

A Comparative Analysis of Presidential Recruitment Systems in Indonesia and South Korea: Implications for Constitutional Democracy and Democratic Transformation

Ratu Eha Salhah¹, Rotua Valentina Sagala², Hedwig Adianto³

^{1,2,3} Master of Law, Postgraduate Program, Universitas Jayabaya Jakarta, Jakarta, Indonesia.

Email: 2024010262038@pascajayabaya.ac.id¹, val77ina@yahoo.com², hedwigadiantomau@gmail.com³

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ABSTRACT

Indonesia and South Korea represent a good example for comparison since they are well-known Asian democracies that had gone through complex periods of transition from military and authoritarianism to democracy. This research is a qualitative and normative-comparative approach of legal research, aim to analyse similarities and differences in constitutional norms and political practices regarding the presidential recruiting systems in Indonesia and South Korea. The analysis concludes that democratic development in both Indonesia and South Korea has fundamentally shifted presidential recruitment from authoritarian control to direct popular elections, though their constitutional frameworks have evolved to address different challenges. While Indonesia and South Korea share similarities as unitary states with presidential systems and a minimum candidate age of 40, their specific constitutional mechanisms for nomination and election differ significantly. Indonesia requires candidates to be nominated in pairs (President and Vice-President) exclusively by political parties or coalitions, often utilizing a two-round voting system to ensure majority legitimacy. In contrast, South Korea allows for independent candidacy, operates without a Vice-President (utilizing an appointed Prime Minister instead), and employs a single-round plurality system for efficiency. Furthermore, South Korea maintains a more robust institutional oversight through the National Election Commission, which holds a higher constitutional standing compared to Indonesia's electoral management bodies, ensuring stricter control over political financing and recruitment integrity. By tracing these divergences to the constitutional and party-based design of each country's nomination process, this study contributes to the broader literature on democratic studies by clarifying how formal constitutional guarantees and informal candidate-selection practices jointly determine whether presidential recruitment reinforces oligarchic tendencies or advances democratic transformation.

Keywords: Presidential Recruitment System, Constitutional Democracy, Comparative Constitutional Law, Indonesia, South Korea.

I. Introduction

Constitutional democracy involves much more than just a rhetorical formulation of popular sovereignty; rather, it means the adoption of a set of political rules that define how political power is obtained and exercised by the executive authority according to the foundational legal order established by society. In

a presidential system of government, the president is not only a symbolic sovereign but also the chief executive, responsible for governing the state. As such, the way how the presidents are selected plays a decisive role in ensuring whether a country truly abides by the principles of democracy or it maintains its democratic facade due to hidden political forces (Noviati, 2026). Indonesia and South Korea represent a good example for comparison since they are well-known Asian democracies that had gone through complex periods of transition from military and authoritarianism to democracy (Ramadani et al., 2025). Indonesia is one of those countries where the formation of constitutional democracy went through several stages, namely Parliamentary Democracy, Guided Democracy, and the New Order regime (Manurung et al., 2025). The Reformasi of 1998 provided the basis for constitutional reforms and resulted in major changes in the way how the president is elected – the election changed from the indirect elections by the People's Consultative Assembly (MPR) to the direct elections by the people (Surahman, 2024). At the same time, the implementation of democracy involved new constitutional rules that stipulate a requirement for political parties to get at least 20% of parliamentary seats or 25% of votes across the nation in order to nominate presidential candidates. Such a requirement was criticized as an indicator of the oligarchy's role in maintaining the democratic game and preventing talented political leaders who lack political organization from coming to power (Constitution, 2025).

In effect, the 1999–2002 constitutional amendments to the 1945 Constitution redefined the source of presidential legitimacy from parliamentary appointment to a direct popular mandate, yet the accompanying electoral-threshold requirement re-concentrated candidate selection in the hands of party leaderships, thereby limiting the practical reach of this new recruitment channel (Murphy, 2007). In turn, South Korea achieved its milestone in the process of implementing constitutional democracy after adopting a constitutional amendment in 1987 and thus forming the Sixth Republic (Wardah et al., 2025). Article 71 of the Constitution states that the president cannot hold office for longer than five years (Wahyuni, 2024). The presidential recruiting in South Korea shows relatively high professionalism and is based on the strong presence of meritocratic tradition and a political party system where there is a clear emphasis on training political cadres (Ramadani et al., 2025). South Korea experienced major political events in late 2024 when, following the proclamation of martial law by President Yoon Suk Yeol, he was impeached by the National Assembly in December 2024, and consequently, in June 2025 a snap presidential election took place and was won by Lee Jae-myung (Kim, 2024). The 1987 constitutional settlement similarly transformed the source of presidential legitimacy in South Korea, replacing indirect selection with direct popular election and a fixed single term, and it is precisely this constitutional guarantee against indefinite re-election, reinforced by the National Election Commission's independent constitutional standing, that has allowed South Korea's recruitment process to remain comparatively more insulated from incumbency-driven oligarchic capture (Dahl, 1998).

This paper will examine the effectiveness of the recruiting systems in both countries in terms of finding leaders who can meet the standards of integrity and competence. By relying on Robert Michels' concept of the iron law of oligarchy, this paper assumes that political parties are dominated by the political elite whose representatives control political organizations and their decisions (Michels, 1915). At the same time, Pippa Norris highlights that not only constitutional requirements determine the ways how presidents are recruited; rather, such processes also depend on the informal selection of candidates and the gatekeeping role played by the party elite (Norris, 1996). The nomination process itself may be considered to belong to what Pippa Norris calls the secret garden of politics (Gallagher & Marsh, 1988). Recent comparative-institutionalist scholarship reinforces this concern: Indonesia's coalitional presidentialism, produced by the interaction of a directly elected presidency with a highly fragmented, proportionally elected legislature, has been shown to systematically favour elite-brokered candidacies over programmatic competition (Pepinsky, 2025).

The main research questions are the following: How democratic development and constitutional frameworks affected presidential recruiting mechanisms in Indonesia and South Korea? What are the key similarities and differences in the constitutional frameworks governing the recruitment and nomination of

presidential and vice-presidential candidates in Indonesia and South Korea? Both questions research bring to learn in what way do the systems promote governmental stability and ensure that constitutional democracy remains intact. To situate these questions within the relevant scholarship, the following section reviews the theoretical and comparative literature on constitutional democracy, political participation, and candidate-recruitment theory before turning to the study's method.

II. Literature Review

Robert Dahl's foundational account of polyarchy identifies inclusive suffrage, contested elections, and institutionalized channels of popular contestation as the minimum conditions that distinguish a democratic order from its authoritarian alternatives (Dahl, 1971). In a later refinement, Dahl (1998) stresses that democratic legitimacy depends not merely on the existence of elections but on the quality of citizens' effective participation in selecting those who exercise public authority. Murphy (2007) extends this reasoning specifically to constitutional democracies, arguing that a constitution earns its democratic character only when it simultaneously empowers popular sovereignty and constrains the officials who act in its name; a presidency that is popularly elected yet insulated from meaningful competition at the nomination stage therefore represents an incomplete realization of constitutional democracy. This distinction between the formal existence of elections and the substantive openness of the recruitment process that precedes them provides the conceptual anchor for the present study.

Complementing this constitutional perspective, the political participation literature situates elections within a broader repertoire of citizen engagement. Verba and Nie (1987) demonstrate that formal political equality at the ballot box coexists with persistent inequalities in who actually shapes candidate agendas, while Rolfe (2012) shows that turnout itself is embedded in social networks that can either widen or narrow the effective electorate that recruitment processes must answer to. Giugni and Grasso (2022) further note that participation research has increasingly moved beyond voting to examine the informal, elite-mediated arenas — such as party nomination processes — in which the practical boundaries of democratic inclusion are set. These insights suggest that comparing Indonesia and South Korea solely at the level of constitutional text would understate the importance of the informal recruitment arena that this study also investigates.

The theoretical core of the study draws on two complementary bodies of political recruitment theory. Hazan and Rahat (2010) provide a systematic framework for analysing candidate-selection methods along four dimensions — candidacy, the selectorate, decentralization, and the mode of voting or appointment — and demonstrate that the degree of inclusiveness on these dimensions has direct consequences for party democracy and, by extension, for the quality of the candidates who reach executive office. Pippa Norris (1996) similarly argues that legislative and executive recruitment is shaped not only by formal constitutional eligibility rules but also by informal gatekeeping performed by party elites, a process she and other scholars have termed the secret garden of politics (Norris, 1996; Gallagher & Marsh, 1988). Robert Michels' iron law of oligarchy (1915) supplies the study's second theoretical pillar, positing that even organizations founded on democratic principles tend toward oligarchic control as bureaucratic leadership consolidates. Read together, Hazan and Rahat's inclusiveness framework and Michels' oligarchy thesis generate a testable expectation: presidential recruitment systems with more centralized, less inclusive candidate-selection methods should exhibit stronger oligarchic tendencies than systems that permit broader or more competitive access to nomination.

A substantial body of country-specific scholarship documents these dynamics separately in each country. On democratization and constitutional reform in Indonesia, Manurung et al. (2022), Ramadani et al. (2025), and International IDEA (2000) trace the post-Reformasi transition, while Power and Warburton (2021) and, more recently, Pepinsky (2025) and Vikalista et al. (2026) document a subsequent pattern of democratic regression driven by coalitional presidentialism, elite-centred party structures, and the entrenchment of political dynasties despite competitive elections. On South Korea, Wardah et al. (2025) and Jung (2013) analyse the constitutional foundations of the Sixth Republic and the meritocratic political culture that has shaped

candidate recruitment, while Cho (2024) examines how younger cohorts of voters are reshaping the demand side of political engagement. What remains comparatively underexplored, however, is a systematic, theory-driven comparison of how the constitutional and party-based recruitment mechanisms of these two countries jointly produce divergent outcomes for democratic accountability — a gap that this study addresses by applying Hazan and Rahat's (2010) candidate-selection framework and Michels' (1915) oligarchy thesis side by side to Indonesia and South Korea.

III. Research Method

This study follows the qualitative and normative-comparative approach of legal research. The purpose of the research is to analyze similarities and differences in constitutional norms and political practices regarding the presidential recruiting systems in Indonesia and South Korea. Constitutional legal materials include the 1945 Constitution of the Republic of Indonesia, 1987 Constitution of the Republic of Korea, electoral laws, regulations of electoral management bodies, constitutional court decisions, and official electoral provisions of both countries. The analysis will be performed using secondary legal materials in the form of textbooks, articles, and research papers published in reputable academic journals and prepared by institutions like CSIS and NEC. Moreover, the theoretical base will involve Political Recruitment Theory by Pippa Norris, Iron Law of Oligarchy by Robert Michels, and Presidential System Theory. Empirical evidence will be taken from recent studies about the general elections in Indonesia in 2024 and political events in South Korea in 2024-2025.

Secondary legal materials were identified through a purposive, criterion-based search of constitutional texts, electoral statutes, Constitutional Court decisions, and peer-reviewed comparative-politics scholarship published between 1996 and 2026, with priority given to sources directly addressing presidential eligibility, nomination, and recruitment in either country. Materials were included where they satisfied three criteria: (i) direct relevance to constitutional or statutory provisions governing presidential recruitment, (ii) publication in a recognized legal, governmental, or peer-reviewed academic source, and (iii) sufficient recency to reflect post-2024 constitutional developments in both countries, including Indonesia's Constitutional Court Decision Number 62/PUU-XXII/2024 on the presidential threshold and South Korea's 2024–2025 martial law and impeachment crisis. Sources that did not meet these criteria, such as general news commentary without a documented factual basis, were excluded or used only to corroborate dates and procedural facts already established in primary legal materials.

The choice of Political Recruitment Theory (Norris, 1996), the Iron Law of Oligarchy (Michels, 1915), and Hazan and Rahat's (2010) candidate-selection framework — collectively referred to here as Presidential System Theory for the purposes of this study — is justified by their combined capacity to explain both the formal (constitutional) and informal (party-based) dimensions of presidential recruitment identified in the Literature Review. Political Recruitment Theory directs attention to the gatekeeping role of party elites; the Iron Law of Oligarchy supplies a mechanism for why that gatekeeping tends to become self-reinforcing over time; and Hazan and Rahat's framework operationalizes the resulting variation into measurable dimensions — candidacy requirements, the selectorate, decentralization, and voting procedure — that can be applied consistently to both the Indonesian and South Korean cases. No single existing theory addresses all three dimensions simultaneously, which is why a combined theoretical framework, rather than a single theory, was adopted for this comparative analysis.

Analytically, the study proceeds through four sequential procedures. First, constitutional and statutory provisions governing presidential recruitment in Indonesia and South Korea were classified according to Hazan and Rahat's (2010) four dimensions of candidate selection. Second, the classified provisions were compared side by side using a structured comparison matrix, summarized in Tables 1 and 2, to identify convergences and divergences between the two systems. Third, the identified patterns were interpreted through the combined lens of Political Recruitment Theory and the Iron Law of Oligarchy to assess the extent to which each system's recruitment mechanism concentrates or disperses candidate-selection

power. Fourth, to safeguard the validity and reliability of this qualitative-normative analysis, each interpretive claim was cross-checked against at least two independent sources — typically a primary legal text and a peer-reviewed secondary source — and any claim that could not be corroborated in this way was either qualified as tentative or omitted. This study does not introduce a new research method; rather, it applies an established qualitative, normative-comparative legal method, with the comparison matrix described above serving as the study's principal methodological instrument for organizing and cross-referencing legal and political data drawn from both countries.

IV. Result and Discussion

4.1. Democratic development and constitutional frameworks affected presidential recruiting mechanisms in Indonesia and South Korea

a. Democracy

Today, democracy is viewed not as the procedure of choosing political leaders but rather as a value-based system that presupposes popular sovereignty and constrains governmental power. Indonesia and South Korea present two examples of Asian democracies that took complicated paths to achieve constitutional democracy.

b. Development of Democracy in Indonesia

Indonesian democracy can be defined as continuous search for national identity. Beginning with the stage of Parliamentary Democracy (1945-1959), Indonesia attempted to introduce the Western model characterized by vigorous multiparty system. Nevertheless, due to political instability caused by frequent reshuffle of cabinets, the Presidential Decree of 5 July 1959 initiated the period of Guided Democracy (Ramadani et al., 2025). At that time, popular sovereignty was replaced by the central role of the presidency along with strong support of the military and communists. Introduction of New Order regime (1966-1998) and its president, Soeharto, implied the promise of restoring "Pancasila Democracy." However, instead, the new system evolved into bureaucratic authoritarianism with strong control over the process of political participation through consolidating the number of political parties to just three officially recognized ones (Manurung et al., 2022). The events of Reformasi, taking place in 1998, represented a major turning point, leading to the era of democratic reforms. Namely, the amendments to the 1945 Constitution improved the system of separation of powers, granted more freedom to press, and introduced direct presidential elections starting from 2004 (Ramadani et al., 2025).

Based on the literature of the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (International IDEA) and constitutional analysis after the constitutional amendments, one may state that Reformasi represented a milestone for changing Indonesian democracy into a more restricted, electoral and open political order through the adoption of four constitutional amendments in 1999-2002 (International IDEA, 2000). Still, according to the latest studies, current state of Indonesian democracy is still threatened by the issues of corruption, lack of minority protection, use of law to prevent any criticism and illiberal tendencies (Power & Warburton, 2021). Nevertheless, despite these impressive achievements, nowadays Indonesia has to face the issue of democratic regression, meaning the existence of the same democratic institutions that actually lose their essence due to the increasing impact of oligarchy and weakening of supervising agencies (Power & Warburton, 2021).

c. Development of Democracy in South Korea

Democratic processes of South Korea started developing immediately after its independence in 1945; however, further division of Korea and Korean War hindered democratic development. For quite a long period, South Korea experienced authoritarian regime aimed at economic development ("Miracle on the Han River"), namely under Syngman Rhee and then Park Chung-hee. Despite successful economic development,

democratic needs of the population had to experience severe oppression (Ramadani et al., 2025). The apex of South Korean democracy came in June 1987 through mass protests in favor of democratic constitution. As a result, Sixth Republic was proclaimed and new constitution was adopted implying the introduction of direct presidential elections and additional human rights protection (Ramadani et al., 2025). Now, South Korea enjoys peaceful transfer of power between two main political parties, conservative and liberal ones. South Korean democracy is commonly known for its high level of vitality and citizens' participation, and a high level of accountability of its politicians and political leaders ensured by the possibility to initiate impeachment even twice during the last twenty years (Surahman, 2024).

d. Constitution

As Brian Thompson explains "*a constitution is a document which contains the rules for the operation of an organization*" (Thompson, 1997). The constitution cannot be equal to any ordinary legislation since it is adopted by a certain organization enjoying much higher authority. Therefore, in case of conflict between the norms of the constitution and legislation, the latter must always give way to the former. This idea is very similar to the hierarchical principle in law which states that constitution remains the highest norm of the legal order. All other laws remain legal only if there is no contradiction between the lower law and the higher one (Mau & Ditisrama, 2024). In turn, constitutional differences in Indonesia and South Korea provide the ground for various presidential recruitment procedures in both countries.

e. Constitutional Framework in Indonesia

Indonesia is based on the 1945 Constitution of the Republic of Indonesia (UUD 1945) having been modified four times in 1999-2002 (Ramadani et al., 2025). These amendments led to the transformation of the concept of popular sovereignty from the exclusive one of the People's Consultative Assembly (MPR) into the sovereignty regulated by the constitution as stated in Article 1(2) (Noviati, 2013). Presidential eligibility and procedures of their election are regulated by Article 6 and Article 6A of the Indonesian Constitution. The President and Vice President are elected directly by popular vote on one ticket. According to the constitution, the political parties or coalition of political parties have the right to propose the candidate for the post of president before elections. Prior to 2025, the Constitutional Court supported the validity of Article 222 of Law Number 7 of 2017 on General Elections (the Election Law), emphasizing the openness of the presidential threshold. Nevertheless, after the mentioned article of the law has been recognized unconstitutional in 2025 through Constitutional Court Decision Number 62/PUU-XXII/2024, the court's position changed considerably (Antara, 2025).

f. Constitutional Regime in South Korea

The currently operating Constitution of the Republic of Korea (Daehanmingguk Heonbeob) was adopted via a constitutional amendment passed on 29 October 1987. According to the constitutional text, there are 130 articles (Constitution of the Republic of Korea, 1987). An important provision contained in the document is Article 70, which states that the President is to serve one single term, lasting five years, with no chance of re-election (Constitution of the Republic of Korea, 1987). This clause represents a historical response to the tendency of Presidents to prolong their terms. The impeachment procedures established by Indonesia and South Korea incorporate legislative bodies and constitutional courts, but differ in regard to whom makes the final decision. Namely, the impeachment process in Indonesia follows the provisions set forth by the 1945 Constitution, according to which, the DPR submits its opinion with regards to the violation of law by the President and/or Vice President in Articles 7A and 7B(1). The Constitutional Court (MK) decides on the DPR's opinion in Article 24C(2). Finally, in accordance with Articles 7B(5), (6), and (7), the decision concerning dismissal from the office is made by the MPR. Conversely, in South Korea, the procedure is regulated by the Constitution of the Republic of Korea, in which the National Assembly initiates and approves the process of impeachment according to Article 65, and a decision about removal from the office is handed down by the Constitutional Court of Korea, according to Article 111(1). As per Article 113, the final decision must be made

unanimously by at least six constitutional judges, and no approval of another body is required (Constitution of the Republic of Korea, 1987). Thus, the constitution serves as a very efficient mechanism to guarantee executive accountability in case of misconduct.

4.2. The key similarities and differences in the constitutional frameworks governing the recruitment and nomination of presidential and vice-presidential candidates in Indonesia and South Korea

a. Form of State and Governmental Systems

Among different stages of development of states, governmental systems can be classified into two types: monarchical and republican. Monarchy implies a governmental system in which the state power is held by the monarch, who assumes the position by inheritance, and stays in power all his/her life. Different names for the head of the state may vary (king, emperor, emir, shah). The contemporary monarchy exists in Great Britain, Netherlands, Sweden, Malaysia, Saudi Arabia, Jordan, and Thailand. On the other hand, *res publica* refers to the republican form of government. In a republic, the state is managed by the people using the power of the President who is head of the state and head of government elected by the people for a certain period of time in accordance with the constitution (Wolhoff, 1955). In addition to the classification based on the governmental system, states can be also divided according to their form, for example, unitary states, federal states, confederations, and superstates. The form of organization of a state affects the coordination between its institutions and patterns of recruitment into politics. Further in the paper, the organizational form of both Indonesia and South Korea is analyzed.

Table 1. Organizational Structure of Indonesia and South Korea

Characteristic	Indonesia	South Korea
Form of State	Unitary State (Republic of Indonesia)	Unitary State
System of Government	Presidential System	Strong Presidential System
Executive Branch	President and Vice President	President and Prime Minister
Legislative Branch	Bicameral (House of Representatives/DPR and Regional Representative Council/DPD)	Unicameral (National Assembly)
Term of Office	5 Years (Maximum of Two Terms)	5 Years (Single Term Only)

Source: (Ramadani et al., 2025); (Constitution of the Republic of Korea, 1987).

Indonesia is known to operate a presidential form of government, in which power is more equally distributed after the amendments to the constitution. In particular, the President has all rights to appoint the cabinet on a discretionary basis; nevertheless, the DPR must give consent to strategic policies and important nominations to various posts (Noviati, 2013). These conditions make Indonesian presidents tend to create wide governing coalitions, which in turn affects recruitment of political parties' presidential candidates. South Korea has traditionally been viewed as a presidential system with parliamentary characteristics. The head of the state and the head of the government is the President, and he/she works together with the Prime Minister appointed by the President with the consent of the National Assembly (Wardah et al., 2025). In this regard, the involvement of the Prime Minister helps to have more flexibility in bureaucratic matters. Moreover, as the President can serve one term only, he/she will be more inclined to pursue his/her political agenda quickly, since he/she is not worried about getting re-elected. However, at the same time, it can result in presidents becoming "lame ducks" at the end of their term when their power is weakened (*The Last Will and Testament of a Lame Duck*, 2014).

b. Inter-Institutional Relations in States

The relationship of different state institutions is aimed at maintaining control over power in order to ensure balance.

1) In Indonesia

The new constitution adopted after amendments establishes institutional relations based on the principle of checks and balances and equality of the state institutions at the same hierarchical level. The President holds executive power, the DPR conducts legislature, and MK plays the role of the guarantor of the constitution as the body deciding upon legislative review, settling conflicts between powers of state institutions, resolving electoral disputes, and ruling upon presidential impeachment (Articles 4, 20, and 24C of the 1945 Constitution of the Republic of Indonesia). In practice, due to the fact that Indonesia operates a presidential system in a multi-party setting, in which the President creates a coalition of parliamentary factions for governing stability and efficiency, there is more likelihood of executive-legislative cooperation rather than confrontation. It makes the effectiveness of checks and balances much weaker when the ruling majority dominates the DPR (Isra, 2010). Also, this factor affects the way the candidates are recruited in the presidential election because those presidents, who managed to create a coalition in parliament, have more chances for receiving necessary support (Haris, 2014).

2) In South Korea

State institution relations in South Korea are based on the principle of separation of powers, where the President is the chief executive, the National Assembly is the legislative organ, and the Constitutional Court acts as the constitutional control body together with the judiciary. Such a division of power puts the President in the position of a strong administrator while retaining checks and balances via parliamentary legislative and control powers, the competence of the Constitutional Court for reviewing constitutionality of state action, and the possibility to initiate impeachment procedure in the Constitutional Court on the basis of resolution of the National Assembly (Constitution of the Republic of Korea, arts. 40, 61, 65, and 111). In addition, another significant factor is the National Election Commission, an independent constitutional institution that ensures neutrality of the political administration process as well as prevents dominance of any branch of power over it (National Election Commission of the Republic of Korea, 2020). In practice, state relations between the President and the National Assembly depend on the political alignment of the legislature. In case the President fails to obtain a parliamentary majority, political and legislative deadlocks may occur in a situation of divided government (Yun, 2014). The relations among the state institutions in South Korea are built on an administratively formalized basis and are guided by the clearly codified procedure. For example, the National Election Commission acts as an independent constitutional institution on equal footing with other organs of power charged with organizing impartially and responsibility elections, managing political parties, and ensuring appropriate political finances. In this way, the example indicates that South Korean political administration operates on the basis of a clearly stated and documented mechanism (Noviati, 2013).

c. Presidential and Vice-Presidential Recruitment and Election Systems

The recruitment process of national leaders forms the essence of constitutional democracy. The following analysis highlights some similarities and differences in translating political theories into practices.

1) The Role of Political Parties

Political parties form a gateway to the executive power. In Indonesia, the recruitment function of political parties is determined by the Political Parties Law; however, the practice of recruitment in political parties is highly centralized. Presidential nominations in Indonesia are usually taken care of by political parties' chairpersons (Jefri K, 2023). The issue is related to the theory of Robert Michels who claims that "*democracy leads to oligarchy, and necessarily contains an oligarchical nucleus*" (Michels, 1915). Hence, political parties and other democratic organizations become oligarchically governed. In addition, political parties in Indonesia are inclined towards the popularity-based recruitment such as including celebrities and businessmen in their leadership bodies rather than ideological cadre recruitment (Jefri K, 2023).

On the contrary, political parties in South Korea act in a rather institutionalized environment, supported by strict rules regulating party formation, political funding, and electoral oversight performed by the National Election Commission (Political Parties Act, 2018). Moreover, South Korean elections promote competitiveness, transparency, and close monitoring of media resources and Internet activities of political actors in order to ensure objectivity in the political process (Public Official Election Act, 2024). Besides, political financing is strictly controlled as per Political Funds Act with requirements to disclose political fund usage (Political Funds Act, 2018). The wide usage of digital media and Internet monitoring allows the citizens to observe more carefully the political process and check candidates' backgrounds (Public Official Election Act, 2024).

2) Presidential Nomination Requirements

There are notable differences regarding thresholds of presidential nominations in South Korea and Indonesia.

Table 2. Presidential Candidacy Requirements in Indonesia and South Korea

Eligibility Requirement	Indonesia	South Korea
Independent Candidacy	Not Permitted	Permitted (subject to voter support requirements)
Minimum Age	40 Years (or having previously held an elected office)	40 Years
Citizenship	Indonesian citizen by birth and has never acquired foreign citizenship	Citizen of the Republic of Korea

Source: (*The 1945 Constitution of the Republic of Indonesia, Articles 6 and 6A; Law No. 7 of 2017 on General Elections; Constitutional Court Decision No. 90/PUU-XXI/2023; Constitution of the Republic of Korea, 1987; Public Official Election Act, 2024*).

According to the Public Official Election Act, the candidates to president office in South Korea can be nominated not only by political parties but also individually as long as they meet constitutional requirements, for example, age and electorate thresholds (Public Official Election Act, 2024). It creates a more open and competitive political market.

d. Political Financing and Election Campaigns

Money becomes the fuel of politics, however, if it is not properly controlled, it undermines democracy. One of the most acute issues in Indonesia is the problem of expensive politics. Critics say that in Indonesia political campaigns contribute to the creation of political dependence on major donors and economic oligarchs leading to a mutually beneficial relationship between political leaders and their financial supporters upon taking office (Winters, 2011). There are certain rules regarding financial reports during the campaign, yet enforcement remains disputable. On the contrary, South Korea has rather strict rules of political financing. Political parties in South Korea are granted state subsidies while all political contributions and expenditures must be reported (Political Funds Act, 2018). Donations of amounts over certain threshold must be made in a traceable way using checks, credit card, and bank transfer. Violation of these regulations leads to severe sanctions including annulment of the election results, criminal charges, and disqualification from political activities, thus making the recruitment process more democratic (*Public Official Election Act, 2024*).

Besides, strict control of the political process is provided by rules regulating political financing. In accordance with Political Funds Act, all political expenses should be accounted and disclosed, and no political funds may be used under fictitious identity of donors (Political Funds Act, 2018). Thus, the mentioned measures provide for preservation of democratic character of political processes, minimization of opportunities to manipulate the political process, and reduction of informality of political relations not justified from the legal point of view (Political Funds Act, 2018). Finally, South Korea maintains strong

administrative control by passing Improper Solicitation and Graft Act, otherwise known as Kim Young-ran Act, which prohibits giving gifts, entertainment and other inappropriate solicitations to public officials, journalists, and educators (Improper Solicitation and Graft Act, n.d.). Hence, the discussed regulation helps to maintain neutrality of the public institutions and avoid influence of informal relations in the process of decision-making. Thus, the discussed administrative governance system prioritizes procedural aspects of relations between the state institutions.

e. The Impact of Political Culture and History

There is much evidence that political culture has great importance in the formation of non-formal rules regarding political recruitment. For instance, Indonesia's political culture is profoundly paternalistic. Indonesian politicians are often described as the father or mother of the country. Patron-client relations play a much more significant role than any policy program or platform. The legacy of the authoritarian regime in the past also implies that avoidance of conflict is highly valued in the country. As a result, political recruitment in Indonesia occurs largely based on elite consensus (Ramadani et al., 2025). South Korea has a Confucian heritage in terms of social hierarchy and respect for authority. Nevertheless, in democratic contexts, Confucian values transformed into a strong culture of meritocracy through competitive education and administrative recruitment systems (Jung, 2013). Moreover, the political culture of South Korea became critical and participatory after years of struggling against military autocracy in the 1970s and 1980s. The new generation of politicians influenced strongly the dynamics of political recruitment and political preferences of the South Korean electorate (Cho, 2024).

f. Electoral System and Voting Procedures

In case a candidate does not receive more than 50% of votes under a required geographical distribution of votes, Indonesia uses a two-round voting system. Nevertheless, in the 2024 presidential election in Indonesia, the tickets consisting of Prabowo Subianto and his son Gibran Rakabuming Raka won already in the first round. On the contrary, in South Korea, the single round of voting takes place through which a candidate receiving the greatest number of votes is immediately elected as the president. Despite simplicity and low costliness of such an electoral procedure, there is a chance that the person winning an election will not represent an absolute majority of voters.

g. Election Management Body Role in Promoting Recruitment Integrity

According to the legislation in Indonesia, election processes are organized by the General Election Commission (KPU). However, the Election Supervisory Agency (Bawaslu) performs tasks of preventing and correcting electoral violations as well as solving disputes related to election processes. This fact highlights that electoral oversight plays a much more important role than simply a complementary one in maintaining electoral integrity. Moreover, in Indonesia, the Constitutional Court decides the issues related to disputed results of the presidential and vice-presidential elections. Therefore, in terms of structure, Indonesia's electoral institutional design can be considered fairly solid, including an electoral organizer, an electoral oversight agency, and a constitutional judge of elections. Challenges remain associated with maintenance of organizational independence and integrity, sufficient expertise, and high levels of public confidence (Bawaslu, 2026).

This challenge is corroborated by recent Indonesian survey-based research: public trust in the KPU's handling of the 2024 presidential election was found to be comparatively low even though perceptions of its procedural performance were more favourable (Novalia et al., 2024), while persistent problems of duplicate voter registration continue to complicate the Commission's ability to guarantee electoral fairness (Sitanggang & Sinaga, 2025). It should be highlighted that a key difference in terms of electoral institutional design in Indonesia and South Korea concerns the constitutional foundation of an election management body. Namely, in South Korea, the Constitution of the Republic of Korea establishes a National Election Commission as an independent constitutionally-mandated body that has the same constitutional standing as other main

government agencies (Constitution of the Republic of Korea, 1987). South Korea's NEC performs various functions of election administration, management and regulation of political parties and funding, and monitoring of political campaigns and dissemination of information about them (National Election Commission of the Republic of Korea, 2020). Meanwhile, Article 22E, paragraph (5) of the 1945 Constitution of Indonesia stipulates merely the existence of "an" election commission as a national permanent and independent agency. Thus, there is a difference in how the constitutional standing of election management is recognized in Indonesia compared to South Korea.

h. Disputes Prevention and Resolution Procedures

One major difference between electoral oversight mechanisms and dispute resolution procedures in Indonesia is that both are performed separately. Namely, the task of preventing electoral violations belongs to the Election Supervisory Agency. As for the election results disputes, in Indonesia, these cases are solved by the Constitutional Court. According to the Election Law, presidential election disputes can be submitted to the Constitutional Court no later than three times twenty-four hours after the official release of the election results by KPU. The reason for such a short period is to provide prompt and efficient dispute resolution due to the importance of presidential election disputes as constitutional ones. The principle of constitutional democracy suggests that in such circumstances, only law-based mechanisms can be used in order to resolve election disputes (Bawaslu, 2026). In South Korea, disputes of election results cannot be taken to the Constitutional Court but to the Supreme Court under the Public Official Election Act. Constitutional disputes related to the presidency continue to be decided by the Constitutional Court. It is worth noting that during the 2024-2025 political crisis, the Constitutional Court was involved in the proceedings on impeachment of President Yoon, while the election of a new president took place within the constitutional timeframe set. At the same time, the period available for parties to appeal an election result is much longer in South Korea (thirty days) than in Indonesia (three times twenty-four hours). Therefore, the election processes in South Korea can be considered to allow more extensive preparation for disputing and presenting evidence to support arguments (*Public Official Election Act*, 2024).

i. Electoral Systems vs. Executive Stability

Indonesia holds its presidential election in accordance with the principle of direct vote within a multi-party system and may use a two-round electoral mechanism where appropriate. There exist certain advantages and disadvantages connected to this model. In particular, a two-round mechanism increases the legitimacy of the president by guaranteeing that the victor enjoys a majority of support in the last round of elections. On the other hand, in a fragmented party system, nomination and coalition-building serve as arenas for elite bargains. Under the presidential nomination threshold, which was abolished recently by the Constitutional Court, government stability depended on making the process of nomination simple by forming a broad coalition of supporters prior to the nomination stage. Thus, in many cases, government stability was achieved at the expense of narrowing the list of possible nominees to choose from. In view of the recent Constitutional Court decision of 2025, the challenge facing Indonesia is to maintain open presidential nomination while avoiding excessive fragmentation that might make presidential rule inefficient (Mahkamah Konstitusi RI, 2025; Mau, 2025).

In South Korea, the electoral system is characterized by simplicity as it comprises a one-round presidential election without the vice-presidency position. This enables the rapid change of presidents and allows filling the vacancy of a presidential office within sixty days if needed (Constitution of the Republic of Korea, 1987, Article 68(2)). Yet, unlike in a two-round majority voting, the probability of getting into power of presidents who win without an absolute majority becomes greater. Considering that South Korean society faces high polarization and relatively weak institutionalization of the party system, such presidents may enjoy less legitimacy upon taking up their responsibilities. Furthermore, the ban on consecutive presidential terms decreases the risk of personal power abuse; however, it also contributes to making a president lame-duck because he/she cannot be elected once again (Constitution of the Republic of Korea, 1987, Article 72(1)).

Hence, South Korea is relatively successful in achieving simplicity and procedural efficiency, whereas it is prone to some challenges related to minority presidencies and political polarization.

4.3. Discussion: Findings in Light of Theory and Prior Comparative Studies

The findings presented in Sections 4.1 and 4.2 can now be interpreted through the combined lens of Hazan and Rahat's (2010) candidate-selection framework, Norris' (1996) Political Recruitment Theory, and Michels' (1915) Iron Law of Oligarchy introduced in the Literature Review.

a. Theoretical Analysis: Oligarchy and Political Recruitment

For the analysis of the two countries in question, two key theories will be considered. Robert Michels' Iron Law of Oligarchy suggests that even democratic organizations become oligarchical, i.e., the decision-making processes in them are controlled by a small group of people. In the case of Indonesia, the oligarchy is represented in highly centralized procedures for recruiting presidential nominees as the relevant decisions are made by the chairpersons of respective parties. Although South Korea still struggles with oligarchic tendencies as a challenge, their impact is somewhat limited owing to strict legal rules concerning party organization and political funding regulated by the National Election Commission (NEC) (Michels, 1915). This finding is consistent with recent Indonesian scholarship: Vikalista et al. (2026) similarly document that elite-centred, family- and network-based recruitment continues to override merit-based candidate selection more than two decades after the Reformasi reforms, while Pepinsky (2025) shows that Indonesia's combination of a directly elected presidency with a fragmented, proportionally elected legislature structurally rewards large, elite-controlled coalitions over programmatically distinct candidates. The present findings extend rather than contradict these studies by tracing the mechanism directly to the constitutional and statutory design of the nomination process itself, rather than to political culture alone.

Pippa Norris' theory of political recruitment implies that recruitment into political positions depends not only on formal constitutional rules but also on informal procedures. As per Pippa Norris, political recruitment takes place in "the secret garden of politics", which does not permit outsiders (Norris, 1996; Gallagher & Marsh, 1988). According to the analysis conducted, "the secret garden of politics" is still predominant in Indonesia due to elite consensus and secret political negotiations. Unlike Indonesia, South Korea takes measures to make the arena of political recruitment more open, among others allowing independent presidential candidacy. In terms of Hazan and Rahat's (2010) four dimensions, Indonesia's recruitment system scores toward the centralized, exclusive end of the spectrum — candidacy is restricted to party or coalition nominees, and the selectorate is effectively the small circle of party chairpersons — whereas South Korea's system, by permitting independent candidacy and imposing a strict single-term limit, scores toward the more inclusive, decentralized end. This confirms the theoretical expectation set out in the Literature Review that lower inclusiveness in candidate selection correlates with stronger oligarchic tendencies, and it suggests that Hazan and Rahat's framework, developed primarily from European party systems, travels reasonably well to presidential recruitment in these two Asian constitutional democracies. Consequently, the recommendations proposed in the Conclusion are not merely administrative adjustments: democratizing internal party recruitment and permitting independent candidacy would shift Indonesia's position on Hazan and Rahat's inclusiveness scale, with plausible downstream effects on executive accountability, the competitiveness of future presidential elections, and the long-term legitimacy of Indonesia's constitutional democracy.

V. Conclusion

Democratic development in both Indonesia and South Korea has fundamentally shifted presidential recruitment from authoritarian control to direct popular elections, though their constitutional frameworks have evolved to address different challenges. In Indonesia, the Reformasi era ended indirect elections by the

MPR, yet the current framework remains influenced by oligarchic tendencies and highly centralized party leadership that often prioritizes elite consensus over ideological merit. Conversely, South Korea's democratic transition in 1987 established a framework focused on preventing long-term power abuse through a strict single-term limit and a meritocratic political culture. Ultimately, while democratic progress has empowered voters in both nations, Indonesia's mechanism continues to struggle with elite-driven "secret garden" politics, whereas South Korea has institutionalized more professionalized and accountable recruitment processes.

While Indonesia and South Korea share similarities as unitary states with presidential systems and a minimum candidate age of 40, their specific constitutional mechanisms for nomination and election differ significantly. Indonesia requires candidates to be nominated in pairs (President and Vice-President) exclusively by political parties or coalitions, often utilizing a two-round voting system to ensure majority legitimacy. In contrast, South Korea allows for independent candidacy, operates without a Vice-President (utilizing an appointed Prime Minister instead), and employs a single-round plurality system for efficiency. Furthermore, South Korea maintains a more robust institutional oversight through the National Election Commission, which holds a higher constitutional standing compared to Indonesia's electoral management bodies, ensuring stricter control over political financing and recruitment integrity.

To strengthen Indonesia's presidential recruitment system based on the provided comparative analysis, the following suggestions are offered:

- a. Democratize Internal Party Recruitment: Indonesia should move away from highly centralized recruitment where chairpersons hold exclusive power and instead adopt more transparent, merit-based cadre systems to eliminate the "secret garden" of elite-driven politics.
- b. Allow Independent Candidacy: Following South Korea's model, Indonesia could consider permitting independent candidates to run for president, which would create a more open and competitive political market and reduce the dominance of established party elites.
- c. Strengthen the Constitutional Standing of Electoral Bodies: Indonesia should elevate the constitutional status of its election management bodies (KPU and Bawaslu) to match the independence and authority of South Korea's National Election Commission, ensuring greater neutrality and institutional integrity.
- d. Reform Political Financing: Implementing stricter, traceable political funding rules, including mandatory reporting of all donations and severe sanctions for violations, is essential to curb the influence of economic oligarchs and reduce the burden of "expensive politics".
- e. Institutionalize Anti-Graft Measures: Adopting rigorous anti-solicitation laws similar to South Korea's "Kim Young-ran Act" during recruitment and campaigns can help maintain the neutrality of public institutions and prevent informal influence in decision-making.
- f. Balance Openness with Efficiency: Following the abolition of the presidential threshold, Indonesia must develop mechanisms to maintain open nominations while preventing excessive political fragmentation that could lead to executive instability.

Future research could build on these findings in at least three directions. First, systematic empirical measurement of Hazan and Rahat's (2010) four candidate-selection dimensions across a larger sample of Asian presidential and semi-presidential systems would test whether the Indonesia–South Korea contrast identified here generalizes beyond these two cases. Second, comparative research combining constitutional analysis with intra-party survey or interview data could clarify how party chairpersons in Indonesia actually exercise gatekeeping discretion in practice, complementing the doctrinal analysis undertaken in this study. Third, given the rapid pace of institutional change in both countries — including Indonesia's 2025 Constitutional Court decisions on the presidential threshold and South Korea's 2024–2025 martial law and impeachment crisis — longitudinal research tracking the recruitment consequences of these events over subsequent electoral cycles would help determine whether the patterns identified here are transitional or durable features of each country's constitutional democracy.

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