

The Institutionalization Paradox Of Political Parties: A Case Study Of Golkar (2020-2024)

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ABSTRACT

The issue of political party governance is intriguing to study in depth and holistically, especially from an academic perspective, specifically examining the governance of the Golkar party in North Sumatra when led by Musa Rajekshah, which is aligned with the transformation of the new Golkar paradigm, positioning Golkar as a modern political party that is program-oriented and problem-solving oriented. This study aims to analyse the institutionalization of the Party in North Sumatra for the period 2020-2024. This research employs a descriptive qualitative research design using a case study method. Understanding the chronological sequence of events, the data obtained were analysed based on the Political Party Institutionalization theory of Vicky Randall and Lars Svasand, as well as neo-institutional theory. Based on the findings and analysis, it shows that the Party for the period 2020-2024 has a well-described level of institutionalization, referring to the process by which a political party becomes stable, independent, and has strong roots both internally and externally in society, making it an institution that operates based on clear rules and ideology. Thus, the writer concludes that the victory of Golkar Party in North Sumatra during the 2024 Legislative Election was due to the implementation of good party institutionalization, strengthened by the "personalistic party" of Musa Rajekshah's popularity, who has a large support base in North Sumatra.

Keywords: paradox, political party, Golkar

I. INTRODUCTION

Political parties and the governance of the party system are two distinct concepts. The study of political party institutions began in the early 20th century, pioneered by scholars such as Ostrogorsky (1902), Michels (1911), Duverger (1951), and Neumann (1956). Subsequently, several behavioralist scholars, such as LaPalombara and Weiner, specifically examined the relationship between parties and political development; they articulated these ideas in their book entitled *Political Parties and Political Development*. Later, Sartori contributed with his book *Parties and Party Systems: A Framework for Analysis* (1976).

Etymologically, the word "party" originates from the Latin term *partire*, which means to divide. Initially, the presence of parties in political life was often viewed negatively by society. The poor image of political parties is inseparable from the various attitudes and actions they have displayed before the public over time. This aligns with the view of Robespierre, an orator and agitator of the French Revolution, who regarded "parties as merely organizations that prioritize the interests of their leaders."

A political party is a group of people within the same organization who share common principles, goals, and a vision-mission to achieve collective interests. In the Indonesian political system, political parties play a crucial role in the democratic process (Miriam Budiardjo, 2008). Currently, political parties exist at a crossroads of paradoxical conditions, where public trust continues to decline. This presents a stark contrast when

compared to the early reform era, where public trust (in political parties) was relatively high. Based on the assumption that the performance of political parties has not improved, internal party fragmentation, and alleged involvement in corruption cases, the public tends to view political parties negatively.

According to a survey by *Indikator Politik Indonesia*, public trust in political parties is low; out of 12 institutions, political parties rank at the bottom with a trust level of 54% ([Kompas.com](https://www.kompas.com), 03/04/2022). Based on this survey, the functions of political parties—including cadre recruitment, socialization, political education, and practical political aggregation—cannot be carried out effectively. It is unsurprising, then, that negative assessments have emerged, suggesting that the presence of Indonesian political parties today is more of a burden than a bridge between the people and the government. The quality of political parties is strongly correlated with governance processes. This underscores the importance of analysing the governance of political party institutionalization as part of efforts to ensure that democracy is filled with quality political parties (Randall and Svasand, 2002). Huntington, as cited in Pamungkas (2011), states that institutionalization is the process by which organizations and procedures gain stability. Randall and Svasand (2002) define institutionalization as the process by which a party becomes stable, both in terms of integrated behavioural patterns and in terms of attitudes and culture. The institutionalization of political parties correlates with making political parties adaptive to changes in the political system, enabling them to compete, survive, and gain significant support or sympathy from the public (Romli, 2008).

The principles of good governance apply not only to government but also serve as a crucial internal foundation for modern political parties to function effectively, accountably, and professionally within a democratic system. The relationship between governance and modern political parties is intertwined. Political parties that neglect good governance risk becoming less effective, losing public trust, and failing to fulfil their role as guardians of democracy. As Samuel Huntington stated, strong and institutionalized political parties promise better democratic development (Huntington, 1968).

The objective of this research is to analyse the issue of political party governance in a deep, holistic, and academic manner: specifically, how the party in North Sumatra was governed when led by Musa Rajekshah from 2020 to 2024, aligned with Golkar's new paradigm transformation. This transformation positions Golkar as a modern political party oriented towards programs (program-oriented) and problem-solving, shifting away from the old Golkar paradigm as "the regime party," which merely functioned as an electoral machine or a political tool to legitimize power.

II. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Some theories used are:

a. Theory of Political Party Institutionalization

Vicky Randall and Lars Svasand (2002) explain that political party institutionalization is the process of establishing a political party both structurally, in terms of patterning behaviour, and culturally, in terms of patterning attitudes and culture: "the process by which the party become established in terms of both integrated patterns of behaviour and of attitude and culture" (Ridha, 2016). This institutionalization process is divided into two aspects: the internal-external aspect and the structural-cultural aspect. When these two aspects are cross-referenced, they produce four cells, namely:

- a. The degree of less system, as a result of cross-referencing the internal aspect with the structural aspect.
- b. The degree of value infusion, as a result of cross-referencing the internal aspect with the cultural aspect.
- c. The degree of decisional autonomy, as a result of cross-referencing the external aspect with the structural aspect.
- d. The degree of reification (public image), as a result of cross-referencing the external aspect with the cultural aspect (Ridha, 2016).

Political party institutionalization encompasses two dimensions: internal-external and structural-attitudinal (Suryana et al., 2020). Randall and Svasand (2002) simplify this into a unity of interrelated variables. This institutionalization process is divided into two aspects: the internal-external aspect and the structural-cultural aspect. When these two aspects are cross-referenced, they produce four institutionalization outcomes:

- a. The degree of less system.
- b. The degree of value infusion.
- c. The degree of decisional autonomy.
- d. The degree of reification (public image) (Ridha, 2017).

In the internal aspect, there are two main indicators: lack of system and value infusion. Lack of system reflects the extent to which the party's structure has been formed in a stable and permanent manner, such as the existence of internal rules, cadre recruitment mechanisms, and an organizational structure that operates consistently. Meanwhile, value infusion describes the level of internalization of the party's values and norms by its members. When each member of group feels an ideological bond and commitment to the party's goals, rather than merely using the party as a pragmatic political vehicle, then institutionalization from this perspective can be considered successful. From the external perspective, it encompasses at least two indicators: decisional autonomy and reification. Decisional autonomy refers to the party's ability to maintain independence in decision-making without pressure or intervention from external actors such as the government, capital owners, or other interest groups. Meanwhile, reification relates to how the party is perceived by the public as a legitimate, important, and irreplaceable institution within the political system. When the party has become an integral part of democracy and has gained legitimacy from society, then external institutionalization can be said to have been achieved. This means that leadership elections, internal decisions, and the determination of internal policy directions must reflect existing democratic values. Consequently, when a party in its internal aspect does not demonstrate democratic values, then that party cannot yet be called an institutionalized political party (Ridha, 2017).

b. Theory of Neo-Institutional

Samuel Huntington was the first scholar to attempt to conceptualize "institutionalization" and extend it to political parties. He defined institutionalization as "the process by which organizations and procedures acquire value and stability" (Huntington, 1968). Angelo Panebianco (1988) further elaborated on this definition and viewed party institutionalization as the way an organization "solidifies," that is, as "the process by which the organization's followers develop an interest in its survival." While Panebianco and Huntington concentrated on internal party processes, Kenneth Janda incorporated an "external" component, defining an institutionalized party as "a party that is reified in the public mind so that the 'party' exists as a social organization apart from its momentary leaders, and this organization demonstrates recurring patterns of behaviour valued by those who identify with it" (Janda, 1980).

Neo-institutional theory serves as a holistic framework for understanding organizational change in the public sector. This research explores the relationship between institutional pressures and changes in public organizations, explaining how institutional change occurs in response to internal and external pressures (Greenwood et al., 2011). For instance, institutional change occurs in response to exogenous forces (such as shifts in political power) as well as endogenous forces like changes in norms and organizational values (Calvert, 2017). Furthermore, neo-institutional theory is also influenced by the role of isomorphism and stability in shaping organizational behaviour. Isomorphism refers to the tendency of organizations to adopt similar structures and practices in order to conform to institutional pressures and achieve legitimacy (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983).

Neo-institutional theory reinforces stability and encourages homogeneity within a particular organizational population or field. However, neo-institutional theory also acknowledges the potential for institutional change to disrupt stability and encourage heterogeneity, as organizations seek to adapt and respond to changing environmental conditions (Scott, 2014). Neo-institutionalism is a theoretical perspective in sociology and organizational studies that focuses on the influence of institutions (laws, norms, and regulations) in shaping organizational behaviour and structure. This perspective affects how organizations function and adapt within the broader societal context. However, the successful application of neo-institutionalism in practice depends on several factors, including organizational type, environment, organizational culture, leadership, management, organizational goals, and geographical context. The relevance of neo-institutionalism varies based on geographical and cultural differences in the level of institutional pressure. Organizations in more stable and institutionalized environments tend to be more compliant with institutional norms and practices. Conversely, organizations in dynamic environments tend to have greater flexibility in their compliance with institutional pressures. Organizational culture and leadership play a significant role in determining the optimal application of neo-institutionalism. Some organizations may resist institutional pressures and maintain their unique identity and practices, while others may conform more readily. Thus, the effectiveness of applying neo-institutionalism depends on the knowledge, skills, and commitment of an organization's leadership and management in navigating institutional pressures.

METHOD

This research employs a qualitative descriptive design using a case study method. The uniqueness of this research lies in the anomaly of Musa Rajekshah's success in leading the Golkar Party of North Sumatra from 2020 to 2024, rebounding to become the winning party in the 2024 legislative elections, yet this did not lead the Central Executive Board of the Party to grant him an extension of his leadership in North Sumatra. Based on this contextual analysis, the author is interested in uncovering the reality behind this phenomenon as a complete and detailed entity. Using a case study paradigm, this research analyses its strategy holistically and adaptively in response to political dynamics to maintain its dominance and existence in North Sumatra in 2024. The data were analysed using the Miles and Huberman development model.

III. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

One of the oldest and most deeply rooted political parties, reaching down to the village level, is the Golongan Karya Party (Golkar). The Party is currently undergoing a new paradigm transformation, as seen on its portal. This transformation contains the main points of doctrine, vision, mission, and political platform. It encompasses aspects of continuous

renewal, implemented through changes in the institutional structure. This paradigm renewal aims to strengthen the Party with the ideology of Pancasila and the doctrine of work/achievement, in order to realize an independent, democratic, strong, solid, deeply rooted, and responsive Party. This new paradigm positions Golkar as a modern political party oriented towards programs and problem-solving, no longer positioning it as the "regime party" as in the old paradigm (Akbar Tanjung, 2008).

This paradigm renewal was also driven by internal pressure within the Party itself, aligned with the fourth point of the *Golongan Karya Panca Bhakti* Pledge. Institutional renewal steps are realized based on the principle of sovereignty being in the hands of internal members. This means that organizational decision-making mechanisms are carried out more openly, democratically, from the bottom up, without interference from outside parties or any group. Through this democratic mechanism, opportunities open up for potential members to lead the party. This implication makes the Party more modern and independent, and realizing the principle of sovereignty in the hands of members is one of the main principles of a modern, democratic, and deeply rooted party.

The Party has a vision to strive for the realization of a new, advanced, modern, united, peaceful, just, and prosperous Indonesia, with a society that is faithful and pious, of good character, upholds human rights, loves the homeland, is democratic, and just within the order of a civil society that is independent, open, egalitarian, aware of law and the environment, masters science and technology, possesses a work ethic and a spirit of *karya*, as well as high discipline. This vision is the Party's determination to create a democratic national political life through the implementation of political reform agendas directed at making a series of planned, institutionalized, and continuous corrections to all areas of life.

Based on the theory of political party institutionalization: first, based on lack of system, since being entrusted to lead Golkar in North Sumatra on November 7, 2020, Musa Rajekshah (Ijeck) is considered relatively successful in applying governance party for the 2020-2024 period. This is evident from the absence of internal conflicts emerging publicly and the tendency for members' accommodation to be fulfilled. In terms of internal democracy, he claims to have accommodated 200 members within the party, which is the largest management in the history of Golkar party leadership in North Sumatra. (<https://waspada.co.id/ijeck-bantah-golkar-sumut-dalam-kondisi-darurat>).

Second, based on the degree of value infusion, the author concludes that Ijeck is considered relatively successful in bringing an image of stability, consolidation, and in strengthening the emotions and articulation of political representation among young people to enhance the party's success. This is evidenced by a drastic increase in members: in 2017, the number of its members was 44,407; by 2023, this had grown to 241,273 members recorded as part of the internal membership of Party in North Sumatra. In percentage terms, this represents an increase of approximately 500%. The percentage increase in internal members is dominated by young faces, aligned with the representation of the demographic bonus. According to data from the Badan Pusat Statistik (BPS) for 2024, the percentage of youth (aged 16-30 years) in North Sumatra is estimated to be around 23% to 25% of the total population (BPS, 2024). (https://medanbisnisdaily.com/news/online/read/2026/01/03/196213/dpp_golkar_dinilai_salah_langkah_jegal_karier_politik_ijeck_di_sumut_suara_bisa_terjun_bebas/)

Third, based on the degree of decisional autonomy, the author concludes that Ijeck is considered relatively successful in implementing autonomy, emphasizing the aspect of relations between the party and actors outside the party, whether sources of authority such as

rulers or the government, or sources of funding such as businessman, rulers, the state, or other external institutions, as well as sources of mass support such as community organizations. In this context, the Golkar Party of North Sumatra is a solid political party supported by President of Indonesia; Prabowo and Gibran, collaborating with Gerindra Party, Partai Amanat Nasional Party, Demokrat Party, Bulan Bintang Party, and Gelora Party, under the designation of KIM Plus in North Sumatra.

(<https://www.cnnindonesia.com/nasional/20240827012643-617-1137790/bobby-nasution-klaim-dukungan-kim-plus-solid-di-pilgub-sumut-2024>).

(<https://www.liputan6.com/regional/read/4979303/musa-rajekshah-siap-rajut-silaturahmi-kib-di-sumut>).

Fourth, based on the degree of reification or the degree of public knowledge about a political party, which refers to the question of whether the existence of the political party has been embedded in the public imagination (Susanto, 2018). Based on the degree of reification, Ijeck is considered relatively successful in leading the party; he succeeded in building his involvement in politics not merely for power. He made politics a *wasilah* or means to spread goodness and expand benefit.

(Source: <https://www.agiodeli.id/2025/06/bang-ijeck-sosok-pemimpin-yang.html>).

The degree of reification is also strengthened by the popularity of him, who has a large support base in North Sumatra, indirectly becoming a competitive advantage for the Party in North Sumatra. As of January 2026, he still holds several important positions outside the political party structure, including in community organizations, sports, and social organizations. Some of these other positions include:

- a. The Chairman of the Regional Leadership Council of Pemuda Pancasila for North Sumatra Province, for the 2022–2027 period.
- b. The Chairman of the Indonesian Red Cross for Medan City, for the 2024–2029 period.
- c. The Chairman of the Provincial Board of the Indonesian Motor Association for North Sumatra Province, for the 2021–2025 period.
- d. The Chairman of the Indonesian Taekwondo Association for North Sumatra Province, for the 2021–2025 period.
- e. Advisor to the Regional Executive Board of the Communication Body for Indonesian Mosque Youth for North Sumatra Province.
- f. The Chairman of the Indonesian Hajj Fraternity Association for North Sumatra Province, for the 2025–2030 period.

The institutionalization dimension shows the extent to which a party is considered a 'lasting force' or an 'established party' by other parties and relevant political actors. Analysing based on this theory, it serves as a holistic framework for understanding the organization of the Golkar Party of North Sumatra from 2020 to 2024. In the complex society of North Sumatra, the figure of Musa Rajekshah, under the H. Anif Foundation, succeeded in building an image as a populist political figure who cares about humanitarian work, social issues, and religious values. This makes him is affectionately known, a rare figure in the current political landscape. The harmonization of social dedication, religious values, his role as a youth organization figure, and his charming appearance make him an exemplary and charismatic figure. His success in building a loyalist base among mothers and young people in North Sumatra indirectly becomes a competitive advantage for the Party in North Sumatra. The popularity of Musa Rajekshah is one of the significant key factors in the Party's victory in North Sumatra in the 2024 Legislative Election.

Internally within the Party, this figure is considered relatively successful in leading it to rebound and win the 2024 Legislative Election, repeating the success of 2014 when it won in North Sumatra by garnering 1,712,074 votes. This success placed members in the People's Representative Council, increasing from 4 to 8 members. In the North Sumatra Regional People's Representative Council, seats increased from 15 to 22, and in the District/City Regional People's Representative Councils, seats increased from 184 to 208 members in 2024. This increase was also accompanied by a progressive rise in internal members: in 2017 there were 44,407 members, which grew to 241,273 members in 2023. If calculated and converted, this represents a 500% increase recorded as part of the internal membership. It also succeeded in exceeding the target set by the Central Executive Board of the Golkar Party for the 2024 Regional Head Elections, achieving 64% of victories in regional head elections in North Sumatra, surpassing the 60% target.

The Secretary General of the Golkar Party, Muhammad Sarmuji, confirmed that the central executive board of the banyan tree party has rotated the position of Chair of the Regional Executive Board of Golkar North Sumatra, currently held by Musa Rajekshah. Information regarding his dismissal is based on decree Number: Skep-132/DPP/GOLKAR/XII/2025, signed by the General Chair Bahlil Lahadalia and Secretary General Muhammad Sarmuji on December 14, 2025.

(Source: <https://www.tempo.co/politik/alasan-golkar-copot-ijeck-dari-ketua-dpd-sumatera-utara-2100540>).

Although in general the replacement of party chairs at the regional level is the prerogative of the Central Executive Board of political parties, the specific mechanisms and authorities are regulated in the Articles of Association and Bylaws of the political party. Based on Law Number 2 of 2008 concerning Political Parties (amended by Law No. 2 of 2011), parties are given the freedom to regulate their internal structure and management mechanisms democratically, including the replacement of administrators at the provincial and district/city levels.

CONCLUSION

Based on the analysis of governance theory and neo-institutionalism, the leadership indicators of Musa Rajekshah, since being entrusted to lead Golkar in North Sumatra Province, are considered relatively successful in bringing an image of stability, consolidation, and strengthening the emotions and articulation of political representation among young people to enhance the party's success. Based on the assumption that youth support has increased, the unique share of internal member has grown nearly 500-fold, which is a strong indication that his leadership succeeded in building "new channels" to establish a new voter market share in society. Golkar in North Sumatra has built relatively strong roots in civil society organizations. Several civil society associations have more constructive personal relationships with him. For instance, Pemuda Pancasila, one of the largest youth organizations, has become part of its internal membership, automatically promoting its political ideology at the grassroots level. Based on the personalistic party concept, his popularity is one of the significant key factors in the Golkar Party's victory in North Sumatra in the 2024 Legislative Election.

In national politics, the concept of a party's 'decisional autonomy' is crucial for determining whether the party remains relevant as an independent entity (Randall & Svåsand, 2002). When analysing party institutionalization in a multi-level context, autonomy becomes

relevant from different perspectives, such as the relationship between branches and the central structure (Barberà & Barrio, 2019). In a multi-level context, regional autonomy seeks a balance to build synergy with all internal members while also synergizing with the central organization. This balance is often difficult to achieve, and consequently, parties may lean toward one extreme, based on the assumption of solid and stable support bases and communicative relationships with followers (Arter & Kestilä-Kekkonen, 2014).

The case of Golkar in North Sumatra illustrates the importance of balancing interactivity and autonomy within a political party. In terms of the consolidation system, the central party organization must have the flexibility to listen more to grassroots suggestions and opinions, considering network opportunities for the grassroots to be accommodated into the system by methodologically demonstrating ideological strengthening, thereby achieving mutual benefit without losing coherence for the central leadership. As a major party with deep roots in society, this necessitates a more moderate approach in leadership transition strategies aligned with consensus strategies. Golkar has managed to maintain its existence through voter maximization strategies, and representation strategies deserve consideration. If its position is managed oligarchically, it will give rise to groupthink symptoms. This phenomenon, described by Irving Janis in his work *Groupthink: Psychological Studies of Policy Decisions and Fiascoes* (1982), is characterized by groups that often fail to develop alternative courses of action. Members think alike and avoid dissenting thoughts, resulting in very few possibilities for emerging unpopular ideas or those differing from the main elite.

This phenomenon can threaten the sustainability of democracy while also diminishing public trust in political parties as institutions that should represent the articulation of people's interests. This condition necessitates reform and evaluation in the structure and decision-making mechanisms within political parties. One crucial step is ensuring that party leadership elections are conducted transparently and free from pressure. Additionally, establishing regulations and term limits for party leadership and leadership succession is important to enhance accountability and meritocracy.

Golkar actually has the opportunity to build a modern party due to the absence of veto players. However, the tendency toward pragmatic politics often drags it into hesitation in adhering to the agreed-upon articles of association and bylaws. Furthermore, it is often trapped in an oligarchic political party model because party decisions and policies are made only by a handful of ruling elites within, closing access to dialectics and input from other outside groups. Consequently, the party governance flow does not implement good governance (accountability, effectiveness, and transparency), is far from democratic narratives, and remains highly elitist. Ultimately, the party returns to old feudal, oligarchic, and transactional traditions. This aligns with the old Golkar paradigm of the "Regime Party," which merely functions as an electoral machine or a political tool to legitimize power, far from its own modern paradigm renewal.

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