

Political Reality in Indonesia from the Perspective of Vilfredo Pareto

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ABSTRACT

According to Wilfredo Pareto, a sociologist, history demonstrates a continuous circulation of elites. This circulation occurs through two processes: the movement of individuals from lower social strata to higher social strata, and the replacement of governing elites by previously non-governing elites. When an elite group enters a position of political power, another elite group must leave that position. However, social theories such as Pareto's elite circulation theory often encounter contradictions when confronted with empirical realities. The same situation occurs with Wilfredo Pareto's theory of elite circulation when it is examined within the context of political reality in Indonesia. Empirical evidence indicates that political parties in Indonesia have not experienced effective elite circulation; instead, they tend to demonstrate practices of dynastic politics. This phenomenon can be observed during general elections and regional elections, where political candidates often consist of the same individuals or groups repeatedly. This study aims to examine Wilfredo Pareto's elite circulation theory, analyze criticisms from other sociologists regarding Pareto's theoretical perspective, and investigate how Pareto's theory applies within Indonesian society. This research employs a library research method, namely research conducted by collecting relevant literature regarding Wilfredo Pareto's elite circulation theory and subsequently describing and analyzing the collected data. The results indicate that, according to Pareto, political and governmental systems should experience changes, rotation, and movement among elites. Nevertheless, when applied to the Indonesian political context, Pareto's theory appears to contradict reality. Indonesia demonstrates characteristics of dynastic politics, where individuals who are able to access political leadership and governmental positions are frequently those who possess close relationships with political party leaders. Consequently, political candidates in democratic processes such as elections and regional elections tend to remain unchanged, resulting in limited elite circulation.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Cadre regeneration is one of the fundamental responsibilities of political parties (Katz and Mair, 1995; Suryadinata, 2015) that must be implemented. However, in practice, this responsibility has not been carried out optimally by political parties. The weakness of political cadre development indicates that political elite circulation within party organizations has not functioned effectively.

The unanimous election of Agus Harimurti Yudhoyono as Chairman of the Democratic Party during the Fifth Congress of the Democratic Party represents evidence of dynastic politics and political oligarchy (Winters, 2011; Robison and Hadiz, 2004) in Indonesia. This tendency of political dynasties (Aspinall and Berenschot, 2019) may also occur in other political parties (Katz and Mair, 1995; Suryadinata, 2015), such as the Indonesian Democratic Party of Struggle (PDI-P), where Puan Maharani, the daughter of Megawati Soekarnoputri, occupies an important position within the party.

Political parties in Indonesia tend to experience limited political elite circulation. This condition results in the emergence of the same political figures repeatedly during democratic events, including general elections and regional elections. The absence of effective elite circulation occurs because of dynastic political practices within political parties (Katz and Mair, 1995; Suryadinata, 2015). Such practices reduce opportunities for other party cadres to emerge in electoral competitions because political access is often dominated by individuals who belong to the inner circle of party leaders. Currently, political parties in Indonesia do not fully operate according to their ideal institutional functions.

Instead, some political parties (Katz and Mair, 1995; Suryadinata, 2015) appear to operate similarly to organizations controlled by certain individuals with strong political and financial resources. Political parties are often determined by who possesses the greatest political capital and financial influence. Individuals with greater capital tend to obtain greater political advantages. In this article, the author attempts to examine the concept of elite circulation theory (Pareto, 1935; Higley, 2018) proposed by the prominent sociologist Wilfredo Pareto. This study discusses how other sociologists perceive Pareto's elite circulation theory, including its strengths and weaknesses. Furthermore, this article analyzes how Pareto's elite circulation theory can be applied to contemporary Indonesian political life.

2. METHODS

This study employs a library research method, which is a research approach conducted through the collection, examination, and analysis of relevant literature related to Wilfredo Pareto's elite circulation theory (Pareto, 1935; Higley, 2018) (Pareto, 1935; Pakulski, 2018) and its application within the context of Indonesian politics. The data sources used in this study consist of books, academic articles, and other relevant scholarly publications discussing elite theory, political sociology, political power, and Indonesian political dynamics. The collected data were analyzed descriptively and analytically.

The descriptive analysis was conducted by explaining the main concepts of Wilfredo Pareto's elite circulation theory (Pareto, 1935; Higley, 2018) (Pareto, 1935; Pakulski, 2018), including the concepts of governing elites, non-governing elites, elite replacement, the lions, the foxes, residues, and derivations. Furthermore, the analytical approach was used to examine the relevance of Pareto's theory when applied to Indonesian political reality, particularly regarding political elite regeneration, political dynasties (Aspinall and Berenschot, 2019), oligarchic power structures, and the process of elite circulation within democratic institutions.

Through this approach, the study seeks to understand whether the political dynamics in Indonesia reflect Pareto's concept of continuous elite circulation or instead demonstrate a tendency toward elite reproduction (Hadiz and Robison, 2013; Winters, 2011) and political oligarchy (Winters, 2011; Robison and Hadiz, 2004).

3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

A. Wilfredo Pareto's Elite Circulation Theory and Its Criticism

The concept of elite has been widely discussed in sociology and political science. In general terms, elite refers to a group of individuals within society who occupy a higher social position compared to others. In a more specific context, elite can be defined as a group of individuals who possess particular expertise, competence, or superiority within certain fields.

From the perspective of social science, elites are considered a minority group that possesses influence and authority over the majority of society. In political sociology, elite refers to the ruling class, namely a group of individuals who control power either formally or informally within a social structure. Through their authority and social position, elites have the capacity to influence social development and political processes (Varma, 1987).

Therefore, elites are not independent entities separated from society; rather, they emerge as a consequence of social structures and historical processes. The existence of elites reflects the differentiation of abilities, resources, and access to power within society.

In every field of human activity, individuals are evaluated based on their achievements and abilities. Those who obtain the highest level of achievement are categorized as elites. Thus, elite status is not only associated with political authority but also with competence and excellence in various fields of social life (Birch, 2001).

Political elites themselves can be categorized into two groups: local political elites and non-political local elites. Local political elites refer to individuals who occupy political positions within executive and legislative institutions through democratic electoral mechanisms. These include governors, mayors, regents, members of regional legislative councils, and leaders of political parties (Katz and Mair, 1995; Suryadinata, 2015) at the regional level.

Meanwhile, non-political local elites refer to individuals who possess significant social influence but do not directly hold governmental positions. These groups include religious leaders, community organization leaders, professional groups, and other influential actors within society (Higley, 2018).

Within elite relations, there is a process of change and replacement known as elite circulation. Wilfredo Pareto argues that political power does not remain permanently controlled by one elite group. Instead, there is a continuous process in which one elite group replaces another.

According to Pareto, elite circulation occurs through two main mechanisms. First, replacement occurs among groups of governing elites themselves.

Second, replacement occurs between governing elites and other members of society. This process may happen through: The entry of individuals from different social classes into an existing elite group.

The emergence of new elite groups from lower social strata that compete with existing elites for political power (Pakulski, 2018). Pareto argues that every society is governed by a small group of individuals who possess particular qualities required for political leadership. This group is called the elite because they have the ability to access and control centers of power.

According to Pareto, elites consist of successful individuals who occupy important positions within society. However, elite status is not necessarily determined by morality or virtue, but rather by ability, competence, and effectiveness in achieving power. Therefore, elites may exist in various fields, including economics, science, culture, and politics (Birch, 2001).

Pareto divides society into two major categories: The upper class, consisting of:

Governing elites, namely elites who directly exercise political authority. Non-governing elites, namely elites who possess influence but do not directly control government power.

The lower class, namely the non-elite population. The relationship between these groups creates a continuous process of elite replacement. According to Pareto, if the circulation of elites does not occur, society may experience stagnation because existing elites gradually lose their ability to govern effectively (Pakulski, 2018).

Pareto emphasizes that political stability depends on the continuous circulation of elites. When an elite group becomes unable to maintain its effectiveness, another group with better capabilities will eventually replace it.

The process of elite circulation occurs because different groups possess different political characteristics. Some elites maintain power through force and authority, while others rely on intelligence, negotiation, and strategic manipulation.

Pareto illustrates these two characteristics through the concepts of “the lions” and “the foxes.” The lions represent elites who maintain power through strength, authority, and coercive capacity. Meanwhile, the foxes represent elites who rely on intelligence, strategy, negotiation, and political manipulation.

According to Pareto, successful political leaders are those who are able to combine both characteristics. A leader who relies only on force may lose legitimacy, while a leader who relies only on manipulation may become vulnerable to stronger opponents (Varma, 1987).

In unstable political environments, societies tend to require leaders with characteristics similar to the lions because strong authority is considered necessary to maintain order. However, in stable societies, leaders with characteristics similar to the foxes become more influential because political flexibility and strategic thinking are increasingly important.

Nevertheless, Pareto argues that neither type of elite can maintain power permanently. Eventually, the foxes will replace the lions, and later the lions will return to replace the foxes. This continuous process forms the cycle known as elite circulation (Pakulski, 2018).

Although Pareto’s elite theory has made an important contribution to political sociology, several scholars have criticized its assumptions. Birch argues that Pareto’s theoretical framework contains several weaknesses because it tends to oversimplify social relations. Pareto focused heavily on elite dominance and paid insufficient attention to other forms of interaction occurring within society. This limitation was influenced by the historical context in which Pareto developed his ideas, when state power was significantly dominant over social life (Birch, 2001).

Unlike Pareto’s relatively rigid perspective, Marvick provides a broader understanding of elites. According to Marvick, there are two historical interpretations of elites.

The first interpretation views elites as exceptional individuals who carry historical missions and create social order. In this perspective, elites are considered responsible for producing innovation and directing social development.

The second interpretation views elites as groups consisting of individuals who occupy strategic positions within government, organizations, and social institutions. In this modern perspective, elites are associated with leaders, decision-makers, and influential actors (Higley, 2018).

Field and Higley further explain that elites are individuals who occupy strategic positions and participate in policy-making processes. However, they emphasize that elites should not always be understood as a unified group because internal competition and conflicting interests frequently occur among elite members (Best & Higley, 2018).

Therefore, elite circulation does not only involve replacement between elites and non-elites but also involves competition among different elite groups seeking to maintain or obtain political power. Another important contribution to elite theory was developed by Robert Michels through his concept of the Iron Law of Oligarchy (Michels, 1962).

Michels argues that every organization, including political parties (Katz and Mair, 1995; Suryadinata, 2015), tends to develop oligarchic characteristics. Over time, decision-making authority becomes concentrated in the hands of a small group of leaders who possess organizational control.

According to Michels, oligarchy appears in several dimensions: Organizational structure. Leadership systems. Relationships between organizations and society. Governmental power relations. This perspective demonstrates that even democratic organizations may eventually experience domination by a small elite group (Birch, 2001).

Discussion

The ideas of Wilfredo Pareto and Gaetano Mosca are considered important contributions to classical elite theory. Although both scholars argue that society is inevitably divided between elites and masses, they have different perspectives regarding the sources and characteristics of elite power.

Pareto emphasizes that elites possess superior psychological and personal characteristics that enable them to govern. For Pareto, political elites are individuals who possess specific capabilities, including intelligence, strategic ability, psychological strength, and political skills. According to Pareto, elites become vulnerable when they lose their ability to defend their interests, become too tolerant, or fail to maintain their authority (Varma, 1987).

In contrast, Mosca does not necessarily view elites as morally or intellectually superior groups. According to Mosca, the success of elites is primarily determined by their organizational capacity and ability to coordinate collective action. Mosca argues that political elites succeed because they possess organizational advantages compared with the masses.

Both Pareto and Mosca reject the idea that political power is fully controlled by the people through democratic mechanisms. They argue that political systems are always characterized by the dominance of minority groups over the majority population.

Mosca argues that even democratic elections may be influenced by elites because individuals who possess greater moral, intellectual, organizational, and material resources have a stronger ability to influence political outcomes. However, Pareto presents a stronger argument regarding elite superiority. He believes that elites possess psychological characteristics that distinguish them from ordinary members of society. In Pareto's view, political leadership requires specific qualities that are not equally distributed among all individuals (Birch, 2001).

According to Pareto, human behavior, particularly political behavior, is largely influenced by non-rational factors. Most human actions are not based entirely on logical calculations but are strongly influenced by emotions, beliefs, and psychological motivations.

Therefore, Pareto argues that one of the most important elements of elite power is the ability to persuade and influence society. Mosca, however, provides a different perspective by emphasizing that ruling classes attempt to legitimize their authority through political formulas that correspond with historical conditions. Although ordinary citizens are not members of the elite, their existence remains important because elites require mass support to maintain political legitimacy.

The relationship between elites and masses is therefore interdependent. Elite groups cannot exist without the presence of non-elite groups that provide social recognition and political support (Higley, 2018).

One of Pareto's important contributions to sociology is his explanation of human action through the concepts of residues and derivations. Pareto argues that human actions are not always determined by rational objectives. Although individuals often provide rational explanations for their behavior, their actual motivations are frequently influenced by deeper psychological factors. Pareto refers to these underlying psychological elements as residues. Meanwhile, the explanations or justifications that individuals construct to make their actions appear rational are called derivations.

According to Pareto, individuals often engage in actions based on emotional, psychological, or instinctive motivations but later create logical explanations to justify those actions. This perspective challenges the assumption that human political behavior is always rational and calculated. Pareto argues that even societies considered highly civilized remain influenced by irrational elements within human behavior (Pakulski, 2018).

Pareto distinguishes between two types of actions: Logical actions Logical actions are actions directed toward achievable goals and supported by appropriate means. These actions involve a clear relationship between objectives and methods.

Non-logical actions Non-logical actions are actions that are not based on rational connections between goals and methods. These actions may be influenced by emotions, traditions, beliefs, or psychological motivations.

According to Pareto, political actions frequently contain non-logical elements because political actors often pursue power based on interests, emotions, and social influence rather than purely rational considerations. Pareto connects the concept of residues with the process of elite circulation. He argues that changes in elite groups occur because different elites possess different psychological characteristics. Pareto divides residues into two major categories: Residues of combinations

Residues of persistence of aggregates The first category refers to the ability of elites to adapt, manipulate situations, and create new strategies. This characteristic is associated with the concept of the foxes.

The second category refers to persistence, stability, and the ability to maintain authority through strength and determination. This characteristic is associated with the lions. According to Pareto, societies require a balance between these two types of elites. When one type dominates excessively, political instability may emerge, resulting in the replacement of one elite group by another.

Elites who rely excessively on force may lose their adaptability, while elites who rely excessively on manipulation may lose their capacity to maintain authority. Therefore, elite circulation becomes an unavoidable process in political systems (Varma, 1987).

Pareto argues that elites attempt to justify and legitimize their power through various ideological explanations. These explanations function as mechanisms to persuade the masses and maintain political control. Through these mechanisms, elites transform actions based on residues into actions that appear rational and acceptable to society. Therefore, Pareto views elite circulation as an essential process for maintaining social equilibrium. The replacement of elites prevents political systems from becoming completely stagnant because new groups continuously enter the competition for power (Pakulski, 2018).

Pareto's theory provides an important perspective for understanding political change. Unlike liberal theories that emphasize democratic participation and Marxist theories that emphasize class struggle, Pareto focuses on competition and replacement among elite groups. Pareto rejects the idea that political development necessarily follows a progressive direction. According to him, history does not represent continuous improvement but rather a repeated cycle of elite replacement.

Political systems experience changes not because society moves toward a perfect condition but because different elite groups continuously compete to obtain and maintain power. Although Pareto's theory has been criticized for being deterministic and insufficiently attentive to social participation, his ideas remain influential in understanding political power, oligarchy, and elite competition. The concept of elite circulation continues to be relevant in analyzing contemporary political systems, particularly in societies where political power tends to be concentrated among a limited number of groups.

B. Wilfredo Pareto's Elite Circulation Theory and the Political Reality of Indonesia

Based on Wilfredo Pareto's elite circulation theory (Pareto, 1935; Higley, 2018) (Pareto, 1935; Pakulski, 2018), political elites in Indonesia have experienced several major waves of transformation throughout history. These changes demonstrate that political power in Indonesia has not remained controlled by a single group permanently. Instead, different groups have entered and replaced previous elites according to the political, social, and economic conditions of each historical period.

At least three major waves of elite circulation can be identified in Indonesian political history. The first wave was the intellectual-nationalist elite, represented by the generation of Indonesia's founding fathers, including Soekarno, Mohammad Hatta, Sutan Sjahrir, Mohammad Natsir, Soepomo, and Tan Malaka. These figures emerged from the political awareness and intellectual movements developed among youth and student activists during the 1928 generation.

This group represented an intellectual elite that played an important role in the formation of Indonesian nationalism and the struggle for independence. Their political authority was constructed through intellectual capacity, ideological commitment, and leadership during the anti-colonial movement.

The second wave was the military-ideological elite, represented by figures such as Soeharto, Abdul Haris Nasution, Ahmad Yani, Ali Murtopo, and D.N. Aidit. This elite group emerged from the political and security instability during the period of President Soekarno's leadership.

The political environment at that time created opportunities for military and ideological actors to gain significant influence. When the Old Order regime collapsed, many actors surrounding political power during the Soekarno era became the new ruling elites.

The third wave was the technocratic-business elite, which emerged during the leadership of Soeharto. This group included figures such as B.J. Habibie, Emil Salim, Mohammad Sadli, Mar'ie Muhammad, Jusuf Kalla, and Fahmi Idris.

These elites gained influence through expertise in technology, economics, business, and state administration. They became prominent during the New Order period and later continued to play important roles after the collapse of the authoritarian regime.

These three waves demonstrate a pattern similar to Pareto's concept of elite circulation, where one group replaces another due to changes in social and political conditions. However, the question remains: what characteristics will define the next wave of political elites in Indonesia?

If the historical pattern of Indonesian politics is examined, political elite circulation has often been dominated by established groups, including old political figures, military actors, business elites, and technocrats. Nevertheless, in recent years, several new political figures have emerged with different backgrounds and political styles.

For example, Ridwan Kamil gained political popularity through his engagement with urban communities and younger generations, while Joko Widodo (Jokowi) entered the national political arena by presenting an image of simplicity and closeness to ordinary citizens.

These examples demonstrate that new forms of elite recruitment may emerge outside traditional political channels. Other actors have also attempted to enter the political elite structure. For example, business figures such as Hary Tanoesoedibjo utilized media ownership and economic resources as instruments for political influence. Similarly, religious figures such as Habib Rizieq Shihab gained political influence through religious organizations and mass mobilization.

These developments indicate that future political elite circulation may not necessarily be determined by domination of a particular professional field. Instead, the ability to influence public opinion and mobilize social support may become the most important factor in gaining access to political power.

In other words, contemporary elite circulation is increasingly influenced by the capacity to shape public perception and control political communication. Traditional channels of elite formation in Indonesia, such as political parties (Katz and Mair, 1995; Suryadinata, 2015), military institutions, business networks, and bureaucratic structures, remain important pathways to political power. However, recent political developments indicate a tendency toward weakening certain channels while strengthening others. For example, restrictions on political party activities within university environments, declining student participation in extra-campus organizations, and changes in higher education policies have influenced the traditional process of political recruitment.

At the same time, entrepreneurship and business-oriented activities among young people have received increasing attention. Many universities have introduced entrepreneurship courses, while successful young entrepreneurs have increasingly become public figures. This phenomenon does not necessarily represent a negative development. Instead, it demonstrates that political elite circulation in Indonesia is becoming more dynamic. The emergence of new political actors provides opportunities for younger generations to participate in national leadership. It also indicates that political power is not entirely restricted to traditional elites. However, an important question remains: Does higher elite circulation automatically lead to better democratic quality?

Panji Anugrah Permana, a political scholar from the University of Indonesia, argues that experiences from Latin America and Eastern Europe demonstrate that high levels of elite replacement do not necessarily correlate with improved democratic quality. However, frequent elite turnover

indicates that electoral mechanisms function effectively as instruments of reward and punishment. Through elections, citizens possess the ability to reward political leaders who perform well and punish those who fail to meet public expectations. Indonesia conducted its first general election in 1955. This election is often considered by Indonesian political scholars, including George McTurnan Kahin, as one of the most democratic elections in Indonesian history.

During the 1955 election, political parties (Katz and Mair, 1995; Suryadinata, 2015) competed based on clear ideological foundations, social support bases, political programs, and policy visions. The four largest parties in the 1955 election represented different ideological orientations:

The Indonesian National Party (PNI), representing nationalist ideology, gained 22.32% of votes. Masyumi, representing Islamic ideology, gained 20.92% of votes. Nahdlatul Ulama (NU), representing Islamic ideology, gained 18.41% of votes. The Indonesian Communist Party (PKI), representing communist ideology, gained 16.36% of votes. This electoral competition demonstrated a relatively strong relationship between political ideology, party identity, and voter preferences. After the 1955 election, Indonesia entered the Guided Democracy period in 1959, during which President Soekarno was appointed president for life.

Political tensions intensified following the events of 1965, which significantly changed Indonesia's political structure. Soekarno lost political legitimacy, and power gradually shifted toward Soeharto and his supporters. In March 1967, Soeharto officially became president, marking the beginning of the New Order regime. During the New Order era, Indonesia conducted six general elections. However, these elections were considered highly predictable because the winner was almost always expected to be Golkar and its political leadership.

Although elections were formally conducted under the principles of direct, general, free, confidential, honest, and fair elections, democratic competition was significantly restricted. The New Order government simplified the political party system into only two political parties (Katz and Mair, 1995; Suryadinata, 2015) and one dominant organization: Indonesian Democratic Party (PDI), United Development Party (PPP), Golkar. Golkar received significant institutional advantages, including extensive organizational networks reaching village levels and strong support from bureaucratic structures. As a result, Golkar became a political machine supported by patronage networks and elite alliances (Crouch, 1979). Democracy during this period functioned more as a political symbol rather than a substantive democratic mechanism.

The collapse of the New Order regime in 1998 created significant expectations regarding democratic improvement and political reform in Indonesia. The resignation of President Soeharto was expected to open opportunities for broader political participation, stronger democratic institutions, and greater accountability of political elites.

However, after several electoral cycles and regional elections, Indonesian democracy (Aspinall, 2013; Aspinall and Berenschot, 2019) has not fully achieved its national aspirations of creating a just and prosperous society. One of the major challenges faced by Indonesian democracy after the Reform Era is the persistence of oligarchic power. Instead of producing a complete transformation of political power relations, democratization has often been accompanied by the continuation of old elite networks and the emergence of new forms of political domination.

According to Hadiz and Robison (2013), Indonesian democracy (Aspinall, 2013; Aspinall and Berenschot, 2019) after authoritarianism has been shaped by the resilience of oligarchic interests. Economic and political elites have successfully adapted to democratic institutions and used electoral mechanisms to maintain their influence.

The decentralization process after the Reform Era also created new opportunities for local elites to control political and economic resources. Local bureaucratic elites, business actors, and political leaders formed alliances to dominate regional political structures.

This condition contributed to the emergence of political patronage systems and political dynasties (Aspinall and Berenschot, 2019) at the local level. Rather than eliminating elite domination,

decentralization sometimes transformed the form of elite power from centralized authoritarian control into decentralized oligarchic competition.

From the perspective of Pareto's elite circulation theory (Pareto, 1935; Higley, 2018), democratic systems should provide opportunities for new elites to replace ineffective ruling elites. However, political reality in Indonesia demonstrates a different pattern. Instead of continuous elite circulation, many political institutions experience elite reproduction (Hadiz and Robison, 2013; Winters, 2011), where political power remains concentrated among families, established networks, and groups with strong economic resources.

Political dynasties illustrate the limitation of elite circulation because access to political positions is often determined not only by competence and public support but also by family connections, political networks, and financial resources. In many cases, individuals who enter political competition are not entirely new actors emerging from broader social groups but rather members of existing elite circles.

This phenomenon contradicts Pareto's expectation that lower social groups could produce new elites capable of replacing existing elites. Instead, Indonesian political reality demonstrates a process where existing elites reproduce themselves through democratic institutions. According to Winters (2011), oligarchic power operates through the ability of wealthy individuals and groups to control resources, influence political decisions, and maintain their position within political systems. Therefore, although Indonesia has implemented democratic elections, political competition remains strongly influenced by economic and social inequalities.

The persistence of oligarchic politics demonstrates that democracy alone does not automatically guarantee effective elite circulation. Political parties, which should function as institutions for political recruitment and cadre development, often become dominated by certain figures or groups. Instead of becoming open organizations that produce new leaders, many political parties (Katz and Mair, 1995; Suryadinata, 2015) function as vehicles controlled by individuals with strong political capital.

Political recruitment within parties is frequently influenced by loyalty, personal relationships, financial capacity, and proximity to party leadership. As a result, many potential leaders outside elite networks experience difficulties entering political competition. This condition reflects a weakness in the process of political regeneration.

From Pareto's perspective, political stability requires continuous circulation between old and new elites. When elite circulation stops, political systems may experience stagnation because existing elites become increasingly focused on maintaining their own interests rather than responding to social changes.

Despite the dominance of oligarchic forces, Indonesian society has also witnessed attempts to create alternative political movements. Various social movements have attempted to challenge established political elites by promoting broader participation from workers, students, farmers, and civil society groups. One example is the attempt by labor movements to enter electoral politics through the creation of alternative political organizations.

These movements argue that political representation should not only be controlled by business elites and established political parties (Katz and Mair, 1995; Suryadinata, 2015) but should also include groups representing ordinary citizens. The idea of alternative politics seeks to challenge elite domination by introducing new actors into political competition. From the perspective of elite circulation theory (Pareto, 1935; Higley, 2018), these movements represent potential sources of new elites emerging from lower social groups. However, their success depends on their ability to transform social movements into sustainable political organizations capable of competing within democratic institutions.

Political activists argue that alternative political movements are necessary because existing democratic institutions have been dominated by oligarchic interests. According to this perspective, democratic reform cannot depend only on electoral competition but must also involve strengthening grassroots participation and expanding political awareness among citizens. Alternative politics aims to create political organizations based on social interests rather than elite interests. However, these

movements face significant challenges. First, they must overcome institutional barriers within the electoral system. Second, they must develop organizational capacity and financial resources. Third, they must prevent themselves from becoming absorbed into the same oligarchic structures they initially intended to challenge.

This challenge reflects Pareto's argument that elite replacement is not always guaranteed. New groups may enter political competition, but they must possess sufficient organizational capacity and political skills to replace existing elites. The Indonesian political experience demonstrates both the relevance and limitations of Pareto's elite circulation theory (Pareto, 1935; Higley, 2018).

On the one hand, Indonesian history shows several examples of elite replacement: the transition from nationalist founding elites to military elites; the transition from military elites to technocratic-business elites; the emergence of new political figures during the Reform Era. These processes reflect Pareto's idea that political power continuously moves among different elite groups.

On the other hand, contemporary Indonesian politics also demonstrates limitations of elite circulation because political power often remains concentrated among established networks. Instead of complete replacement, Indonesia frequently experiences elite adaptation, where old elites transform themselves and continue to influence political institutions under new democratic conditions. Therefore, Indonesian politics reflects a combination of elite circulation and elite reproduction (Hadiz and Robison, 2013; Winters, 2011). Political power changes hands, but the new elites often emerge from similar social, economic, and political backgrounds.

4. CONCLUSION

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