

The involution of democracy post-reform: Indonesian case

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Abstract

Besides causing political stagnation, the involution of democracy in post-reform Indonesia also potentially produces a return to an absolute system of government. However, this topic remains underexplored in scholarly discussions. In response to gaps in previous studies, this research focuses on how the involution of democracy has been experienced in post-reform Indonesia. Employing a qualitative descriptive approach rooted in the forms, factors, and implications of involution, this study highlights three key findings. First, political access in post-reform Indonesia is still under the power of the rulers. Second, prospective leaders in post-reform Indonesia's general elections are still dominated by the elite. Third, the upper class still dominates leaders elected in general elections in post-reform Indonesia. By mapping three key findings, the article sheds light on the involution of democracy experienced by Indonesia in the post-reform era, which appears in the form of stagnation of the political system, so that political access and the characteristics of the resulting leaders tend to ignore the process and principles of democratic values.

Keywords: *Involution; Democracy; Political system; Reform; and Indonesia*

1. Introduction

Involution is a concept introduced by Geertz (1963) to explain the stagnation of an economic-political system in the absence of significant progress. This context also occurs in the democratic system in post-reform Indonesia, which is experiencing an involution. The involution of democracy in post-reform Indonesia can be expressed through political access that is still under the power of rulers (Asrinaldi et al., 2022), prospective leaders who are still dominated by political party elites (Johansson, 2019), and elected leaders who still come from the upper class (Warburton et al., 2021). Other than causing inequality in political access, the involution of democracy also degrades the commitment and values of reforms proclaimed by a country (Lindsey, 2006; Luttrell et al., 2014). Addressing these perspectives, this study examines the crucial issue of the involution of democracy experienced by Indonesia in the post-reform era to evaluate the commitment and values of reform manifested in political contestation in

the general elections held every five years in a democratic manner.

Studies examining the involution of democracy in post-reform Indonesia are crucial to comprehensively exploring and evaluating Indonesia's commitment to realising the values of reform in a democratic political system. However, the existing studies that discuss a country's commitment to realising democratic values in the post-reform era focus on only three contexts. First, studies discuss a more effective democratic system post-reform era (Heurich, 2019; Lukman, 2023; Santoso, 2021). Second, studies discuss a more accommodating democratic system in the post-reform era (Chen, 2022; Maula, 2023; Zulfadli et al., 2020). Third, studies discuss post-reform transformative democratic systems (Arslanalp & Deniz Erkmén, 2020; Hammond, 2021; Owen, 2020). In general, studies that discuss the post-reform democratic system focus only on the political system's effectiveness, accommodation, and transformation. While these studies offer valuable insights, they often lack a comprehensive analysis of the involution of

democracy in the post-reform era, particularly in Indonesia.

The democratic system in the post-reform era has characteristics that are so complex and contextual in each implementation that it is interesting to explain. Treisman (2020) argues that in a country, the political system in the post-reform era has become stagnant, so the access and political system in democratic contestation often ignore democratic processes. However, comprehensive studies that evaluate the stagnation of the political system in the post-reform era, especially in Indonesia, remain limited. This research seeks to address these critical gaps by thoroughly examining and analyzing the involution of democracy experienced by Indonesia since the reform era. It aims to provide an in-depth reflection on the complexities of a country's commitment to upholding democratic values, which, despite the initial hopes for progress, have faced significant stagnation and challenges in the post-reform landscape. Through this investigation, we aim to shed light on the underlying factors contributing to this stagnation and to better understand the implications for Indonesia's democratic trajectory.

The stagnation of a country's commitment to manifesting the values of democratic reform has caused a latent involution in Indonesia's democratic system. In this sense, research on the involution of democracy in post-reform Indonesia is a valuable lesson for future applications, warranting detailed explanation and analysis. This study addresses three central questions: (1) how are the characteristics of political access carried out in the post-reform democratic system in Indonesia? (2) What are the characteristics of prospective leaders who exist in the post-reform democratic contestation in Indonesia? (3) What are the characteristics of the dominant leaders elected in the post-reform democratic contestation in

Indonesia? In addressing these questions, the study argues that the involution of democracy in post-reform Indonesia reflects a form of stagnation of the political system so that political access and the characteristics of leaders produced in democratic contestation tend to ignore the process and principles of democratic values.

2. Theoretical Perspective

2.1 Involution

Involution is a concept introduced by Geertz (1963) to explain the stagnation of an economic-political system in the absence of significant progress. Similarly, Burawoy (1996) explains that involution has been used to explain a society's stagnation of economic, political, and even agricultural systems. In other words, involution is more evaluative in explaining a system or social-political structure in a country (Burawoy et al., 2000). Although the concept of involution is often used in evaluating agricultural systems as described by Geertz (1963). However, in White's (1995) perspective, the concept of involution can be used as a basis for evaluating the functioning or dysfunction of the socio-political system in a country. For example, a study conducted by Naseem et al. (2022) found an involution of a country's political system through the attitudes and regulations issued in the face of reactive political mobilisation based on ethnicity.

In the political context, involution does not appear in the product of ethnicity politics that consolidates the identity and characteristics of a hierarchical administrative system against an autonomous political-economic infrastructure (Damanik, 2020). Therefore, the concept of involution applied by Geertz (1963) can be used to explain the ecological, economic, and sociological conditions of an existing society and to evaluate the stagnation of a political-economic system in a country. Thiemann (2023) also argues that involution occurs mostly in the

form of political-economic infrastructure that causes various implications, such as the devaluation of labour in rural areas. A country's involution appears not only in the political context but also in the context of agricultural-economic production and reproduction, as experienced by the Soviet Union (Burawoy et al., 2000). However, in the study of Losada and Máiz (2005), the involution experienced by a country can be overcome through political, economic, and ecological education that emphasises progressive values, as in Spain.

2.2 Reform of the political system

Reform is conceptualised as a country's drastic change that aims to improve and even replace the political system. According to Jima (2021), the political system reform aims to reconstruct the education gap, constitutional crisis, and empowerment of civil society. In other words, the political system reform that occurs in a country aims to ensure empowerment and open access to politics, economics, and health for the better after the reform (Chernichovsky, 2019). Therefore, Garritzmann et al. (2023) argue that if the values and orientations of political reform can be manifested in a system, it can realise social, economic, and political welfare in a sustainable manner. For instance, Xiong and Wang (2022) highlight that in post-reform China, the political image has become more democratic, and the bureaucracy become more effective and rational (Clark, 2013; Jiang, 2022; Makin, 2018).

The reform of the political system does not always work as expected by a country and even has the potential to fail, as happened in China (Zhang & Ji, 2023). Failure to manifest the commitment and values of reform is often used as a basis for evaluating the political-economic system that exists in a country (Felderhof, 2022). According to Cheng et al. (2020) explain that a country's political system's failure is reflected in the

undemocratic contestation of democracy, so in every general election, personal interests are prioritised over social interests, as happened in India. Similarly, Bourblanc and Anseeuw's (2019) research highlights the challenges of political-economic system reform in minimising the subordination of black people in the policy context. Besides emphasising collective commitment, Turner et al. (2022) also mention the importance of accommodative political education in realising post-reform democratic principles.

2.3. Democracy in Indonesia context

The concept of democracy in Indonesia emerged after the reformation in 1998 and was realised in 2004 through the first democratic political contestation. In Indonesia, democracy is a system open to all groups to participate in political contestation (Galuh Larasati et al., 2023; Hidayah et al., 2020; Hidayat, 2024). Isra et al. (2020) explain that the democratic system in Indonesia is a presidential form, where power is based on the three highest institutions, namely the executive, legislative, and judiciary, which are democratically elected (Fossati et al., 2020). At the same time, in their study, Hardi et al. (2023) affirmed that if democratic values and systems can be applied transparently and inclusively, they can pave the way to a more effective and efficient political system. Commitment to manifesting democratic values theoretically and practically is essential in order to realise a more transparent and accountable political system. This context can be started by conducting systemic democracy education, as shown in Nanggala's study (2020).

Democracy as a political system in Indonesia does not always bring positive transformations in every process and implementation. According to Hadiz (2021), the performance of democracy in post-reform Indonesia has regressed because global trends influence it. Meanwhile, in the view of Romli

(2019), the decline of democracy in a country is greatly influenced by the issue of identity politics, which has strengthened and only accommodates the interests of particular groups or clans, as experienced by Indonesia post-reform. In their study, Mukti & Rodiyah (2020) also showed that in the post-reform era, political dynasties did not appear a little in Indonesian regions, which had negative implications for the substance of the realisation of democratic values in the electoral process. The decline in democracy experienced by Indonesia, based on Aspinall et al. (2020), is also influenced by elite fanaticism in every political contestation that ignores collective commitments and values. The implication is that elite power in a democratic system becomes absolute, reducing civil society participation in political contestation (Fernando et al., 2024; Lindgren et al., 2024; Mietzner, 2021).
capitalized.

3. Method

This study was conducted on the polemics that occurred in the contestation of democracy in Indonesia in 2024, which was disseminated through online media coverage. However, this study only focuses on explaining political access, the status of prospective leaders, and the identity of leaders who have raised many polemics in every democratic contestation in post-reform Indonesia from 2004 to 2019 in online media coverage. In line with that, this study is also based on three considerations. First, the polemics in democratic contestation in post-reform Indonesia are a central issue that has not been comprehensively considered in previous studies. Second, the polemics that occur in democratic contestation in Indonesia represent a form of post-reform democratic involution. Third, the post-reform democratic involution experienced by Indonesia post-reform contains characteristics that are so complex that the context is essential to reflect.

These three considerations form the basis of this study, which chooses the involution of democracy in post-reform Indonesia as the focus of discussion.

This study is a descriptive qualitative approach based on primary and secondary data. The primary data in this study are quotations from the description of online news texts collected through intensive reading of 1,500 online news texts using the search keywords democracy and leaders in Indonesia from time to time via the Google search engine. Searching and reading online news texts started from 1 November to 10 December 2023. Selecting and reading online news was done quickly, focusing on the headlines. The reading process resulted in 498 online news articles that discussed the dominant political party leaders in post-reform Indonesia, 503 online news articles that discussed the existence of elites in post-reform democratic contestation in Indonesia, and 499 online news articles that discussed the dominant elected leaders in post-reform democratic contestation in Indonesia. Secondary data in this study was collected through reading books, websites, and journal articles relevant to the focus of the discussion and the research questions.

The data analysis in this study refers to the process conducted by Miles and Huberman (1994), which focused on three processes. First, data reduction is organising data into a more systematic form based on data classification according to the forms, factors, and implications the data represents. Second, data verification is a process to conclude the data that has been reduced thematically. Third, data description displays data selected and classified in thematic order and then presented as a table containing quotes from online news texts. From these three processes, the next step is to analyse the data inductively as a basis for interpreting the data that has been collected. The data is interpreted by restating and reflecting on the data under the ideas, patterns,

and socio-cultural contexts represented in online news texts (Fernando et al., 2023). The process and stages of the analysis made it possible to conclude the phenomena.

4. Result and Discussion

This study shows that the involution of democracy in post-reform Indonesia emerges in three contexts: political access is still under the power of the rulers, the elite still dominates prospective leaders, and elected leaders still come from the upper class. These observations are supported by three primary findings.

4.1. The control of political access among the rulers

Political access under the ruler's control is a form of democratic involution experienced by Indonesia after the reformation. Damanik (2020) also said that involution in a political system is characterised by ownership of administrative access that is still dominated and controlled by the ruler. Table 1 contains a narrative about the ownership of access under the control of political party leaders in the post-reform era (see Table 1).

Table 1. The leaders of the dominant political parties in the post-reform era

Year	Party	Status	Narrative
2004	Partai Golongan Karya	Former Vice President	Former Vice President of Indonesia, Jusuf Kalla, was chairman of the Golkar Party in 2004 (Agne, 2023).
2004	Partai Demokrasi Indonesia Perjuangan	Former President	Former President of Indonesia, Megawati Soekarnoputri, became chairperson of the PDI-P in 2004 (Osdar, 2021).
2004	Partai Kebangkitan Bangsa	Former Minister	Former Coordinating Minister for Human Development and Cultural Affairs of Indonesia, Alwi Sihab, was the chairman of the PKB in 2004 (Farisa, 2022).
2009	Partai Demokrat	Representative Council	Former member of DPR RI, Anas Urbaningrum, was the chairman of the Democrat Party in 2009 (Faizi, 2023).
2009	Partai Golongan Karya	Former Minister	Former Coordinating Minister for Human Development and Cultural Affairs of Indonesia, Aburizal Bakrie, was chairman of the Golkar party in 2009 (Agne, 2023).
2009	Partai Demokrasi Indonesia Perjuangan	Party Elite	The daughter of the former first President of Indonesia, Megawati Soekarnoputri, returned as chairperson of the PDI-P in 2009 (Litbang, 2022).
2014	Partai Demokrasi Indonesia Perjuangan	Former Member of DPR RI	Former member of DPR RI, Megawati Soekarnoputri, was the chairperson of the PDI-P in 2014 (Ali, 2023).
2014	Partai Golongan Karya	Former Member of DPR RI	Former DPR RI Chairman Setya Novanto was chairman of the Golkar Party in 2014 (Agne, 2023).
2014	Partai Gerakan Indonesia Raya	Former General of the National Army	Former General Commander of the TNI, Prabowo Subianto, was chairman of the Gerindra Party in 2014 (Dwi, 2023).

		of Indonesia or TNI	
2019	Partai Demokrasi Indonesia Perjuangan	Party Elite	Megawati Soekarnoputri has been re-elected as chairwoman of the PDI-P in 2019 (Muhid, 2023).
2019	Partai Golongan Karya	Party Elite	Former Minister of Industry Airlangga Hartanto became chairman of the Golkar Party in 2019 (Agne, 2023).
2019	Partai Gerakan Indonesia Raya	Minister	The Minister of Defence, Prabowo Subianto, is the chairman of the Gerindra Party in 2019 (Perdana, 2019).

Source: Online news uploaded via Google.

Table 1 shows that the leaders of political parties in post-reform Indonesia are dominated by the rulers. In line with that, the content of Table 1 also contains three critical aspects regarding the status of political party leaders in post-reform Indonesia, that the rulers still dominate. First, former Presidents and Vice Presidents of Indonesia often become chairpersons of political parties in post-reform Indonesia, as happened in 2004. Second, former Ministers and former Members of the People's Representative Council often become chairpersons of political parties in post-reform Indonesia, as was the case in 2009. Third, former generals of the National Army of Indonesia also became chairman of political parties in the post-reform era, as happened in 2014. These three aspects reflect that political access is

dominated and under the control of the rulers in the contestation of democracy. This condition is a form of the involution of democracy experienced by Indonesia post-reform.

4.2. The dominance of the elites to become prospective leaders

The dominance of the elite to become prospective leaders is a form of the involution of democracy experienced by Indonesia in the post-reform era. Sakwa (2022) also said that involution in a social and political system can be identified through the existence of people from the elite participating in democratic contestation. Table 2 contains a narrative about elites wanting to become prospective leaders in the post-reform democracy contestation (see Table 2).

Table 2. The existence of elites in post-reform democratic contestation.

Year	Prospective	Status	Narrative
2004	President	Daughter of former President of Indonesia	The daughter of the former President of Indonesia, Megawati Soekarnoputri, was a candidate for President of Indonesia in the 2004 general election (Kompas, 2022).
2004	DPR RI	Party Elite	Former chairman of the Golkar party, Akbar Tanjung, was a candidate for the DPR RI in the 2004 general election (Utami, 2012).
2004	Governor	Former General of the National Army of Indonesia	Former General Commander of the National Army of Indonesia, Sutowo, was

			Governor of the Special Region of Jakarta in 2004 (Tempo, 2003).
2009	Vice President	Former General of the National Army of Indonesia	Former General Commander of the National Army, Wiranto, was a candidate for President of Indonesia in the 2009 general election (Riana, 2019).
2009	DPR RI	Son of the Party Chairman	Son of the chairman of the Democratic Party, Edhie Baskoro Yudhoyono, was a candidate for the DPR RI in the 2009 general election (Kumparan, 2021).
2009	Governor	Party Elite	A Democrat party elite, Fauzi Bowo was the Special Region of Jakarta Governor in 2009 (Ajeng Wirachmi, 2023).
2014	President	Entrepreneur	An entrepreneur, Joko Widodo, was a candidate for President of Indonesia in the 2014 election (Dinisari, 2014).
2014	DPR RI	Son of the Party Chairman	Son of the chairman of the Democratic Party, Edhie Baskoro Yudhoyono, was a candidate for the DPR RI in the 2014 general election (Adam, 2013).
2014	Governor	Independent	Basuki Tjahaja Purnama, the Governor of the Special Region of Jakarta in 2014, is not affiliated with a political party (Restu, 2014).
2019	President	Party Elite	An elite of the PDI-P party, Joko Widodo was once the President of Indonesia in the 2019 general election (Bbc, 2019)
2019	DPR RI	Son of the Party Chairman	A daughter of the chairperson of the PDI-P party, Puan Maharani is a candidate for the DPR RI in the 2019 general election (Liputan6, 2019).
2019	Governor	Independent	Anis Baswedan, the Governor of the Special Region of Jakarta in 2019, is not affiliated with a political party (R. Hidayat, 2017).

Source: Online news uploaded via Google.

Table 2 shows the existence of elites in the contestation of democracy in post-reform Indonesia. In line with that, the contents of Table 2 also contain three critical aspects regarding the existence of elites in post-reform democratic contestation in Indonesia. First, in the post-reform era, many of the candidates who participated in democratic contestation were the children of former Presidents of

Indonesia, as happened in 2004. Second, in the post-reform era, many candidates who participated in democratic contestation were former generals of the National Army of Indonesia, as happened in 2009. Third, in the post-reform era, many candidates who participated in democratic contestation were the children of political party chairpersons, as happened in 2019. These three aspects reflect that prospective leaders are still

overwhelmingly dominated by the elite in the ongoing contestation of democracy, highlighting a troubling form of the involution of democracy that Indonesia has experienced in the post-reform era, where true representation and diverse voices struggle to emerge amidst the prevailing influence of established power structures.

4.3. The dominance of the upper class in becoming elected leaders

The dominance of the upper class in becoming elected leaders in political

contestation is a form of the involution of democracy that occurred in Indonesia in the post-reform era. Jiang (2022) also said that the involution that occurs in a political system can be seen through the status of leaders elected in democratic contestation, in which people from the upper class still dominate. Table 3 contains a narrative about the leaders elected in the post-reform democratic contestation (see Table 3).

Table 3. Elected leaders in post-reform democratic contestation.

Year	Elected leader	Status	Narrative
2004	President	Former General of the National Army of Indonesia	Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono was elected President of the Republic of Indonesia in the 2004 general election (Hutabarat, 2021).
2004	Chairman of the DPR RI	Party Elite	Agung Laksono was elected as Chairman of the DPR RI in 2004 (Irfan Fathurohman, 2019).
2004	Governor	Former General of the National Army of Indonesia	Sutiyo was elected Governor of the Special Region of Jakarta in 2004 (Tempo, 2003).
2009	President	Former General of the National Army of Indonesia	Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono was elected President of the Republic of Indonesia in the 2009 general election (Azanella, 2021).
2009	Chairman of the DPR RI	Entrepreneur	Marzukie Alie was elected as Chairman of the DPR RI in 2009 (Irfan Fathurohman, 2019).
2009	Governor	Party Elite	Fauzi Bowo was elected Governor of the Special Region of Jakarta in 2009 (Ajeng Wirachmi, 2023).
2014	President	Entrepreneur	Joko Widodo was elected President of the Republic of Indonesia in the 2014 general election (Dinisari, 2014).
2014	Chairman of the DPR RI	Entrepreneur	Setya Novanto was elected as Chairman of the DPR RI in 2014 (Irfan Fathurohman, 2019).
2014	Governor	Independent	Basuki Tjahaja Purnama was elected Governor of the Special Region of Jakarta in 2014 (Restu, 2014).

2019	President	Party Elite	Joko Widodo was elected as President of the Republic of Indonesia in the 2019 general election (Bbc, 2019)
2019	Chairman of the DPR RI	Party Elite	Puan Maharani was elected Chairperson of the DPR RI in 2019 (Liputan6, 2019).
2019	Governor	Independent	Anis Baswedan was elected Governor of the Special Region of Jakarta in 2019 (R. Hidayat, 2017).

Source: Online news uploaded via Google.

Table 3 shows that the dominant leaders elected in democratic contestation in post-reform Indonesia still come from the upper class. In line with that, the content of Table 3 also contains three critical aspects regarding the status of the dominant leaders elected in democratic contestation in post-reform Indonesia. First, many of the dominant leaders elected in the post-reform contestation of democracy in Indonesia are former generals of the National Army, as was the case in 2004. Second, many of the dominant leaders elected in the contestation of democracy in post-reform Indonesia are entrepreneurs, as was the case in 2009. Many dominant leaders elected in post-reform Indonesia's democratic contests, like in 2019, are political party elites, indicating that elected leaders still come from the upper class and reflecting the involution of democracy in this era.

4.4. Making sense of Involution democracy in Indonesia context

Post-reform democracy in Indonesia shows involution, with political access controlled by rulers, prospective leaders dominated by elites, and elected leaders primarily from the upper class, evident in every general election held every five years. The involution of democracy experienced by Indonesia, according to Felderhof (2022), occurs due to the weak commitment of a country in manifesting the values of reform in the political system so that political access is used to accommodate the interests of individuals and groups. Thus, the process and

results of political contestation in every general election held every five years in Indonesia often contradict the principles of democracy open to all groups to actively participate in realising a progressive political system (Clark, 2013; Hidayah et al., 2020).

Internal and external factors influenced the involution of democracy in Indonesia in the post-reform era. From the perspective of Damanik (2020), democratic involution experienced by a country occurs because of fanatical internal interventions in political praxis that cause systemic stagnation. Apart from internal factors, the involution of democracy in post-reform Indonesia is also dominantly influenced by external factors. In this context, Hadiz (2021) asserts that the involution of the political-economic system experienced by a country is heavily influenced by external factors such as trends or radical changes in global political conditions. These two factors reflect that the involution of democracy experienced by a country in the post-reform era is not only influenced by elite fanaticism but also by the country's commitment to responding to global political changes. Therefore, Romli (2019) argues that the involution of democracy experienced by a country is not only influenced by complex factors but also has contextual implications.

The reforms undertaken by Indonesia, apart from forming a democratic political system, also aim to eliminate corruption, collusion, and nepotism. Jima (2021) also said that a country's reform aims to overcome constitutional gaps and empower civil society. However, from the perspective of Zhang & Ji

(2023), the reforms do not always work as expected and even have the potential to experience an involution. In addition to raising fundamental political issues, the involution of democracy in the post-reform era also has the potential to revive the absolute system of government. As Cheng et al. (2020) asserted, the involution of democracy in the post-reform era, apart from threatening the existing political system in a country, also has the potential to perpetuate the massive practices of corruption, collusion, and nepotism. Besides emphasising collective commitment, Turner et al. (2022) also argue for the importance of accommodative political education in realising the principles of democracy in the post-reform era.

The findings in this study are different from those of previous studies. Studies that discuss the post-reform democratic system focus on the effectiveness of accommodative and progressive political system transformation. However, the findings in this study show that post-reform democracy does not always provide a progressive change; instead, it also experiences an involution, as Indonesia experienced. This context, in the view of Naseem et al. (2022), occurs because the system and praxis of democracy that exist in the post-reform era are still based on fanaticism toward one particular group or clan. The involution of democracy in post-reform Indonesia is also confirmed by Zhang & Ji (2023), that political system reforms cannot always prevent the emergence of corruption, collusion, and nepotism in a country, so the system and praxis of democracy experience stagnation. This context reflects the involution of democracy in the post-reform era, as experienced by Indonesia.

The involution of democracy in post-reform Indonesia not only has complex characteristics but also has contextual implications for the sustainability of an accommodative and progressive political

system in the future. Therefore, reflection on a country's commitment to manifesting democratic principles is a critical context in which to evaluate a country's role and performance in carrying out a more democratic political system and praxis in the post-reform era. Hardi et al. (2023) also said that evaluation and reflection from all circles are essential to realise the principles of democracy to be more transparent and inclusive, paving the way for a more effective and efficient political system in the post-reform era. In addition to systemic evaluation, practical and ideological reflection are important contexts to be carried out by the state and society to ensure the sustainability of the political system and praxis undertaken by a country to be more accommodating and progressive in the future.

5. Conclusions

Democracy in post-reform Indonesia has experienced involution in practice. These aspects can be found in three primary findings of this study. First, political access in post-reform Indonesia is still controlled and under the control of the rulers. Second, prospective leaders who exist in general elections held every five years in post-reform Indonesia are still dominated by the elite. Third, the leaders elected in the general elections held every five years in post-reform Indonesia are still dominated by the upper class. These three primary findings reflect that the involution of democracy in post-reform Indonesia comes in the form of stagnation of the political system so that political access and the characteristics of leaders produced in democratic contestation tend to ignore the process and principles of democratic values. In other words, the involution of democracy in post-reform Indonesia has not only caused political stagnation but also has the potential to produce an absolute system of government again.

The findings in this study differ from previous research, which focused on the

effectiveness of the accommodative and progressive transformation of the political system. However, the findings in this study show that post-reform democracy does not always work in an accommodative and progressive manner and even leads to involution, as experienced by Indonesia. The findings in this study are not only expected to be a dialogical basis for social and political science studies but also expected to be a preference in reflecting and evaluating the system and democratic contestation in general elections held every five years in Indonesia.

This study has a limitation, particularly in the data collection process, which is collected by investigating online media reports disseminated on Google. Therefore, the data collected and displayed in this study refers to archives of online news text descriptions. Despite these limitations, the findings of this study can serve as a foundation or reference for future research, particularly studies that aim to comprehensively explore people's perceptions of the existence of political parties and leaders in post-reform Indonesia by conducting in-depth interviews.

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7. References

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