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Path Dependence and Constrained Path Creation in a Newcomer Political Organization Party: Insight from Post Democratic Transition Context

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ABSTRACT

Institutional change is often constrained by the operation of path dependence mechanisms, particularly through increasing returns and self-reinforcing coordination effects. This study employs an institutional approach to examine the Partai Gema Bangsa (PGB), a newly established political party in Indonesia that seeks to challenge the dominance of established political parties through organizational and programmatic innovation. A qualitative research design was adopted, with data collected through in-depth interviews with three purposively selected informants, complemented by document analysis. The data were analyzed using the interactive model of Miles and Huberman, involving data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. The findings reveal the emergence of a path creation process in the party's endogenous institutional change strategy. In this case, path dependence is shaped not only by internal organizational legacies, such as leadership culture, institutional routines, and elite conflicts, but also by external factors operating through state regulations, the structure of electoral competition, and prevailing norms within the political party system. Interview findings further indicate that, despite the dominance of established political actors in the institutional environment, PGB has gradually introduced organizational adjustments, including the decentralization of party authority. These gradual reforms have fostered convergence between conventional organizational patterns and innovative institutional practices. Theoretically, this study extends the existing understanding of path dependence, which has predominantly been conceptualized as an endogenous mechanism, by demonstrating that external path enforcement can also reinforce institutional trajectories while simultaneously creating opportunities for path creation under specific institutional conditions.

ABSTRAK

Terhambatnya proses perubahan kelembagaan dipengaruhi oleh bekerjanya mekanisme *path dependence*, terutama melalui pola *increasing returns* dan efek koordinasi yang bersifat memperkuat diri (*self-reinforcing coordination effects*). Penelitian ini memanfaatkan pendekatan institusional untuk mengkaji Partai Gema Bangsa (PGB) sebagai partai politik baru di Indonesia yang berupaya menantang dominasi struktur partai mapan melalui inovasi organisasi dan programatik. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif dengan teknik pengumpulan data berupa wawancara mendalam terhadap tiga informan yang dipilih secara purposive serta didukung studi dokumentasi. Analisis data dilakukan menggunakan model interaktif Miles dan Huberman melalui tahapan reduksi data, penyajian data, dan penarikan kesimpulan. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan adanya proses *path creation* dalam strategi perubahan yang bersifat endogen. Dalam kasus ini, mekanisme *path dependence* tidak hanya dibentuk oleh warisan internal organisasi, seperti kultur kepemimpinan, rutinitas kelembagaan, maupun konflik antar-elite, tetapi juga dipengaruhi secara signifikan oleh faktor-faktor eksternal yang bekerja melalui regulasi institusi negara, struktur kompetisi elektoral, dan norma-norma dalam ranah organisasi kepartaian. Temuan wawancara memperlihatkan bahwa, meskipun partai menghadapi hegemoni pemain lama dalam tata kelola internalnya, PGB tetap melakukan sejumlah penyesuaian kelembagaan secara gradual, misalnya melalui desentralisasi kekuasaan partai. Langkah tersebut pada akhirnya mendorong terjadinya konvergensi antara pola organisasi lama dan pendekatan organisasi baru. Secara teoretis, temuan ini memperluas pemahaman mengenai *path dependence* yang selama ini cenderung dipahami semata-mata sebagai mekanisme ketergantungan jalur yang berkembang secara endogen dalam organisasi, menuju suatu model yang juga mengakomodasi peran penguatan jalur dari faktor eksternal (*external path enforcement*) sebagai mekanisme yang menopang terbentuknya *path creation* dalam batas-batas tertentu.



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PENDAHULUAN

The vibrancy of Indonesia's electoral democracy is often underscored by the proliferation of new and smaller political parties, which many celebrate as emblematic of political freedom. However, these parties are frequently viewed not as authentic avenues for popular representation but rather as instruments of elite manipulation designed to manage and fragment political power. Limited electoral success does not necessarily equate to political irrelevance; instead, it often serves to reveal their underlying functions as tools to divide public opinion, channels for concealed interests, or proxies for the exercise of oligarchic power (Noor et al., 2025; Pohan et al., 2025; Al-Hamdi, 2021). Their persistence in the political landscape is frequently sustained not by popular support but by patron-client networks, elite sponsorship, and strategic political investments. Consequently, these parties increasingly resemble political commodities—established, leased, or exchanged to secure elite dominance—thereby transforming the procedural dimensions of democracy into a simulated arena in which electoral competition obscures underlying oligarchic contestation.

The proliferation of new political parties has become one of the defining features of Indonesia's post-Reform electoral democracy. Data from the General Election Commission (KPU) indicates that nine new parties participated in the 2019 election, reflecting an expansion of political pluralism (Hanafi, 2018). Nonetheless, empirical evidence reveals ongoing challenges, particularly concerning weak leadership structures and the lack of nationally recognised figures with strong grassroots connections. The institutionalisation of parties remains vital for democratic consolidation, as those with coherent identities and organisational capacity exhibit greater resilience to systemic pressures (Kasanova & Rudiyanto, 2024).

The evolution of Indonesia's political parties reflects a gradual shift from ideologically oriented organisations to increasingly personalistic and pragmatic forms of political competition. While earlier party development was characterised by relatively stable ideological identities and organisational structures, the post-Reform era has witnessed the growing influence of patronage politics, personalised leadership, and electoral pragmatism (Lev, 1967; Bardi, 2022). At the same time, democratic liberalisation has facilitated the emergence of new political parties that seek to introduce alternative organisational models, including more participatory leadership, decentralised decision-making, and digitally mediated political mobilisation (Efriza et al., 2023). Despite these innovations, new parties continue to operate within an institutional environment dominated by well-established parties, where entrenched organisational norms, electoral regulations, and competitive pressures significantly constrain their capacity for organisational transformation (Yuda, 2023).

Against this background, emerging political parties face mounting institutional pressures to establish organisational legitimacy while competing within an electoral arena dominated by well-established political actors. Intensifying electoral competition, particularly with millennials constituting nearly half of the electorate in the 2024 general election, has increased the demand for effective leadership, institutional innovation, and political mobilisation (Haris Zulkarnain & Saufi, 2021). Nevertheless, limited access to nationally recognised leaders with strong grassroots support continues to constrain organisational credibility and institutional development (Hanafi, 2018). Existing studies consistently suggest that although programmatic appeals remain important, leadership quality and organisational coherence are fundamental to sustaining public trust and long-term party institutionalisation (Leo et al., 2023). These conditions highlight the importance of understanding not merely how new parties adapt, but how institutional constraints shape the possibilities and limits of organisational change.

Despite the growing body of research on Indonesian political parties, existing studies predominantly examine party institutionalisation, leadership, electoral competition, and organisational adaptation as separate analytical concerns. Historical institutionalist scholarship

has predominantly conceptualised path dependence as an internally generated mechanism explaining institutional persistence, while studies of political parties have tended to analyse organisational adaptation and leadership reform separately. As a result, little is known about how internal path dependence, external path enforcement, and bounded path creation interact simultaneously to shape institutional change in emerging political parties (Pierson, 2000; Mahoney, 2000). Consequently, the mechanisms through which new parties negotiate institutional continuity and organisational change within highly constrained political environments remain insufficiently understood.

To address this gap, this article investigates how internal institutional legacies interact with external institutional constraints to produce bounded opportunities for organisational change within the Gema Bangsa Party (PGB). Drawing upon qualitative evidence from in-depth interviews and organisational documents, the study demonstrates how these interacting institutional mechanisms shape the party's organisational adaptation within a highly constrained political environment. By integrating the concepts of internal path dependence, external path enforcement, and bounded path creation within a single analytical framework, this study extends historical institutionalist theory beyond its conventional emphasis on endogenous institutional persistence. Rather than treating institutional persistence and institutional change as competing explanations, the findings demonstrate that organisational transformation emerges through the interaction of internal path dependence, external path enforcement, and bounded path creation. This perspective offers both a theoretical refinement of historical institutionalism and practical insights into organisational transformation among emerging political parties.

METODE PENELITIAN

This study utilises a qualitative-analytical research design to explore the interaction between historical institutional constraints and intentional political agency in shaping the leadership and organizational trajectories of a new political party within Indonesia's electoral democracy. The qualitative approach is particularly fitting for this research, as it aims to comprehend the meanings, interpretations, and strategic reasoning held by political actors as they navigate path-dependent institutional structures while striving to create alternative political pathways (Sugiyono, 2020).

The research is conducted at the national level, focusing primarily on Jakarta, which serves as the headquarters of the Central Executive Board (Dewan Pimpinan Pusat/DPP) of the Gema Bangsa Party (Partai Gema Bangsa, PGB). As a political party that arose in the post-2024 electoral context, PGB presents an analytically significant case for examining the operations of new parties under conditions of institutional hegemony, regulatory constraints, and competitive electoral pressures. The DPP has been chosen as the main site for this inquiry because it is the organizational arena where leadership decisions, organizational design, strategic orientation, and responses to external institutional pressures are formulated and coordinated at the national level.

Participants were selected through purposive sampling to ensure that the informants possessed direct experience and strategic knowledge relevant to the research objectives. In total, three elite informants from the Central Executive Board (DPP) of the Gema Bangsa Party (PGB) participated in this study, comprising the Chairperson, Secretary-General, and Chair of Political Affairs. These informants were selected because they occupied key leadership positions and played central roles in organisational strategy, political positioning, leadership development, and institutional decision-making.

Primary data were gathered through in-depth, semi-structured interviews and non-participant observations. In-depth interviews were conducted with three senior party elites serving in the Central Executive Board of the Gema Bangsa Party. Each interview focused on

participants' experiences and reflections concerning leadership formation, organisational development, institutional constraints, strategic decision-making, and responses to Indonesia's evolving electoral environment. The semi-structured interview format enabled the researcher to examine key theoretical issues while remaining sufficiently flexible to capture emerging themes and unanticipated insights. Non-participant observations were undertaken during party meetings, coordination forums, and organisational activities to document leadership practices, interaction patterns, and decision-making processes. To enhance the credibility of the findings through triangulation, secondary data were also collected, including party statutes, organisational documents, official electoral regulations, archival records, media reports, and relevant academic literature.

Data were analysed using a thematic interpretive approach. Interview transcripts, observation notes, and documentary materials were examined through repeated reading, comparison, and interpretation to identify recurrent themes concerning historical institutional constraints, leadership strategies, regulatory pressures, and institutional innovation across multiple data sources. These themes were subsequently interpreted through the analytical lens of historical institutionalism, enabling the study to explain how internal path dependence, external path enforcement, and bounded path creation interact in shaping organisational change within an emerging political party.

HASIL PENELITIAN

Internal Dynamics in the Formation and Consolidation of New Parties New political parties in Indonesia encounter significant challenges during their early stages, which are closely tied to path-dependent organizational dynamics, particularly concerning two interrelated aspects: the recruitment of cadres and the establishment of a sustainable cadre system. Recruitment is not solely an administrative procedure for enrolling members; it is a strategic endeavor aimed at attracting individuals who possess electoral appeal, extensive political networks, and the ability to effectively communicate the party's vision and ideology. This pattern is reflected in the testimony of Ahmad Rofiq, Chairperson of the Central Executive Board of the Gema Bangsa Party, who explained that many Indonesian political parties continue to operate as privately controlled organisations, where strategic decisions remain concentrated in the hands of a single leader or a small circle of elites: "In practice, political parties in Indonesia often operate as if they were privately owned companies. Strategic decisions, including organisational direction and leadership appointments, ultimately depend on the preferences of a single leader or a small group of elites." (Ahmad Rofiq, Interview, 2025). This statement illustrates how elite-centred authority reinforces organisational routines that privilege personalised control over collective institutional development, thereby strengthening internal path dependence. Furthermore, Mukhlis et al. (2024) highlight that the development of cadre functions remains underdeveloped due to recruitment practices predominantly rooted in patronage rather than meritocracy.

Emerging political parties face heightened constraints related to time pressure and regulatory expectations. They must swiftly establish an ideological identity, attain public visibility, and enhance administrative capacity to satisfy legal verification requirements. Consequently, initial cadre development often prioritizes compliance over the cultivation of long-term competence and loyalty. During the initial stage of organisational development, cadre training primarily focused on fulfilling administrative and organisational requirements necessary for party verification rather than fostering long-term ideological consolidation. This condition reflects the institutional pressures faced by newly established political parties operating within stringent electoral regulations. Similar findings have been reported by Mukhlis et al. (2024), who argue that cadre development in many emerging parties tends to prioritise organisational compliance over sustainable political education.

As new parties progress from formation to consolidation, internal tensions often manifest as conflicts among elites, regional and central frictions, and strategic disagreements between idealistic and pragmatic factions. These conflicts reflect entrenched decision-making patterns that typically favor centralization and elite dominance. The centralisation of organisational authority remains a recurring characteristic of Indonesian political parties. Such institutional arrangements frequently generate tensions between national and regional organisational structures, particularly during the consolidation phase. This observation is consistent with the findings of Juswil et al., (2020), which indicate that even well-established parties such as Golkar and PKS have experienced internal fragmentation due to leadership disputes and ideological conflicts. For nascent parties lacking established mechanisms for conflict resolution, similar dynamics tend to perpetuate patterns of elite dominance and low cadre engagement.

In many instances, internal conflicts arise from ambiguous role definitions among founding elites, unstable leadership structures, and pressures to achieve rapid electoral success. Elites possessing social and financial capital frequently dominate strategic decision-making, leaving grassroots cadres marginalized. This situation is further exacerbated by pragmatic practices such as cross-candidacy, where non-party individuals are nominated to enhance vote shares. This tendency is further reinforced by patronage-oriented relationships within party organisations. As explained by Dr. Mohd. Sopya, Secretary-General of the Gema Bangsa Party: "Personal proximity to senior leaders often becomes more valuable than organisational performance. Those who maintain close relationships with party leaders gain greater access to strategic opportunities and organisational resources." (Dr. Mohd. Sopya, Interview, 2025).

This finding indicates that organisational opportunities are frequently distributed through personalised networks rather than institutional merit, reinforcing path-dependent organisational practices. In this context, negotiation of interests becomes a crucial mechanism for maintaining cohesion. Parties equipped with deliberative forums and representative structures are better positioned to manage internal differences constructively, confirming that effective conflict resolution is a pivotal indicator of party institutionalization and electoral resilience. Following the processes of recruitment and conflict management, newly established political parties face the critical task of organizational consolidation and leadership development.

This phase encompasses not only the stabilization of administrative functions but also the establishment of a coherent organizational culture and governance norms. Kristiyanto et al., (2023) emphasizes that the degree of party institutionalization plays a crucial role in determining resilience within an electoral democracy. The challenge of balancing organisational flexibility and institutional discipline is closely associated with entrenched leadership cultures. Dr. Yandra, Chair of Political Affairs of the Gema Bangsa Party, observed: "Power becomes addictive, and feudal political culture often transforms political parties into instruments serving dominant figures rather than the organisation itself." (Dr. Yandra, Interview, 2025). This observation demonstrates that organisational consolidation requires not only administrative development but also institutional reforms capable of reducing excessive personalisation of political authority.

Supporting this perspective, Efriza et al. (2023) illustrate that oligarchic governance frameworks can exacerbate conflicts of interest and hinder horizontal organizational growth. Empirical findings indicate that many new parties struggle to endure, as regional structures are often created solely to meet KPU verification requirements, lacking meaningful ideological cohesion or cadre networking. Empirical observations further indicate that many newly established parties experience difficulties in sustaining organisational activities beyond the electoral verification stage. Regional structures frequently become administratively functional but remain institutionally weak due to limited cadre development and organisational integration. This finding is consistent with Kristiyanto et al. (2023), who argue that party institutionalisation

requires continuous organisational consolidation rather than merely fulfilling formal administrative requirements.

From a leadership strategy viewpoint, organizational consolidation represents a pivotal stage in determining whether a new party can transition from a legal entity to a credible political institution. Leaders must effectively reconcile innovation with structural discipline while aligning internal democratic values with electoral demands. A failure to maintain this balance may lead to stagnation and diminished public appeal, ultimately threatening electoral engagement.

In summary, the internal dynamics of new parties can be understood as a progression through three interconnected phases: recruitment and cadre development as the foundation of organizational identity; conflict management and interest negotiation as tests of internal cohesion; and consolidation and leadership formation as key factors in political sustainability. These phases together constitute a path-dependent institutionalization process, where organizational survival is contingent not only on electoral performance but also on the ability to balance pragmatism with internal democratic principles within an increasingly competitive Indonesian political landscape.

Mechanisms of External Path Dependency

1. Regulatory Hegemony

Indonesia's electoral and party regulations impose rigorous administrative prerequisites that effectively confine new political parties to established organizational trajectories. PKPU No. 4 of 2022 mandates that prospective parties possess legal entity status, maintain organizational presence across provinces and districts, demonstrate a minimum number of verified members, and establish permanent offices at each leadership level. These requirements compel new parties to adopt the organizational frameworks of established parties to achieve verification. Ahmad Rofiq further argued that the institutional burden inherited by established political parties often discourages meaningful organisational reform: "When a political party is effectively controlled by a single individual, organisational decisions become highly centralised, making institutional reform increasingly difficult." (Ahmad Rofiq, Interview, 2025). This perception explains why PGB pursued institutional innovation through the establishment of a new organisational platform rather than attempting to reform existing party structures. Coupled with the 4% parliamentary threshold and intricate campaign financing regulations, these stipulations discourage significant differentiation and function as hegemonic mechanisms that reinforce existing party structures. The formation of the Gema Bangsa Party (PGB) illustrates a direct response to this regulatory hegemony. Rather than attempting to reform an established party burdened by entrenched rules, PGB chose institutional exit. Ahmad Rofiq's reference to the "political burden" and "political sins" associated with established parties reveals an understanding that regulatory lock-in perpetuates the status quo. This initial strategic decision underscores that political agency can manifest not only through adaptation but also through deliberate disengagement from paths viewed as structurally irreformable.

2. Cognitive Mimicry

In addition to formal regulations, cognitive mimicry presents a significant external constraint. New parties frequently emulate the structures, narratives, and strategies of dominant parties in a bid for legitimacy (Palazzi et al., 2025). Although new political parties often seek to introduce organisational innovations, institutional uncertainty and electoral risks encourage them to adopt organisational models that have already been legitimised by established parties. Consequently, cognitive imitation becomes a rational adaptive strategy rather than merely an absence of organisational creativity. This inclination reflects collective cognitive biases shaped by long-established institutional norms. Research by Palazzi et al. (2025) indicates that reformist initiatives are more likely to originate from anti-establishment actors, whereas mainstream parties typically preserve existing arrangements.

PGB's ideological focus on decentralization, participation, and anti-transactionalism represents a concerted effort to diverge from this cognitive imitation. The founders consistently framed decentralization as an "ethos of struggle," treating ideology as an organizational principle rather than merely a symbolic label. However, this differentiation continually confronts systemic realities, as commitments to anti-transactionalism directly challenge normalized practices of money politics. By positioning ethical critique as a feasible political strategy, PGB aspires to expand the cognitive boundaries of what is deemed possible within Indonesian electoral politics.

3. Organizational Field Pressures

Institutional pressures within the organizational field play a significant role in reinforcing conformity among political entities. Normative expectations from political elites and the general public delineate a "standard" political party as one that is centralized, hierarchical, and centered around a singular figure. Cultural-cognitive frameworks tend to normalize the personalization of power while fostering skepticism towards collective leadership (Palazzi et al., 2025; Simmie, 2012). Dr. Yandra also highlighted the persistence of personalised political expectations within Indonesia's party system: "Feudal political culture encourages party members to devote their energy to serving political figures instead of strengthening the institution itself." (Dr. Yandra, Interview, 2025). This finding illustrates how deeply embedded cultural expectations continue to reinforce organisational conformity and constrain alternative models of institutional leadership.

PGB's approach, which categorically rejects ownership-based politics and the dominance of a single figure, directly challenges these entrenched norms. The statement, "its characters are all of us," emphasizes an effort to redefine political legitimacy as being rooted in institutional frameworks rather than centered on individuals. This strategy reflects an understanding that although organizational field pressures are unavoidable, they are also negotiable through strategic institutional design choices aimed at preventing the concentration of power and the emergence of internal oligarchies.

4. Reinforcing Feedback Loop

Regulatory, cognitive, and normative pressures are perpetuated through reinforcing feedback loops. Instances of failed innovation often validate the perception that deviating from established practices is impractical, encouraging parties to revert to dominant models. Repeated institutional failures frequently reinforce the perception that organisational experimentation entails considerable political risk. Consequently, many political organisations revert to established institutional arrangements that are considered more predictable and electorally secure. Such experiences can constrict organizational creativity and deepen path dependence. Comparative studies reveal similar patterns, wherein parties in power resist reform due to concerns over potential losses (Núñez et al., 2017).

In light of this context, PGB's strategy aims to disrupt these reinforcing feedback loops by framing initial institutional choices as long-term commitments rather than provisional experiments. Although constrained by path dependence, the PGB case illustrates that opportunities for limited path creation can still be realized when early institutional choices are consistently reinforced in the face of pressures to revert to dominant patterns. Contracts, and a commitment to value-based loyalty among cadre are designed to foster alternative increasing returns grounded in trust and ethical consistency. Although constrained by path dependence, the PGB case illustrates that opportunities for limited path creation can still be realized when early institutional choices are consistently reinforced in the face of pressures to revert to dominant patterns.

Tabel 1 Summary of Empirical Findings and Their Analytical Interpretation

Empirical Theme		Representative Interview Evidence	Analytical Interpretation
Internal Path Dependence		Ahmad Rofiq	Organisational authority remains concentrated within elite leadership, reinforcing institutional continuity.
External Path Enforcement		Dr. Mohd. Sopya	Patronage relationships and elite proximity shape access to organisational resources and political opportunities.
Bounded Path Creation		Dr. Yandra	Organisational innovation remains possible but is constrained by entrenched leadership culture and institutional expectations.

PEMBAHASAN

Beyond Traditional Path-dependency

This study illustrates that the stagnation of institutional change within newcomer political parties cannot be attributed solely to internal organizational inertia. The case of the Gema Bangsa Party (PGB) demonstrates how path dependence arises from the interplay between internal legacies and external path enforcement, leading to constrained yet dynamic patterns of organizational change. These findings resonate with historical institutionalist perspectives, emphasizing that institutional trajectories are shaped not only by internal mechanisms but also by wider structural contexts that promote continuity (Pierson, 2000; Capoccia, 2016).

The empirical findings indicate that organisational continuity within the Gema Bangsa Party (PGB) is shaped not merely by inherited institutional routines but also by strategic considerations regarding political survival. Interview evidence demonstrates that party leaders viewed decentralised governance as normatively desirable, yet simultaneously perceived it as electorally risky within Indonesia's highly competitive political environment. Consequently, organisational actors tended to retain familiar leadership arrangements despite recognising their limitations. This finding suggests that path dependence in emerging political parties is not simply the product of historical inertia, but also of continuous strategic calculations aimed at reducing organisational uncertainty. Rather than viewing increasing returns solely as the cumulative consequence of past institutional choices, the PGB case demonstrates that actors actively reproduce these institutional arrangements because they perceive them as the safest option under conditions of electoral competition. This interpretation extends Pierson's (2004) explanation of increasing returns by highlighting the strategic dimension of institutional persistence in emerging political parties operating under conditions of democratic uncertainty.

The findings further demonstrate that organisational continuity cannot be explained solely through internal institutional dynamics. Interview evidence and documentary analysis indicate that regulatory frameworks governing political parties significantly influence organisational choices long before electoral competition begins. Rather than functioning merely as legal requirements, regulations concerning organisational structure, territorial representation, and membership thresholds shape how new political parties define organisational legitimacy and allocate institutional resources. Consequently, organisational convergence emerges not only because parties inherit established routines but also because they strategically adapt to an external institutional environment that rewards conformity. This finding broadens the concept of

coercive isomorphism proposed by DiMaggio & Powell (1983) by demonstrating that organisational similarity results from the interaction between regulatory obligations and strategic political calculations rather than from legal compliance alone.

Beyond formal regulations, the empirical findings reveal that institutional constraints also operate through shared political beliefs and organisational expectations. Interview evidence indicates that party elites frequently perceived collective leadership and decentralised authority as politically desirable but electorally less competitive than personalised leadership models. Such perceptions illustrate how institutional constraints become internalised through prevailing political narratives rather than through formal rules alone (Kroeber, 2022). Consequently, organisational innovation becomes constrained by actors' own expectations regarding electoral viability, producing what this study conceptualises as bounded political imagination. This interpretation extends Schmidt's (2008) discursive institutionalism by demonstrating that discourse functions not only as a source of institutional legitimacy but also as a mechanism that narrows the range of organisational alternatives considered politically feasible.

The empirical evidence from PGB demonstrates that institutional continuity is sustained through the interaction of organisational routines and ongoing external institutional pressures rather than through historical legacies alone. This finding suggests that path dependence should be understood as a continuously reproduced process rather than a fixed institutional inheritance. External regulations, organisational norms, and political expectations repeatedly reinforce organisational choices, thereby limiting opportunities for substantial institutional divergence. Consequently, the contribution of this study extends beyond conventional historical institutionalism by demonstrating that external path enforcement operates as an active mechanism through which institutional trajectories are continually reproduced in the absence of critical junctures or major political crises.

Although institutional constraints remain substantial, the empirical findings also demonstrate that organisational actors retain limited capacity to reshape institutional trajectories. Rather than attempting to replace existing institutional arrangements entirely, PGB introduced incremental reforms through decentralised authority, collective leadership, and anti-transactional organisational norms. These initiatives illustrate that institutional innovation is negotiated within existing organisational boundaries rather than pursued through radical institutional rupture. This finding suggests that bounded agency should be understood as a strategic response to institutional constraints rather than as evidence of institutional weakness. In this respect, the PGB case refines Mahoney and Thelen's (2010) concept of gradual institutional change by showing that layering functions not only as a mechanism of institutional preservation but also as a practical strategy for organisational adaptation in highly regulated democratic environments.

The organisational trajectory of PGB suggests that institutional innovation is most likely to emerge through hybridisation rather than institutional replacement. Instead of abandoning established organisational practices altogether, party leaders selectively retained institutional arrangements considered electorally effective while introducing gradual reforms intended to strengthen collective leadership and organisational participation. This indicates that organisational change occurs through continuous negotiation between institutional continuity and strategic innovation. Consequently, path creation should not be interpreted as the abandonment of historical trajectories but as the selective reconstruction of existing institutional arrangements. This interpretation develops Garud and Karnoe's (2001) argument by illustrating how distributed agency operates under conditions where organisational experimentation remains constrained by enduring institutional expectations.

The Indonesian context significantly influences these dynamics. The enduring legacies of the New Order era, such as the floating mass doctrine, continue to restrict mass-based political

participation while favoring elite-driven mobilization (Aspinall et al., 2020). These historical influences interact with contemporary electoral competition, creating feedback loops that reward personalization and hamper long-term institutional investment. As Katz & Mair (1995) illustrate, cartel-like party systems tend to stabilize existing organizational forms by raising entry barriers and penalizing deviations from the norm.

However, the case of the PGB complicates the prevailing assumption that personalization undermines institutionalization. By positioning political figures as representatives rather than proprietors of the party, the PGB endeavors to integrate personal appeal with a collective organizational identity. This approach resonates with recent scholarship suggesting that personalization can coexist with institutional development under specific conditions, particularly when rooted in clear organizational rules and norms.

In summary, these findings advance a more relational understanding of path dependence, linking organizational and systemic levels of analysis. By incorporating the concept of external path enforcement into the discussion of path dependence, this study illustrates how institutional stability and change are mutually generated through rules, norms, and cognitive frameworks that extend beyond the organization. This perspective enhances the framework of historical institutionalism by underscoring that constrained innovation rather than radical transformation serves as the predominant mode of change for emerging political parties operating within established yet exclusionary political systems.

Path Creation under Constraints: A Limited yet Strategic Agency

This examination highlights the interplay between path dependence and the potential for path creation within organizational trajectories. While path dependence imposes significant constraints, the findings suggest that path creation can occur, though in a limited and strategic manner. This supports the existing literature on path creation, which stresses that institutional paths are not solely perpetuated through inertia; rather, they can be reshaped, albeit partially, by purposeful actors operating within established constraints (Garud & Karnøe, 2001).

The case of the Gema Bangsa Party (PGB) serves as a noteworthy example, where organizational leaders aimed to introduce alternative institutional logics by decentralizing authority and moving away from ownership-based leadership models, all while navigating a highly path-dependent political landscape.

In contrast to traditional accounts of path creation that emphasize radical deviation and entrepreneurial agency (Garud & Karnøe, 2001), the PGB case underscores a bounded form of path creation. Here, agency is exercised through gradual adjustments rather than through fundamental disruptions. Such efforts align with the perspective of Mahoney (2000), which posits that institutional change often occurs incrementally through layering and reinterpretation, rather than through sudden breaks. Thus, path creation within the PGB context functions alongside existing institutional pathways, allowing for selective divergence without displacing the prevailing trajectory.

The scope of path creation is significantly influenced by external path enforcement mechanisms. Factors such as regulatory frameworks, electoral competition, and prevailing organizational norms significantly limit the range of attainable alternatives, making innovation a negotiated and riskaverse endeavor. As noted by Kim et al. (2024), while actors may identify inefficiencies within a dominant path, they may remain committed to it due to the absence of viable alternatives. In these scenarios, path creation often manifests as micro-level experimentation, where minor institutional modifications are implemented to assess their feasibility within current structures.

Furthermore, the findings illustrate that path creation encompasses not only structural components but also cognitive and interpretive elements. Party elites in the PGB reframed decentralization and collective leadership not merely as ideological stances but as strategic

choices aligned with electoral pragmatism. This reframing illustrates an attempt to harmonize organizational innovation with established notions of political rationality and competitiveness. This process aligns with Basuki (2020) concept of institutional entrepreneurship, which emphasizes how actors mobilize meanings and resources to legitimize change. However, it is crucial to note that the PGB actors did not possess privileged access to power or material resources, thereby reinforcing the constrained and incremental nature of their agency.

This study contributes to a more nuanced understanding of path creation as relational and contextdependent rather than exclusively driven by individual agency. The PGB case indicates that in highly regulated and competitive political environments, path creation is most effectively realized through hybridization, wherein new practices are layered upon existing structures and selectively internalized. This observation aligns with recent scholarship advocating for an integrated analytical framework that encompasses both path dependence and path creation, acknowledging that institutional stability and change can occur simultaneously (Garud & Karnoe, 2001).

Importantly, characterizing path creation as limited does not undermine its analytical relevance. Instead, it presents a realistic portrayal of institutional change within transitional democracies, where innovation is often constrained by historical legacies, regulatory frameworks, and cognitive limitations. In these contexts, path creation should be understood not as a denial of path dependence, but as a selective reconfiguration of dominant institutional trajectories. Although inherently incremental, these adjustments can accumulate over time, potentially leading to substantial transformations in organizational practices and power dynamics.

KESIMPULAN

This study concludes that the persistence of traditional governance patterns within Indonesian political parties is shaped by path-dependent mechanisms operating through both internal organisational dynamics and external institutional pressures. Leadership renewal and organisational reform remain constrained by entrenched patronage practices, non-independent funding structures, cartel-like electoral competition, and regulatory requirements that collectively reinforce institutional continuity. These mechanisms generate high switching costs and institutional lock-in, encouraging newly established political parties to reproduce organisational models that are perceived as politically legitimate and electorally secure.

Nevertheless, the case of the Gema Bangsa Party (PGB) demonstrates that path dependence does not eliminate the possibility of organisational agency. Rather than attempting to disrupt existing institutional arrangements, PGB pursued incremental organisational innovation through the decentralisation of authority, the rejection of individual ownership, and the institutionalisation of collective leadership principles. These initiatives illustrate a process of bounded path creation, in which organisational change emerges through strategic adaptation within enduring institutional constraints instead of through radical institutional rupture. The findings therefore indicate that organisational transformation in emerging democracies is inherently negotiated, gradual, and contingent upon the interaction between institutional continuity and strategic agency.

Theoretical Contribution. This study contributes to the historical institutionalism literature by extending the conventional understanding of path dependence beyond internally generated mechanisms. While previous studies have primarily explained institutional persistence through endogenous organisational legacies, the present findings demonstrate that institutional continuity is also actively reproduced through **external path enforcement**, including electoral

regulations, organisational norms, and competitive political pressures. By integrating the concepts of internal path dependence, external path enforcement, and bounded path creation within a single analytical framework, this study proposes a more relational explanation of institutional continuity and organisational change. The findings therefore broaden existing historical institutionalist perspectives by showing that institutional persistence and institutional innovation should be understood as complementary rather than opposing processes.

Policy Implications. The findings suggest that strengthening political party institutionalisation in Indonesia requires reforms that extend beyond internal organisational restructuring. Electoral policymakers, political parties, and election management institutions should encourage institutional arrangements that reduce excessive leadership personalisation, strengthen internal democratic governance, improve transparent cadre recruitment and leadership development, and provide greater incentives for organisational innovation. Regulatory frameworks should facilitate institutional experimentation while maintaining democratic accountability, thereby creating a more conducive environment for emerging political parties to develop sustainable organisational identities without excessive dependence on patronage-based political structures.

Future Research. This study also opens several avenues for future research. Comparative studies involving emerging political parties across different democratic contexts are needed to examine the broader applicability of external path enforcement and bounded path creation beyond Indonesia. Longitudinal research following newly established parties across multiple electoral cycles would provide valuable evidence regarding whether early organisational innovations evolve into sustainable institutional alternatives or gradually converge with dominant organisational trajectories. Furthermore, interdisciplinary research integrating historical institutionalism with organisational studies, political psychology, electoral behaviour, and governance studies would deepen understanding of how institutional beliefs, cognitive boundaries, and strategic political agency interact in shaping long-term organisational transformation.

Overall, this study demonstrates that organisational continuity and institutional change should not be viewed as mutually exclusive processes. Instead, both coexist through continuous negotiation between inherited institutional legacies, external institutional pressures, and strategic organisational agency. By highlighting this interaction, the study offers a more comprehensive explanation of political party transformation within emerging democracies and provides a conceptual foundation for future research on institutional change under conditions of enduring political constraints.

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