of the party's goal in the future, the existence of team players is needed. The party will need not only skillful candidates but also loyal candidates.

*"It is necessary to find a candidate with an equal score, both electorally legitimate and able to adapt quickly and correctly to their legislative job." Even when they're not elected, the party will continue to work with them or give rewards for their efforts during the election." (P1)*

*"The party should seek out individuals with activism experience and/or have political capability even with limited resources. These candidates should be viewed as a long-term investment, with the party providing support. The candidate list should not solely be populated by*

*those with high electoral scores but also include candidates who will become policy thinkers.” (G2). ” I believe this approach will enrich the party's diversity and ensure a broader range of perspectives.” (I2).*

Therefore, according to the interview, the study highlights that compromises between goals do not work the same for all list positions. First, selectors might lower their usual standards in candidates for less prominent positions: being loyal forms a prerequisite for safe positions and is much less relevant for list fillers. Second, selectors consider political competence as a second-rank criterion for unsafe positions but not for candidates likely to enter parliament. Third, popularity is taken at the aggregated level: an electorally successful list combines candidates with several personal characteristics and socio-demographic profiles.

Selectors from various parties, including Golkar, emphasized that partisanship ensures loyalty to the party's policies and stability in the party's ranks. Partisanship, coupled with immutability (inherent traits such as socio-demographic factors), strengthens the perceived likelihood of a candidate's electoral success. This is a notion supported by previous studies that emphasizing the importance of a candidate's organizational background, experience, as well as their political identity with personalized voting mechanism (Aspinall et al., 2021; Dettman & Pepinsky, 2023; Hassell & Visalvanich, 2024; Mahsun et al., 2021).

Another key finding was the emphasis on loyalty over other qualities. Party selectors shared that while personal attributes such as popularity and political competence are important, loyalty to the party's ideological agenda ensures the long-term stability and cohesion of party activities post-election. This is consistent with clientelistic systems, where personal loyalty and informal relationships are often leveraged to secure electoral success (Berenschot & Aspinall, 2020).

Regarding the balancing nomination-list policy during candidacy process, the general finding are follows. All the potential candidates had to pass the selection process, which was both administrative (aligned with the general election regulation) and intra-party selection, which varies among parties. All candidates agreed that the most critical part is the nomination stage, especially regarding a list number position. Female candidates feel that they were supported during the selection process. Regarding the representation matters, in this process, most female candidates admitted that they have family relations in the political party. However, they had to pass the pre-selection process, including joining training for the party cadres, before starting the candidacy process. Most of them were elected.

For instance, selectors apply stricter selection criteria for candidates placed in safe positions, while allowing for more flexibility in filling less competitive spots. Candidates with high levels of competence and popularity tend to be placed in positions where their election is more certain, while candidates with lower levels of competence but stronger loyalty may be placed in riskier or filler positions. This approach is consistent with findings from the CSIS Report, which shows a trend towards prioritizing well-known figures for safe seats, often to secure both immediate electoral success and long-term party loyalty (Fernandes, 2024).

Regarding informal networks that occurred during candidacy process, most candidates admitted that such connections help them while doing the process. Most candidates consider that informal connections, such as family members and relatives' relations at a party or representing the interest of a social group (activism), will enhance their magnitude to be nominated. However,

the nomination stage is another issue. Some candidates think that a list position number is given regardless of the selection member's sharing information and discussing the nomination's result with the candidate before officially announcing it. All candidates feel satisfied with their rank number on the nomination list since they rely on the party selector committee's final decision. They believe that rank number is not the main factor in being elected; the most prominent factor is becoming more familiar with the electorates, engaging them, and then convincing them to vote on the ballot.

## **5. Preliminary Conclusion**

This study provides a comprehensive analysis of how political party selectors in Indonesia prioritize selection criteria—partisanship, popularity, immutability, and political competence—during the candidate selection process for the 2024 legislative election. The findings highlight the complex balancing policy that selectors must undertake, often prioritizing a candidate's popularity and partisanship to maximize electoral success. These two factors emerge as critical in open-list proportional systems where visibility and alignment with party values are dominant. While competence is valued, it tends to be secondary to popularity, especially in competitive electoral contexts. Additionally, immutability, or the fixed socio-demographic characteristics of candidates, plays a significant role, especially when tied to clientelistic networks.

One of the key findings is that while selectors value loyalty and competence, popularity and immutability often serve as thresholds for candidacy. Loyalty, particularly through long-standing ties to the party or clientelistic relationships, helps ensure that a candidate remains committed to the party's long-term agenda. This reflects a broader clientelistic pattern in candidate selection, where personal relationships and informal networks can outweigh formal selection criteria such as competence.

This study significantly contributes to the existing body of knowledge by highlighting the importance of partisanship and introducing the concept of immutability as a distinct selection criterion. While previous studies have treated socio-demographic traits as part of a candidate's popularity, this study demonstrates that immutability operates independently, particularly in contexts where clientelism plays a dominant role. This addition to the literature provides a more nuanced understanding of how informal practices, such as clientelism, influence the selection of candidates beyond formal party criteria.

In terms of practical implications, the findings suggest that parties need to rethink how they balance short-term electoral gains with long-term party cohesion and governance effectiveness. While prioritizing popular candidates may lead to immediate electoral success, it can undermine the development of a meritocratic political system, especially if loyalty and informal networks are prioritized over competence. This dynamic could potentially affect governance quality, as candidates with limited skills may struggle to perform effectively in legislative roles.

For future research, it is essential to explore the long-term effects of these selection strategies on governance and political stability. Additionally, examining how gender, ethnicity, and other immutable characteristics influence candidate selection across different regions of Indonesia could offer further insights into the interaction between formal and informal selection criteria. A longitudinal study tracking the career trajectories of selected candidates could also provide valuable information on how initial selection criteria affect their long-term performance and effectiveness as legislators. Furthermore, featuring methods such as ethnography, which allows for

a more personal and in-depth analysis over extended periods, would enrich the research and its findings. Finally, future studies could examine the role of clientelism in other political settings to better understand its broader implications for democratic practices in transitional and developing democracies. Overall, this study has clarified the complexities of candidate selection in Indonesia, revealing the multidimensional decision-making processes of selectors and highlighting the balance between electoral success, party interest (including its elites) and political competence. It also deepens the understanding of how informal networks, including clientelistic ties, shape the country's political future.

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