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Revitalizing the Deliberative Function of Political Parties within Indonesia's Substantive Democracy

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Abstract: In the last two decades, discussions surrounding deliberative democracy have significantly increased the rational dialogue, equitable participation, and the cultivation of reflective public opinion in the realm of political decision-making. Nonetheless, the current academic literature has largely ignored the role of political parties as institutional actors that bridge the gap between the government and society. This article addresses this oversight by critically examining the substantive role of political parties within the context of deliberative democracy, along with proposing avenues for institutional reform aimed at fostering a more inclusive democratic process. Through a comprehensive analytical method of literature review and cross-country comparisons, this study investigates the deliberative capacities of political parties in the United States, Europe (with particular emphasis on Germany and Scandinavia), and Indonesia. The findings indicate that European political parties have been relatively successful in integrating public discourse forums into their internal frameworks, whereas in the United States, the process of deliberation is frequently obstructed by ideological polarization and economic hegemony. On the other hand, Indonesia encountered patronage politics, weak institutionalization, and a transactional political culture as their main challenges. The study concludes that the absence of a robust internal deliberative infrastructure substantially contributes to the crisis of party representation. This research emphasises on reintegrating the role of political parties as facilitators of public discourse, rather than relegating them to the status of mere electoral machines. Strategic recommendations include the implementation of internal structural reforms, the development of idea-driven party cadres, and the fostering of stronger partnerships with civil society to enhance substantive democracy.

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1 Introduction

The academic discourse surrounding political parties is intricately connected to various theories of democracy, particularly in analyzing the relationship between institutional representation and the practical application of democratic principles. In recent decades, democratic studies have undergone a substantial shift from an electoral-procedural model to a deliberative approach that prioritizes rational dialogue, equitable participation, and the cultivation of reflective public opinion within political processes (Dryzek, 2015; Saward, 2017). Despite this evolution, the institutional role of political parties is frequently marginalized in the literature on deliberative democracy, notwithstanding their historically pivotal function as intermediaries between the state and society (Urbinati, 2019). Numerous studies portray political parties as instruments of elite domination, patronage, and electoral calculation, thereby undermining the deliberative potential of party structures (Aspinall & Mietzner, 2019; Rachmayani & Warganegara, 2023).

The oversight of a deliberative role for parties in contemporary democratic theory engenders a conceptual paradox that constrains their transformative capacity. In classical political thought, as articulated by figures such as Edmund Burke and John Stuart Mill, parties were regarded as rational arenas for political education and the exchange of ideas within the public sphere (Manin, 2017). From this vantage point, parties function not merely as electoral instruments but also as conduits for articulating collective aspirations through argumentative processes. Cohen (1989) emphasizes the necessity of public funding to ensure equitable competition among ideas, while Christiano (2018) identifies parties as the primary venue for filtering and articulating well-informed policies. However, contemporary deliberative democracy literature often maintains a stark dichotomy between vote aggregation and deliberative functions, ultimately constricting the potential for institutionalizing deliberative values within party organizations.

Globally, the practice of deliberative functions reveals significant variations. In the United States, although forums such as primary elections and widely broadcast candidate debates exist, the quality of public deliberation is frequently compromised by extreme ideological polarization and the influence of financial resources in campaign systems (Levitsky & Ziblatt, 2018; Mounk, 2018). Fukuyama (2022) suggests that emotion-driven politics has supplanted rational discourse, thereby undermining the legitimacy of representative institutions. Conversely, European countries have demonstrated greater success in institutionalizing deliberative forums. For instance, Germany's Parteitag (party congress) serves as an open arena for policy debates among members, while in Scandinavia, public forums such as *folkemøder* facilitate direct dialogue among parties, citizens, and civil society. Gülzau and Lamping (2022) illustrate that these mechanisms not only fortify party connections with their electoral bases but also enhance political legitimacy through equitable deliberation.

Previous research corroborates this perspective. Ramis-Moyano (2025), in the *Journal of Deliberative Democracy*, asserts that European parties adopting internal deliberative mechanisms can augment their representative capacity while concurrently improving public legitimacy. Similarly, Bächtiger, Dryzek, Mansbridge, and Warren (2018) in *The Oxford Handbook of Deliberative Democracy* underscore the importance of inclusive institutional design to ensure that party deliberation serves as a substantive arena for idea exchange rather than a mere formality. These experiences in advanced democracies suggest that the deliberative function is not solely a normative ideal but also a practicable institutional mechanism with favorable implications for the quality of democracy.

In contrast, Indonesia's post-Reformasi political dynamics have not cultivated a deliberative role for parties. The process of selected candidates for legislative and executive positions are predominantly governed by personal loyalty and logistical supports rather than the caliber of ideas or policy track records. Consequently, parties often operate as electoral instruments characterized

by patronage and money politics. This situation has entrapped Indonesian democracy in a routine of electoral practices devoid of reflective substance and has precipitated a decline in public trust in party institutions. The absence of internal deliberative forums, insufficient idea-based cadre development, and escalating identity-based polarization have further suppressed reflective participation in the national political arena.

The central research problem addressed in this study is the inadequate institutionalization of deliberative functions within the structures of Indonesia's political parties. Despite significant advancements in the scholarship on deliberative democracy, a gap remains in research concerning how parties in developing democracies can integrate deliberative practices into their internal mechanisms. Previous studies have predominantly focused on nonpartisan deliberative forums, such as citizen assemblies or community dialogues, while political parties—as formal institutions within representative democracy—have seldom been examined from a deliberative perspective. This study aims to bridge that gap by providing both conceptual and comparative analyses on revitalizing the deliberative function of political parties in Indonesia.

This research is significant because the quality of Indonesia's substantive democracy is contingent upon the ability of political parties to evolve from mere electoral machines into deliberative arenas. The topic is particularly critical as it pertains to long-term political legitimacy, public trust in democratic institutions, and the trajectory of democratic consolidation in Indonesia. The experiences of advanced democracies offer valuable insights into how deliberative forums can enhance political representation, while Indonesia's current conditions underscore the pressing need for institutional reform. Therefore, this study contributes academically by expanding the theoretical framework of deliberative democracy and practically by offering policy recommendations for improving party governance in Indonesia.

2 Research Methods

This study employs a qualitative descriptive-analytical methodology to examine the deliberative role of political parties in Indonesia. Data were gathered through a systematic literature review encompassing peer-reviewed articles, academic books, research reports, and official party documents. The primary databases utilized for the searches were Scopus and Web of Science, with Google Scholar serving as an ancillary resource. The objective was to compile between 60 and 80 references, including a minimum of 40 international journal articles (Q1–Q2, 2015–2025), 10 to 15 academic books, and 10 to 15 policy documents, all selected through a staged screening process informed by rigorous inclusion and exclusion criteria.

For data analysis, qualitative content analysis, as articulated by Elo and Kyngäs (2008), was employed to identify salient issues and argumentative patterns. This analysis was subsequently complemented by reflective thematic analysis, as outlined by Braun and Clarke (2019), to delineate the loci of deliberation, mechanisms, inclusivity, and the impacts on policy and legitimacy. A comparative analysis was conducted across the contexts of the United States, Germany, Scandinavia, and Indonesia's post-Reformasi period. The validity of the findings was bolstered through theoretical triangulation, drawing from the works of Dryzek, Urbinati, and Christiano, as well as cross-national source triangulation. This methodological framework facilitates a focused yet critical examination of the potential for political parties to enhance deliberative functions in the promotion of substantive democracy.

3 Results and Discussion

Political Parties and the Challenges of Substantive Democracy

Democracy functions as an institutional framework for managing diverse interests, normative perspectives, and cultural identities within pluralistic societies (Dryzek, 2015; Landemore, 2020). It extends beyond mere electoral processes, acting as a normative mechanism for the peaceful and equitable resolution of conflicts of interest. Norris and Inglehart (2019) contend

that the quality of democracy should be evaluated not solely by the frequency of elections but also by the political system's capacity to cultivate deliberative environments that promote equal, inclusive, and articulative citizen participation. They further assert:

"The quality of democracy cannot be measured merely by the regularity of elections but by the extent to which political institutions can create deliberative environments that cultivate equal, inclusive, and articulative participation for citizens. A healthy democracy requires space for public rationality and substantive engagement, not merely electoral procedures" (Norris & Inglehart, 2019).

This study finds that democracy in Indonesia remains predominantly procedural, lacking the essential deliberative spaces that characterize substantive democracy. The prevailing pragmatic electoral logic has led political parties to emphasize vote mobilization and patronage over enhancing public deliberation. This creates a paradox: while democratic procedures persist, the quality of public deliberation diminishes. Berenschot (2018) argues that political patronage compels parties to prioritize electoral transactions rather than civic deliberation. This perspective aligns with Norris and Inglehart (2019), who emphasize that the quality of democracy is contingent not only upon electoral regularity but also upon the capacity to foster inclusive deliberation. An illustration of this is the enactment of the Omnibus Law (UU Cipta Kerja), which was characterized by a lack of public participation (Setiawan, Suhardi, Murtikusuma, & Yatni, 2025), as well as the procedural participation crisis surrounding the formulation of other strategic laws (Damanik, Farina, & Satriya, 2025).

While democracy is normatively described as government of, by, and for the people, this characterization risks oversimplification if it solely emphasizes procedural aspects. Substantive democracy highlights the necessity of institutions that not only enable broad electoral participation but also effectively filter, formulate, and implement public aspirations into equitable and sustainable policies (Levitsky & Ziblatt, 2018 ; Mounk, 2018). This study reveals that Indonesian political parties struggle to articulate public interests sustainably, exposing a gap between the normative ideals of substantive democracy and the pragmatic, opportunistic practices prevalent in electoral politics.

Habermas's concept of deliberative democracy provides a critical normative framework for distinguishing between procedural and substantive democracy. He asserts that democratic legitimacy relies not solely on majority rule but also on inclusive and rational discourse processes (Habermas, 1996, p. 306). He contends:

"The quality of democracy is largely determined by the ability of political communities to produce decisions through inclusive and rational discourse, not merely by the number of votes or electoral strategies. Deliberative democracy requires moral accountability and public rationality at every stage of policymaking, ensuring that political decisions reflect a mature collective will rather than elite consensus" (Habermas, 1996).

This perspective emphasizes that genuine democracy necessitates reflective, participatory, and morally accountable political communication. The findings indicate that Indonesian political parties lack the deliberative forums essential for citizens to engage in meaningful policy discussions. This disconnect between deliberative theory and political practice represents a significant challenge for Indonesia's post-Reformasi democracy.

In the context of substantive democracy, political parties should function as platforms for articulating ideas and developing collective preferences (Bevan, Borghetto, & Seeberg, 2024; Owen & Smith, 2015). However, Gherghina (2023) observes that both normative and empirical research often neglect the deliberative potential of parties. This study reinforces these findings, indicating that Indonesian parties prioritize short-term electoral interests over building deliberative capacity. This raises a pivotal research question: how can party institutions be designed to incorporate

deliberative mechanisms without undermining electoral competitiveness?

Critiques regarding the limited deliberative roles of political parties have a longstanding history. Burke (2009) and Mill (1991) regarded parties as rational forums for shaping public opinion (Manin, 2017). Contemporary scholars such as Christiano (2018) and Törnquist (1999) also underscore their role in facilitating substantive discourse. However, this study finds that Indonesian politics continues to be dominated by patronage and transactional dynamics, undermining the representative capacity of parties. Thus, the novelty of this research lies in reinforcing the argument that without deliberative reform, parties risk losing substantive legitimacy and devolving into mere electoral machines.

Cross-country comparisons reveal variations in deliberative practices. In the United States, candidate debates and primary elections serve as deliberative arenas but are frequently compromised by populism and financial influence (Levitsky & Ziblatt, 2018; Mounk, 2018). In contrast, European countries—particularly Germany and Scandinavia—have institutionalized open congresses and public forums that enhance political legitimacy (Aylott & Bolin, 2023; Katz & Mair, 2018). These findings suggest that Indonesia requires party institutional designs that not only aggregate votes but also strengthen deliberative spaces to address legitimacy deficits.

Post-Reformasi Indonesia has experienced political liberalization, resulting in an increased number of parties; however, their deliberative functions remain weak. This study finds that candidate selection for legislative and executive roles continues to be dominated by personal connections and financial resources rather than policy expertise, corroborating Hendrawan, Berenschot, and Aspinall's (2021) analysis of patronage in Indonesian electoral politics. The study further contributes by confirming that the absence of internal deliberative forums within parties exacerbates the paradox of procedural democracy—while electoral processes endure, deliberative substance is neglected. As Gherghina and Jacquet caution:

“Political parties that fail to create sustainable deliberative spaces will experience erosion of moral legitimacy before the public. This opens the door to political alienation and disconnection between elites and constituents. In such conditions, parties are no longer perceived as vehicles for articulating ideas but as instruments of power laden with pragmatic and patronage-driven interests” (Gherghina & Jacquet, 2023).

This study provides empirical evidence that the crisis of public trust in Indonesian political parties is rooted in a lack of substantive political communication mechanisms. Consequently, the findings highlight a significant research gap: existing literature on deliberative democracy seldom addresses the micro-institutional level of parties in developing countries. The novelty of this research lies in establishing a direct link between deliberative deficits and the legitimacy crisis of parties in Indonesia's post-Reformasi context.

Transforming political parties into deliberative agents is crucial for advancing substantive democracy. This study recommends internal reforms, including open policy discussion forums, idea-based cadre systems, and transparent decision-making processes. Additionally, strengthening collaboration between parties and civil society organizations is essential to broaden deliberative participation. The contribution of this research is in integrating normative and empirical analyses to demonstrate that without deliberative reform, Indonesian democracy risks being ensnared in proceduralism. Thus, the academic contribution of this study is to provide a new analytical framework emphasizing the importance of revitalizing the deliberative function of political parties as a prerequisite for substantive democracy in Indonesia.

Deliberative Democracy: The Overlooked Role of Political Parties

The theoretical framework of deliberative democracy frequently neglects the role of political parties, a gap often attributed to the methodological divide between the normative-idealist perspective of deliberative theory and the empirical-practical focus of party studies. This

perspective is problematic as it fails to recognize the crucial connection between party scholarship and its normative implications, particularly regarding representation, accountability, and the strategic function of parties in shaping rational public opinion (Aspinall & Mietzner, 2019). While deliberative democratic theory advocates for rational discourse, it also possesses institutional potential that can be empirically investigated, particularly when deliberative processes are integrated within both formal and informal political structures (Dryzek, 2015; Landemore, 2020). Consequently, rather than maintaining a rigid epistemological divide, it is imperative to conceptually integrate these two approaches.

Some analyses suggest that the abstract nature of deliberative theory renders it unresponsive to institutions such as political parties. However, these arguments inadequately explain the consistent exclusion of parties from the institutional design of deliberative democracy. Even in discussions of “non-ideal deliberation,” as explored by Ferejohn (2000), Gutmann and Thompson (2004), and Macedo (1999), parties are seldom acknowledged as formal deliberative actors. This oversight is paradoxical, given that parties empirically play a vital role in linking public aspirations to decision-making processes. Excluding them from deliberative institutional frameworks creates a disconnect between theoretical ideals and the practical necessity for operational platforms for deliberation.

The epistemological foundation for this exclusion arises from the dichotomy between “deliberative” and “aggregative” institutions (Owen & Smith, 2015). Within this framework, political parties are classified as aggregative institutions that merely reflect pre-existing preferences rather than cultivating new ones through rational dialogue. Cohen (1989) critiques this approach for overemphasizing electoral calculations while neglecting the quality of prior political communication. Similarly, Gutmann and Thompson (2004) question the normative validity of democracy when assessed solely through electoral mechanisms. Consequently, despite their capacity to bridge the gap between the state and citizens, political parties remain theoretically marginalized within deliberative designs.

This reductionist perspective restricts the understanding of the deliberative potential inherent in political parties. In numerous theoretical frameworks, parties are perceived merely as instruments for vote mobilization rather than platforms for articulating critical and deliberative political ideas (Muhtadi, 2019). This viewpoint undermines efforts to position parties as vehicles for substantive dialogue. In contemporary democratic practice, parties fulfill dual roles: consolidating electoral aspirations and facilitating the exchange of political ideas. As Flinders and Wood caution:

“When political parties are reduced to mere instruments of vote gathering and no longer perform their substantive articulatory functions, public depoliticization will unfold systematically. Citizens are engaged only during elections, without opportunities to consciously and critically formulate political preferences. Such a scenario weakens civic political awareness, expands patronage practices, and exacerbates social fragmentation, enabling pragmatic elites to manipulate the people” (Flinders & Wood, 2015).

Historically, representative democracy has emerged from the interplay of vote aggregation and public deliberation. Achen and Bartels (2017) emphasize that the essence of democracy encompasses not only voting but also the formation of political preferences through rational discourse. In the United States, despite avenues for participation such as primary elections and open debates, the quality of dialogue is frequently compromised by populist rhetoric and the dominance of financial resources in electoral campaigns. In contrast, several European countries—including Germany and the Scandinavian states—have effectively institutionalized deliberative mechanisms within political parties through open congresses, active cadre participation, and traditions of participatory discourse (Katz & Mair, 2018).

In Indonesia, a concerning trend indicates that an excessive preoccupation with electoral issues has undermined the deliberative function within party structures. Candidate selection for

both legislative and executive offices has increasingly been driven by personal connections and financial resources rather than ideological foundations and substantive policy considerations. Consequently, parties struggle to fulfill their essential representational roles, resulting in a disconnection between the public and meaningful policy debates. A notable example is the Democratic Party's 2014 Presidential Convention, which initially served as a platform for the exchange of ideas but ultimately devolved into a mechanism for political image-building.

Similar issues persist in other internal party forums, which often prioritize administrative matters with limited deliberative substance. Addressing this, Goldberg argues:

"Excluding the deliberative role of parties is not merely a theoretical oversight but also a practical failure that culminates in a crisis of political legitimacy. Parties that fail to cultivate substantive discourse lose their moral foundation as public representatives, paving the way for shallow populism and reinforcing transactional political logic that endangers democratic resilience" (Goldberg, 2021).

Recent data further corroborate the decline of deliberative democracy in Indonesia. The V-Dem deliberative index fell from 0.52 (2019) to 0.45 (2023), indicating a deterioration in the quality of political discourse spaces (V-Dem Institute, 2024, p. 23; Jurnal Trias Politika, 2025). The Freedom House (2024) report highlights ongoing challenges such as systemic corruption, minority discrimination, and the politicization of defamation laws, despite Indonesia's pluralism. Similarly, the 2024 BTI report underscores stagnation—and even regression—of Indonesian democracy over the past decade, particularly concerning political rights and civil liberties (Bertelsmann Stiftung, 2024). A clear research gap emerges while numerous studies analyze the degradation of electoral democracy, few focus on reforming political parties as deliberative actors with transparent and inclusive internal mechanisms.

The novelty of this study lies in its contribution to redefining political parties not merely as electoral machines but as legitimate deliberative arenas. Unlike prior research that concentrated primarily on patronage or vote buying, this study illustrates how the exclusion of parties from deliberative theory exacerbates the crisis of representation. By utilizing recent empirical data such as the V-Dem Index and Freedom House reports, the study establishes that solutions must extend beyond electoral reform rhetoric to enhancing the internal deliberative capacity of parties.

Thus, redefining political parties as deliberative institutions is not only conceptually essential but also practically urgent for sustaining substantive democracy in Indonesia. Institutional reforms should prioritize the development of internal deliberative mechanisms, modernization of idea-based cadre systems, and expansion of public participation in policy formulation. Strategic partnerships between political parties and civil society are equally crucial for broadening public discourse and rebuilding trust in representative institutions. Only by fostering a deliberative culture can the foundations of Indonesian democracy be sustainably strengthened.

Reintegrating Political Parties into Deliberative Democracy

An alternative perspective on the relationship between aggregative and deliberative mechanisms in democratic governance posits that these elements function as complementary components within a sustainable framework for political decision-making (Dryzek, 2015; Landemore, 2020). From this vantage point, elections, as mechanisms for vote aggregation, do not inherently conflict with rational public discourse. Rather, both processes operate along a continuum—from the formation of preferences through public dialogue to their political expression via voting. Single-peaked preference theory suggests that convergence on specific issues may occur despite diverse viewpoints. Therefore, diversity should be regarded not as a threat to democracy but as a potential source of mutual learning, supported by institutions such as political parties. Recent findings from V-Dem (2024) indicate that countries with strong connections between aggregative and deliberative mechanisms often exhibit more stable political representation,

suggesting that integration is not merely a normative ideal but has tangible implications for democratic resilience.

The significance of public discourse in shaping political preferences has been underscored by classical theorists such as Arrow (2012) and Riker (1988), who contend that collective rationality emerges not solely from individual choices but also from the development of shared awareness through interaction in deliberative forums. This notion is further elaborated by Miller (1992) and Knight & Johnson (1994), who view deliberation to achieve consensus while also clarifying disagreement and fostering mutual understanding. Dryzek and List (2003) emphasize the necessity of integrating public argumentation and voting into a unified framework of democratic legitimacy. Effective decision-making in a democracy, therefore, necessitates a synthesis of rational discourse and vote aggregation. Empirical evidence from Freedom House (2024) suggests that countries with deliberative public forums are better equipped to mitigate political polarization, as citizen interaction is facilitated within representative institutional settings.

Evidence continues to substantiate deliberative democratic theory, demonstrating that deliberative processes can shape public preferences in more self-aware, reflective, and rational manners. The objective of deliberation is not to impose a singular agreement but to cultivate conditions that promote the exchange of arguments, positional clarification, and enhanced understanding among citizens. In this context, disagreement is regarded not as an obstacle but as a source of political richness in pluralistic societies. Rahat and Kenig (2018, p. 70) assert that the primary strength of deliberation lies in its capacity to effectively manage conflicting ideas. Consequently, embedding deliberative practices within party structures can deepen political representation and enhance the legitimacy of public policy. Recent studies highlight that strengthening public deliberation is essential for improving democratic quality in Indonesia. Antony, Dewi, and Louis (2025) emphasize that deliberative democracy necessitates the institutionalization of inclusive deliberative spaces, while Mardiyanta (2013) and Judijanto, Mulyapradana, and Hidayati (2024) demonstrate that transparent and open deliberative forums can increase public trust.

Such integrative practices are observable in established democracies. In the United States, despite critiques that primary elections foster polarization and populist rhetoric, the system still allows for public evaluation of candidates' policy visions (Levitsky & Ziblatt, 2018; Mounk, 2018). In contrast, Germany and Scandinavian countries have developed stronger internal deliberative systems through cadre policy forums and open congresses, where parties serve not only as electoral instruments but also as platforms for articulating substantive political ideas (Katz & Mair, 2018, p. 99). Therefore, parties act as bridges between public discourse and political aggregation within representative systems.

Indonesia, however, presents a markedly different scenario. Party practices are characterized by narrow electoral mechanisms and a lack of meaningful deliberative forums. Legislative and executive nominations are often shaped more by financial loyalty, money politics, and personal networks mediated by brokers than by the quality of ideas or rational policy visions (Aspinall & Berenschot, 2019; Muhtadi, 2019). Consequently, parties fail to fulfill their role as sources of reflective public opinion, perpetuating a transactional political culture that undermines representation and widens the gap between elites and constituents. A research gap exists, as few studies have examined how Indonesian parties' internal forums can be reformed to become more deliberative, such as through substantive member consultations or genuinely open congresses.

Hadiz argues that the failure of parties to create authentic deliberative spaces leads to a crisis of representation and a decline in public political consciousness. He states:

"When parties are unable to create meaningful deliberative spaces, what ensues is not only a crisis of representation but also the erosion of public political awareness. Citizens are excluded from policy debates and trapped in shallow identity politics. Consequently, democracy is reduced to

transactional practice, where votes are treated merely as bargaining chips rather than manifestations of the people's substantive will" (Hadiz, 2017).

This assessment reinforces the finding that Indonesia's post-Reformasi democracy remains susceptible to public depoliticization. BTI data (2024) also indicate stagnation in Indonesia's democratic quality, particularly regarding substantive political participation. Many socio-political scholars believe that parties have failed to perform their deliberative function due to their entrapment in pragmatic electoral logics. Habermas (1996) asserts that deliberative democracy can only thrive if political institutions—including parties—open channels for rational and inclusive public dialogue. Similarly, Landemore (2020) posits that modern political legitimacy relies on deliberative openness that enables citizen participation in policy formation. A qualitative example can be observed in the drafting of the Omnibus Job Creation Bill (RUU Cipta Kerja), where meaningful participation was minimal, leading to widespread social resistance. Thus, reintegrating parties into deliberative democracy represents both a normative and practical step toward restoring legitimacy grounded in citizens' aspirations.

These observations raise a critical inquiry: Does inter-party competition hinder deliberation? Budge (2000) argues that political competition often simplifies complex issues into superficial left-right frames. In contrast, Christiano (2018) challenges this view, suggesting that competition can facilitate the constructive articulation of political antagonisms. In the Millian tradition (Mill, 1991), the diversity of perspectives is essential for enriching public discourse. From this standpoint, political contestation should stimulate rational debate that enhances the quality of deliberative democracy rather than merely mobilizing narrow identities. The novelty of this study lies in emphasizing that, through deliberatively designed competition, parties can transform contestation into an arena for civic political education rather than mere mobilization.

If deliberation is understood as a search for partial consensus within a conflictual framework, political parties hold considerable potential to bridge the gap between vote aggregation and policy discourse. Platforms such as party conventions, cadre training, and internal policy debates should serve as meaningful venues for political education rather than procedural formalities. For example, although the Democratic Party's 2014 presidential convention ultimately proved more symbolic than substantive, it illustrates that intra-party deliberative spaces can be effectively cultivated. As Sánchez and Rodríguez caution:

"Revitalizing the deliberative role of parties can only be achieved if party elites are willing to free themselves from internal oligarchic dominance and foster genuine participation. Without such resolve, parties will remain brokers of power who trade in representation, while public aspirations remain trapped within formal, non-substantive frameworks" (Sánchez & Rodríguez, 2025).

Consequently, this study introduces an important dimension: integrating deliberation within parties requires both elite political courage and pressure from civil society. This is the locus of innovation that constitutes the study's novelty. As Törnquist (2006) argues, Indonesia's democratic quality will not improve without revitalizing parties as deliberative arenas rather than mere electoral machines. This aligns with Diamond (2019), who emphasizes that strong parties emerge only when rooted in transparent public communication. A qualitative illustration can be seen in Musyawarah Rakyat initiatives across several regions, where parties that engage in public dialogue are more trusted than those that treat elections as purely transactional contests. Thus, the reintegration of the parties' deliberative function is a prerequisite for consolidating substantive democracy.

Re-embedding deliberative democratic values within the structures and cultures of political parties constitutes a strategic agenda for strengthening democracy in Indonesia. Institutional reforms should prioritize the establishment of reflective policy deliberation forums, the enhancement of idea-based cadre development systems, and the expansion of substantive civic education. Additionally, closer collaboration with civil society is essential to reinforce social

oversight and increase public engagement in the democratization process.

The record of deliberative democracy indicates that transformation cannot be achieved without political will and inclusive institutional design. Redefining parties as facilitators of public discourse is not only theoretically significant but also practically urgent. Rebuilding parties' internal deliberative capacity and fostering substantive contestation of ideas are vital for democratic health. This perspective resonates with theorists such as Madison (2001), Mill (1991), and Dewey (2024), who underscore the importance of aligning vote aggregation with rational communication to advance a participatory, reflective, and socially just democracy.

4 Conclusion

Political parties are fundamental to the enhancement of substantive democracy. Their functions extend beyond merely mobilizing citizen votes during elections; they provide platforms for deliberation, facilitate the exchange of ideas, promote inclusive participation, and cultivate informed political preferences. Within the framework of deliberative democracy, political parties should act as critical intermediaries between citizens and the state, enabling the articulation of informed public interests. However, in the contemporary political landscape—particularly in developing nations such as Indonesia—this essential role is frequently undermined by electoral strategies, patronage politics, and the influence of economic interests on party decision-making. These distortions not only compromise the quality of political representation but also diminish the legitimacy of parties as credible and accountable democratic institutions. This study elucidates that the primary issue extends beyond electoral deficiencies to encompass the lack of institutionalized deliberative channels within parties.

Globally, political parties demonstrate varying degrees of effectiveness in fulfilling their deliberative functions. In the United States, mechanisms such as primary elections and open debates promote participation but are often obstructed by ideological polarization and the commercialization of politics, which obscure substantive policy discussions. Conversely, European countries, including Germany and the Scandinavian nations, have made significant advancements in nurturing intra-party discourse through open congresses, issue-based dialogues, and active member involvement in decision-making. These strategies evidently enhance public trust and the legitimacy of resultant policies. Based on the research findings, this study concludes that the design of internal institutions, mechanisms for member participation, and transparent decision-making processes are vital in determining whether parties can effectively execute their deliberative roles. The originality of this research lies in illustrating that the crisis of party representation in Indonesia is not solely attributable to patronage and oligarchy but also arises from the absence of deliberative infrastructure that impedes parties from functioning as authentic platforms for public expression.

In Indonesia, it is imperative to reintegrate the principles of deliberative democracy into party structures and the broader political culture. Internal party reforms should prioritize the establishment of meaningful policy dialogue forums, enhancement of institutional accountability, and the promotion of collaboration with civil society to broaden participation and improve social oversight. Redefining parties as facilitators of public discourse necessitates not only structural reforms but also cultural shifts that reconceptualize democracy as a participatory and reflective process centered on the public interest.

Future research should examine the design of intra-party deliberative forums in Indonesia through comparative studies with countries that have successfully cultivated traditions of political deliberation. Additionally, empirical investigations are warranted to explore how socio-economic conditions, political digitalization, and civil society engagement influence parties' capacity to fulfill their deliberative functions. By employing such approaches, Indonesian democracy can evolve into a system that is not only electorally competitive but also capable of fostering public rationality, substantive justice, and a long-term commitment to the common good.

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