



Dynamics of Power Relations and Concordance Leadership Style in Policy Making: A Case Study of the Malang City Regional Legislative Council 2020

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Abstract

The mass corruption scandal that engulfed 41 out of 45 legislators in Malang City DPRD in 2018 serves as a striking reminder of how fragile democratic institutions can be when power becomes overly concentrated and accountability mechanisms are weak. Against this backdrop, this study aims to analyze the distribution of power and the interplay between structural dominance, leadership style, and political behavior in the Malang City DPRD, particularly in relation to its policy-making processes. Using a qualitative case study approach, the research draws on document analysis, interviews, and observation to capture the dynamics of legislative-executive relations and intra-party interactions. Findings show that PDI-P's positional dominance enabled it to secure agenda-setting power, yet this structural advantage was exercised not through confrontational oversight but rather through a consensus-oriented, harmonious relationship with the executive. While fostering stability, this alignment weakened the checks and balances function, leading to policy capture by elites and reinforcing cartelized politics. The novelty of this research lies in integrating the positional approach, political behavior theory, and system analysis to reveal how structural dominance combined with weak legislative capacity produces institutional vulnerability to corruption. The policy implication is clear, strengthening legislative capacity, internal party democracy, and opposition mechanisms is essential to prevent elite capture and ensure that local legislatures genuinely serve as instruments of democratic accountability.

Keywords

Malang City DPRD; Power Distribution; Cartel Politics; Political Behavior; Elite Capture

Abstrak

Skandal korupsi massal yang melibatkan 41 dari 45 anggota DPRD Kota Malang pada tahun 2018 menjadi pengingat tajam rapuhnya institusi demokrasi ketika kekuasaan terlalu terkonsentrasi dan mekanisme akuntabilitas melemah. Berangkat dari konteks tersebut, penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis distribusi kekuasaan serta interaksi antara dominasi struktural, gaya kepemimpinan, dan perilaku politik di DPRD Kota Malang, khususnya dalam proses pembentukan kebijakan. Dengan menggunakan pendekatan studi kasus kualitatif, penelitian ini mengandalkan analisis dokumen, wawancara, dan observasi untuk menangkap dinamika relasi legislatif-eksekutif serta interaksi intra-partai. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa dominasi posisi PDI-P memberikan kapasitas agenda setting, namun

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keunggulan struktural ini dijalankan bukan melalui pengawasan konfrontatif, melainkan dengan pola hubungan harmonis dan konsensus bersama eksekutif. Meskipun menciptakan stabilitas, pola ini justru melemahkan fungsi checks and balances, membuka ruang bagi elite capture, dan memperkuat politik kartel. Kebaruan penelitian ini terletak pada integrasi pendekatan posisional, teori perilaku politik, dan analisis sistem untuk menunjukkan bagaimana dominasi struktural yang disertai kapasitas legislatif lemah menghasilkan kerentanan institusional terhadap korupsi. Implikasi kebijakan dari temuan ini menegaskan perlunya penguatan kapasitas legislatif, demokrasi internal partai, serta mekanisme oposisi yang substantif agar lembaga legislatif daerah benar-benar berfungsi sebagai instrumen akuntabilitas demokratis.

Kata Kunci

DPRD Kota Malang; Distribusi Kekuasaan; Politik Kartel; Perilaku Politik; Penguasaan Elit

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Introduction

The largest democratic exercise conducted in Indonesia is the General Election, which takes up every five years. The 2018 Malang City Legislative Elections for Malang City Regional Legislative Council (Malang City DPRD) had an interesting twist. A corruption scandal ensnared 41 out of 45 members of Malang City DPRD. The scandal is one of the largest corruption scandals ever encountered by the Indonesian local government. The scandal raised very critical questions about electoral process integrity, apart from revealing how pervasive corruption is within the local government. The scandal, therefore, raised significant public outcry and calls for reform of the political system. Yuntho (2018) said that this case is one of the biggest corruption scandals in the history of local government in Indonesia. The mass corruption committed by the people's representatives in Malang City is certainly ironic and concerning. The Malang City DPRD, which is supposed to carry out the function of supervising the work of the executive, collaborated to commit corruption. This incident not only affected Malang City but also caused people to distrust almost all regional parliaments.

It began from an investigation by the Corruption Eradication Commission (KPK) into bribery cases related to deliberations of Malang City's Revised Regional Revenues and Expenditures for the 2015 Fiscal Year (APBD-P). On the official KPK website, "bribes had been paid so that members of DPRD discussed and passed through discussion of 2015 APBD-P". KPK identified 19 suspects in March 2018, consisting of former Malang Mayor Mochammad Anton and 18 Malang City DPRD members for the 2014–2019 term. The development of the case then unveiled in-

volvement from a total of 41 DPRD members from 10 parties. The corruption scandal illustrates how systemically and extensively corrupt practices are feasible within local government legislatures, and their corrosive influence upon governance and public services.

The public was shocked by the large-scale corruption committed by 41 members of the Malang City DPRD in 2018. It is interesting to note that Malang City was crowned the 'overall champion' in the corruption sector based on the number of suspects involved, particularly compared to North Sumatra, where 38 DPRD members were involved over the 2009-2014 and 2014-2019 periods. Luckily, of the 45 members of the Malang City DPRD, there were still 4 members who were not viewed as suspects by the KPK. These 4 members were cleared of the mass corruption allegation regarding the handling of waste disposal funds in Malang City, which involved receiving bribes of Rp 700 million and gratuities of Rp 5.8 billion, specifically relating to the approval of the Ranperda on Amendments to the 2015 Malang Regional Budget (Nadhiroh, 2018). The mass detention of 41 members of the Malang City DPRD caused a major disturbance to the legislative function in the city. According to BBC Indonesia, "the governmental function in Malang City was paralyzed because only four council members were not arrested by the KPK" (BBC News Indonesia, 2018).

The KPK suspects 22 Malang City DPRD members. Twenty candidates on the temporary voter list (DCS) in the 2019 Leikagislative Election, including Sugiarto (PKS), Choirul Amri (PKS), Bambang Triyoso (PKS), Teguh Mulyono (PDIP), Erni Farida (PDIP), Hadi Santoso (PDIP), Diana Yanti (PDIP), Arief Hermanto (PDIP), Choeroel Anwar (Golkar), Ribut Harianto (Golkar), and Harun Prasajo (PAN) Then Een Ambarsari (Gerindra), Suparno Hadiwibowo (Gerindra), Teguh Puji Wahyono (Gerindra), Afdhal Fauza (Hanura), Imam Ghozali (Hanura), Mulyanto (PKB), Indra Tjahyono (Democrats), Asia Iriani (PPP), and Mohammad Fadli (NasDem) (Ika, 2018).

Arresting politicians in corruption matters is inextricable from the institutional cartel's party-related patronage pattern. Amid great political expenses, party institutions have become contentious, especially in the context of elections. Data from Indonesia Corruption Watch (ICW) indicates that most political parties require annual budgets ranging from IDR 200 billion to IDR 250 billion. It will be more than three during the election (Prayudi, 2019). It will not solve this issue through a simple realignment of party funding redistributions. According to a survey carried out for Kompas R&D between March 20 and 21, 2019 (Ika, 2018), 76.5% of 514 surveyed were not sure if additional political party support would discourage politicians from getting dirty.

The party's organizational framework focuses on its oligarchy and depends on its elite personalities, making it simple to hijack or be tempted to commit power abuses from the patronage of the institutional cartel. Not long ago, at the time of the arrest of the Chairman of the United Development Party (PPP), Romahurmuzy, by the Corruption Eradication Commission (KPK), the dangers and repercussions

were reminded (Kompas, March 16, 2019). Particularly among young people, who should bring fresh air and change trapped in the old system, inseparable from the requirement of a political agenda to enhance organizational regulations and the management of party roles, the House of Representatives of the Republic of Indonesia needs to witness a series of arrests of politicians (Kambo, 2017).

Agents in leadership relate to the idea of power; therefore, they balance difficulties. One could argue that a leader is one with power who is justified by the neighboring agents. Agents who are legitimized by other agents will provide their compliance in the form of consensus; it does not end here. The agreement reached is not simply formed; there is also a dogma that controls another agent to follow (Raditya, 2016). The optimization of the functions of several political institutions found in a nation, both individually and in the relationship among these institutions, determines the efficacy and stability of the administration of government in that country. Between the legislature and executive, particularly in a democratically governed nation, is best attained. Lowell Barrington (2013) says two components of a state's politics are its executive and its legislative; among what gives a political system particular value is the shared powers. The political parties represented in the House of Representatives span several political spectrums. Generally speaking, these political parties fall under the categories of nationalist parties (such as the Democratic Party, PDIP, Golkar Party, Gerindra Party, Hanura Party, and PKCI), Islamic parties (such as PPP, PKS, and PBB), and Islamic-based parties (such as PAN and PKB) (Manan, 2017).

A basic idea to stop the concentration of power that could lead to authoritarianism is the distribution of authority in the government structure. In a democratic government framework (Wulandari, 2021), the legislative body is one of the key foundational pillars and therefore quite vital. This highlights the importance of a balanced government where power is shared among different branches, ensuring that no single entity can dominate. By empowering the legislative body, democracy can better safeguard against potential abuses of power.

John Locke, according to his theory of the division of power, stated that states should divide power into three: legislative, executive, and federative (Wulandari, 2021). According to Locke, "legislative power is the highest power in government because it represents the will of the people." However, he also stressed that natural law must exercise legislative power so that this power is not absolute and must interest the general public (Nailufar, 2022). This highlights Locke's belief in the importance of checks and balances within government. Justice principles and social well-being require legislative authority to be responsible. Locke intended to he would protect individual rights, and he could prevent tyranny by supporting limits on legislative power.

According to Yani (2018), "if legislative and executive power are united in the same hand, then there will be no freedom". For many modern government systems, this concept is the basis. Indonesia is indeed one such system for it. Power is held by the judiciary (Mahkamah Agung and Mahkamah Konstitusi),

executive (Presiden), and legislative (DPR) institutions horizontally (Wulandari, 2021). On the other hand, the distribution of power between the federal government and local (regional) governments is vertical (Kelsen, 2013). Indonesia's parliament has legislative, budgetary, and monitoring functions. Article 20A of 1945 carries a provision for the House of Representatives to enact laws, enact and also stipulate budgets, and check the enforcement by the executive of legislation (Haryati 2009).

This demonstrates that the division of authority is both official and practical in performing governmental duties. The connection between the executive and the legislature, however, is frequently tense in reality. For instance, the Constitutional Court's journal states that the connection between the executive and the legislature is often 'tangled'. There is frequently a lack of comprehension of the roles and powers of each institution by both sides (Isra, 2016). Despite constitutional regulation of the distribution of power, its implementation remains problematic, as evidenced by this.

Generally speaking, there are two perspectives from which to view the distribution of power in political literature. The division of authority between local government institutions and central government institutions is the first factor. This division is connected to the separation of political interests and state territory that each level of government is required to make. The qualitative nature of its distribution. Secondly, authority is distributed proportionally among government institutions to their appropriate level for their purpose. The government, legislatures, and courts are such institutions. This is based on qualitative characteristics. The former is called powersharing, and the latter is called separation of powers. Miriam Budiardo succinctly states it. It is a geographical distribution based on Carl (Ali, 2017) or the vertical separation of power quantitatively. Based on this background, this research aims to uncover, "How is power distributed in the Malang City Regional Legislative Council (Malang City DPRD) and which parties among them are most influential?"

Method

This study uses a qualitative case study approach to explore the dynamics of political behavior in the distribution of power within the Malang City DPRD. The case study method enables an in-depth understanding of complex, context-bound phenomena involving social and political interactions.

According to Yin (2018), case studies are particularly suitable when researchers want to answer questions of 'how' and 'why' regarding a phenomenon, and when researchers cannot control the events being studied. This is particularly relevant to this study because the division of power in the DPRD takes place in a real-life context that cannot be manipulated. Moreover, it enables researchers to capture the political process comprehensively, from the background of policies,

inter-faction relations, to the personal dynamics among council members that cannot be accessed through quantitative approaches.

Stake (1995) also emphasizes that case studies are designed to explain an incident as well as to grasp the significance and sociopolitical implications of the choices made by participants in a given situation. As a result, this technique enables researchers to thoroughly examine the political behavior of Malang City DPRD members in the practice of power sharing, as well as the numerous factors that affect it, including political party goals, institutional structures, and local political culture.

The case study approach, in addition to providing comprehensive and contextual information, enables the use of multiple data gathering methods, including document analysis, participant observation, and in-depth interviews. According to Creswell (2013), the case study approach enables researchers to examine a small system using a range of data sources. In this scenario, researchers can gather data from several sources to provide a complete picture of the distribution, negotiation, and use of power at the local legislative level.

Discussion

Personal and Party Dominance in Policy Determination in Malang City DPRD

The policy-making process in the Malang City Council is heavily influenced by the dominance of individuals and political parties. This phenomenon is consistent with the framework of power hegemony as described by Raditya (2016), namely that “the hegemony of leaders enables agents below or at the same level to obey the leaders’ power.” The dominance of the political elite in the Malang DPRD is manifested through control of fiscal resources, particularly in the preparation of the Regional Budget (APBD). This is clearly reflected in the mass corruption case that was uncovered in 2018, when 40 of the 45 members of the Malang City DPRD were named suspects by the Corruption Eradication Commission (KPK) on suspicion of bribery and gratification related to the 2015 Revised Regional Budget (APBD-P) (Tirto, 2018; Tempo, 2019). This fact shows the existence of policy capture by the elite, where the legislative process no longer reflects public aspirations but is directed at perpetuating the internal political interests of the party. The following table summarizes the distribution of Malang City DPRD members who became suspects according to political party.

Tabel 1. Distribution of Malang City DPRD Members Named as Suspects by Party (2018 KPK Cases)

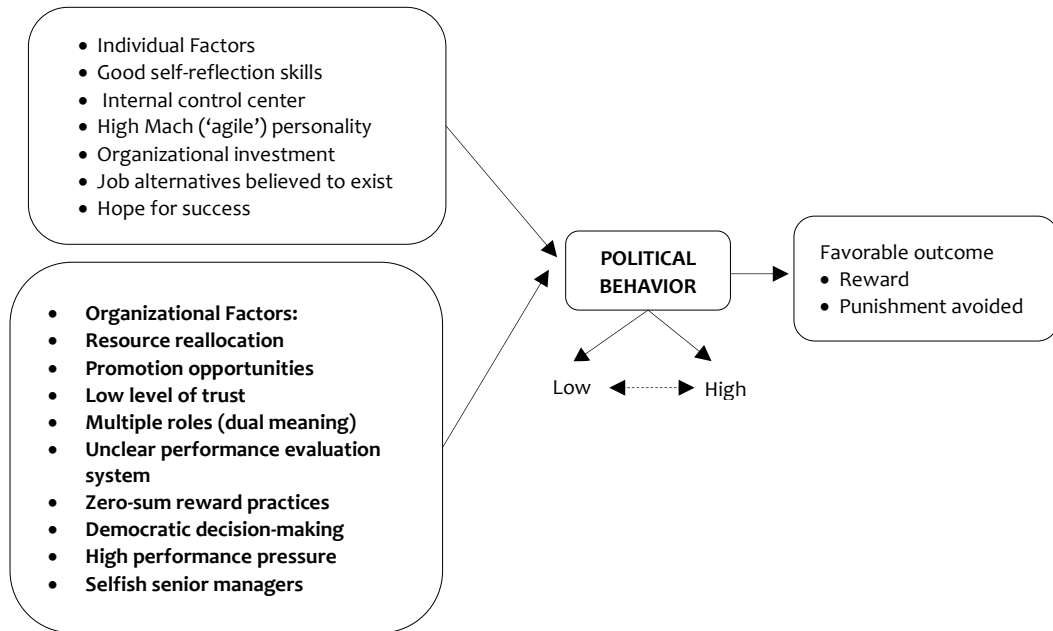
No	Parties (Parpol)	Number of DPRD Members (Suspects)
1	PDIP	9
2	Golkar	5
3	PKB	5
4	Partai Demokrat	5
5	PKS	5
6	Partai Gerindra	4
7	PAN	3
8	PPP	3
9	Hanura	1
10	NasDem	1
Total		41

Source: detikNews, 2018; Liputan6, 2018; Setkab, 2018.

The data in Table 1 shows that the phenomenon of corruption in the Malang City DPRD is cross-party. Almost all parties that had seats in the DPRD at that time were involved, albeit to varying degrees. This fact supports the theoretical analysis that the problem is not only the dominance of one party, but also structural problems in local political institutions in Indonesia. In line with Kristiyanto's (2023) findings, the weakness of internal party democracy has led to political resilience being built through patronage rather than accountability. Within the framework of Easton's (1979) political system, this phenomenon explains the failure of the conversion stage, whereby public input through formal mechanisms is not converted into representative policies because it is hijacked by the interests of party elites.

The political behavior framework (Surbakti, 1992) also helps explain this dynamic. Political behavior can be integrative (compromise, consensus) or disintegrative (conflictual, exclusive). Nursi (2023) asserts that "disintegrative behavior tends to generate conflict." In the context of Malang, disintegrative behavior is clearly evident in that DPRD members prioritize the interests of their factions and elites over the public interest. This is further reinforced by Pradana's (2022) findings that the practice of participatory budgeting in Malang was not fully effective, because the low political commitment of the elite made citizen participation tend to be symbolic and did not have a significant impact on budget allocations. Thus, political behavior that should be integrative has shifted to disintegrative due to elite domination. Here are some factors that can affect a person's political behavior, namely, individual factors and organizational factors, as shown in Figure 1.

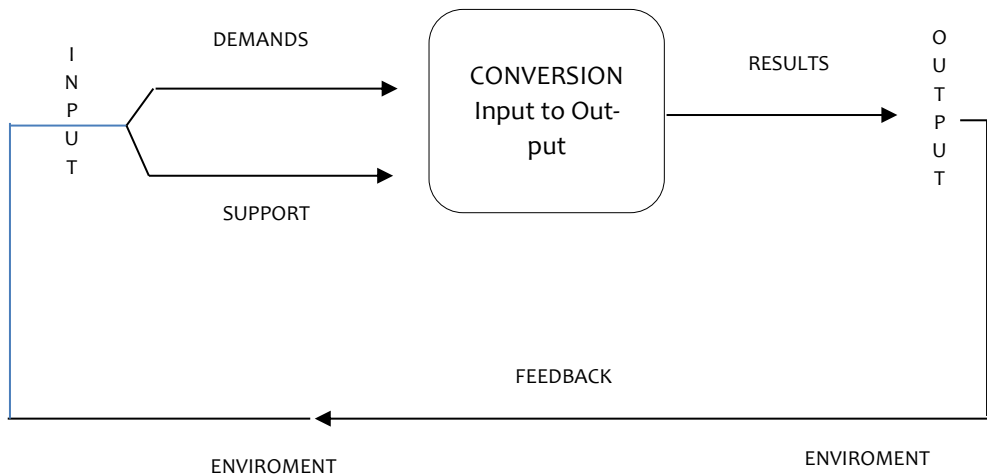
Figure 1. Factors Influencing Political Behavior



Source: Robbin and Judge, 2008.

The horizontal distribution of power indicates that the legislature has the authority to create laws. This institution is also referred to as the Parliament and the House of Representatives (DPR). Its members are elected representatives who are chosen through general elections using either the district or proportional system. Beginning with the open recruiting of legislative candidates in general elections, transparency in legislation should start. This shows that the representatives are quite dedicated to battling for the interests and goals of the people. The legislative institution can be added as a structure in the process of conversion according to David Easton's (1979) systems analysis approach. This shows that its main function is to formulate policies outlined in laws at the political/national government level and regional regulations at the local political level of local government (Kadir, 2008). Figure 2 provides a basic understanding of this concept.

Figure 2. Political System



Source: Kadir, 2008.

The image above illustrates how a political system functions. It starts with the influence that comes from the environment in the form of demands and support. These inputs provide the energy necessary for the system to carry out its activities. The system then converts these inputs into outputs, such as binding decisions or policies, in response to environmental influences. The output is then returned to the environment through a feedback process, affecting or becoming a new input for the political system (Kadir, 2008).

Thus, the integration of hegemony theory, political behavior, and political system models with empirical data on corruption cases in Malang reveals systematic distortions in local democracy. Not only is there formal party domination, but also transactional practices that disrupt the function of representation.

Positional Approach and the Influence of Actors and Parties in Policy Determination

The dominance of the PDI-P in the Malang City DPRD is evident from the number of seats they control (26.6% or 12 out of 45 seats). This structural position has enabled the PDI-P to hold the position of DPRD chair almost continuously from 1999 to 2020. The positional approach theory emphasizes that the political power of actors is directly related to their position in the institutional structure (Idrus & Purwaningsih, 2016). Thus, seat dominance is an important asset in shaping policy in the Malang DPRD.

However, this structural dominance is not entirely directed at control functions. Findings show a tendency toward harmonious cooperation with the executive, where DPRD criticism is constructive and non-confrontational. This can be understood through the framework of power as influence (Putnam et al., 1994), that

power is not always exercised through fierce opposition, but can also take the form of consensus. However, overly dominant consensus has the potential to weaken the checks and balances function. Recent studies confirm this. Qodir (2020) found that DPRD in many regions experience executive capture, while Mietzner (2021) explains the phenomenon of cartelized politics in Indonesia that prioritizes stability over representation of the people. The limitations of the control function are even more apparent when linked to the 2018 Malang City DPRD corruption case. The following data shows the distribution of suspects by party.

Table 2. Composition of Malang City Council Seats 2019-2024

Political Party	Number of Seats	Percentage
PDI-P	12	26,6%
PKB	7	15,5%
PKS	6	13,3%
Gerindra	5	11,1%
Golkar	5	11,1%
Demokrat	3	6,6%
PAN	3	6,6%
NasDem	2	4,4%
Perindo	1	2,2%
PSI	1	2,2%
Total	45	100%

Source: Project contributor Wikimedia, 2025.

The composition of the Malang City DPRD seats for the 2019-2024 period shows that PDI-P is the dominant party with 12 seats or 26.6% of the total 45 seats. This position makes PDI-P not only the majority party, but also a decisive actor in local political dynamics. With a significant number of seats, the PDI-P has a great opportunity to control the leadership of the DPRD, direct the legislative agenda, as well as form a pattern of favorable relations with the executive. Theoretically, this condition is in line with the positional approach, which emphasizes that political power is rooted in structural positions in formal institutions (Idrus & Purwaningsih, 2016).

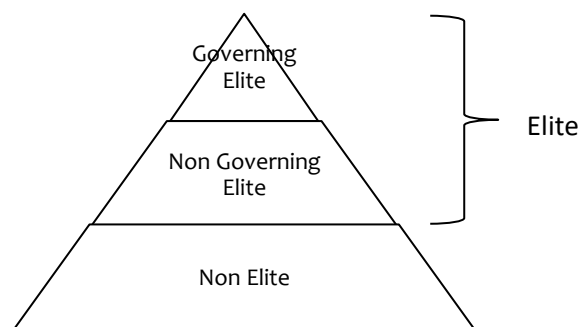
In second place, PKB won 7 seats (15.5%), followed by PKS with 6 seats (13.3%), and Gerindra and Golkar with 5 seats each (11.1%). Although they have fewer seats than PDI-P, this configuration places these parties as important actors in forming coalitions. However, since the PDI-P controls more than a quarter of the seats, the potential for a dominant coalition is very high. This is in line with Mietzner's (2021) analysis, which states that dominant parties at the local level often create cartelized politics where relations between parties tend to be cooperative rather than competitive.

On the other hand, medium and small parties such as Demokrat and PAN (6.6% each), NasDem (4.4%), and Perindo and PSI (2.2%) face limitations in influencing the direction of DPRD policies. Their dependence on the major parties, especially PDI-P, means that they tend to go along with the majority coalition. In other words, this seat configuration reflects an imbalance of political power that not only affects inter-party relations, but also has implications for the function of community representation.

Analytically, this table indicates a pattern of structural dominance that has the potential to weaken the checks and balances mechanism. PDI-P, as the holder of the most seats, has the capacity to form alliances with medium-sized parties to control the majority of DPRD. As a result, substantive opposition is difficult to form, and the oversight function of the executive is potentially weakened. This finding is consistent with Setiyono and McLeod's (2022) study, which asserts that weak opposition in Indonesian local parliaments often contributes to increased corrupt practices because legislative control over the executive is not effective.

Thus, the composition of seats in Malang's DPRD is not only quantitative data on political distribution, but also empirical evidence of how legislative power structures can direct political behavior towards cartelization. It shows that seat dominance is not just an electoral number, but an important determinant that explains why the DPRD tends to be cooperative with the executive, even when its oversight function should be exercised critically. Arguably, aristocratic philosophers such as Vilfredo Pareto, Gaetano Mosca, and Suzanne Keller defined the term 'elite' as a subgroup or subgroups in a society that are superior or more advantageous than other groups. Mosca and Pareto viewed the social pyramid as shown in Figure 3.

Figure 3. The Pyramid of Society According to Pareto and Mosca



Source: Lebaron & Dogan, 2020.

As the above picture of the seat acquisition shows, the PDI-P's dominance in the council is so overwhelming that the chairman of the Malang City Council (DPRD) is automatically occupied by the PDI-P as the majority seat holder. The PDI-

P has undeniably been the dominant party in the composition of the council chair position. From 1999 to 2020, the PDI-P held the position of chairman of the Malang City Council for all but one term. In 2014, the Democratic Party held the position.

During the pandemic in the last 4 (four) months, the DPRD has carried out 2 (two) major activity agendas, namely:

1. Plenary Meeting of the Responsibility Report of the Mayor of Malang

In contrast to the central level, the Malang City DPRD is different from before. In the past, the DPRD could reject the mayor's accountability report, which could lead to serious consequences such as impeachment. According to Asmualik, the second vice chairman of the Malang City DPRD, the council used to have the authority to reject the mayor's accountability report, which could lead to serious consequences such as impeachment. However, that is no longer the case. Now, the report is largely accepted, albeit with the customary caveats and suggestions. For example, when Mr. Sutiaji presented his recent report, the council responded by offering critical feedback. Though these comments are expressed in a spirit of camaraderie, they are meant to be taken seriously by the executive branch. This approach reflects a less confrontational form of supervision where the council raises and documents issues in the forum. This signals that the council is still exercising its supervisory role, albeit in a less heated and more cooperative manner.

Thus far, the legislature and the executive have enjoyed a harmonious relationship. The legislature carries out cooperation, coordination, togetherness, and synergy. The legislature supports all programs proposed by the executive as long as they benefit the community and public services. However, some members of the legislature still criticize the executive branch. In this case, power can be interpreted as the ability to influence individuals or groups. Political scientist Robert D. Putnam defines power as the ability to influence the collective policymaking process (Putnam et al., 1994).

As such, Asmualik stressed that the criticism voiced by the DPRD should be constructive rather than oppositional and should be based on a spirit of cooperation and mutual obligation. This demonstrates a desire to ensure that the executive performs at its best. The DPRD provides direction to promote improvement instead of merely expressing disagreement based on what is regarded as necessary for better governance.

In this situation, power is the capacity to affect other people or groups. According to political scientist Robert D. Putnam, power is the ability to influence the collective policymaking process (Mas'ood & Nasikun, 1987).

2. Meeting With Opinions

It lasted for 2 (two) days, July 19-20, 2020. For 2 (two) days yesterday, the four Malang City DPRD Commissions were busy with a hearing meeting (RDP) with the Regional Apparatus Organization (OPD) of the local City Government. Chairman of the Malang City DPRD I Made Riandiana Kartika explained, each Commission

discussed budget absorption in the 2019 APBD with their respective OPD partners. Commission A with 12 OPDs, Commission B with 9 OPDs, Commission C with 6 OPDs, and Commission D with 14 OPDs.

In an interview, Asmualik said that Commission C emphasized the importance of maintaining stable city revenue to ensure adequate funding for future development efforts. While more conservative voices proposed abolishing certain taxes to maintain the current system, the commission also considered concerns expressed by business owners. As a result, adjustments were made to strike a balance by setting realistic revenue targets that would not burden the government or the business community. The underlying principle was to protect the economic circulation that sustains community life and ensure that no group is unduly disadvantaged.

This is because political actors want the ability to control and mobilize people to support their goals. Politicians and statesmen generally want people to carry out their orders willingly. Common sense tells us that citizens will obey their government, even if they don't believe it has the right to govern or legitimacy. If people believe their government has authority, the government's power becomes legitimate. In political science, this power is called authority (Mas'ood & Nasikun, 1987).

Decision-Making Approach and the Influence of Actors and Parties in Policy-Making

Theoretically, decision-making is understood as the process of selecting the best alternative based on certain criteria (Hodgetts, 1975; Terry, 1977). This definition is emphasized by Afmansyah (2019) that decision-making is "a systematic process involving problem identification, collection of facts and data, and execution of the most appropriate action". However, findings in the field show a gap between the ideals of theory and practice in the Malang City DPRD.

During the 2019-2024 period, the Malang City Council produced only one Regional Regulation (Perda), namely on Regional Property Agency (BMD). Interestingly, the regulation was born from an executive proposal, not a legislative initiative. This fact shows that although the DPRD has the formal authority to take the initiative in making regulations, executive dominance is still very strong. From the perspective of the decision-making approach theory, this indicates that the problem identification and alternative selection stages are not fully carried out by the legislature, but are driven by executive interests.

This phenomenon is also consistent with the analysis of institutionalism theory, which explains that legislative institutions in Indonesia often face limited capacity to initiate policies. A study by Rasyid et al. (2021) in the *Journal of Political Studies* shows that DPRD in many regions function more as policy endorsers than policy initiators. Meanwhile, research by Setiyono & McLeod (2022) confirms that weak legislative opposition increases executive dominance, so political decisions tend to be top-down.

Empirically, the Malang DPRD’s initiative constraints are also influenced by member composition factors. A total of 45 DPRD members for the 2019-2024 period are new faces, who have relatively little experience in legislative techniques. Widianingsih & Morrell’s (2020) study in Policy Studies found that low regional legislative capacity often has implications for low policy quality, because new actors need a long adaptation time.

The case of the local regulation on internet cafes (warnet) is also an example of how legislative policies are not always relevant to social needs. The regulation was passed, but the impact was minimal because the internet cafe business had declined dramatically. This reflects a weakness in the policy evaluation process, where the DPRD failed to ensure that the regulation was truly adaptive to social dynamics. In the context of decision-making theory, this condition shows that the information gathering and impact assessment processes were not carried out optimally. The legislative performance of the Malang City DPRD during 2019 is shown in the following table.

Table 3. Legsilation Performance of the Malang City DPRD for the 2019-2024

Regulatory Type	Confirmed Amount	Inisiator
Perda BMD (Regionally Owned Entity)	1	Executive
Perda Internet Cafe (Warnet)	1 (less effective)	Legislative
Total New Regulations	2	Majority of executives

Source: PERDA Kota Malang No. 1 Tahun 2019; Pemerintah Kota Malang, 20203.

The data in Table 1 confirms the gap between decision-making theory, which emphasizes systematic rationality, and the practice of the Malang DPRD, which shows a heavy reliance on the executive. Political decisions are reactive rather than proactive, with minimal legislative initiative and weak policy evaluation. As such, the DPRD tends to act as a policy follower, not a policy leader.

This is in line with Kristiyanto’s (2023) findings that political parties in Indonesia often fail to internalize internal democracy, resulting in local legislative actors being less able to articulate an independent agenda. Academically, this gap indicates the need to strengthen the institutional capacity of DPRD’s so that they are able to carry out legislative functions substantively, not just formally.

Structural Domination, Weak Opposition, and the Road to Policy Capture

The dominance of the majority party in the DPRD of Malang City, which influences decision-making patterns and policy products, if read through the positional approach framework, the distribution of seats determines the party's structural capacity to control the political agenda. The PDI-P, with 12 seats (26.6% of the total 45), occupies a dominant position in the DPRD structure, so that it almost always occupies the chair of the DPRD and leads the legislative agenda (see Table 2). This

is consistent with Idrus and Purwaningsih's (2016) analysis that structural positions within political institutions are the main source of legislative power.

However, this structural dominance does not necessarily strengthen the legislature's control function. Instead, as field findings show, legislative and executive relations tend to be harmonious and cooperative, with criticism being 'constructive' rather than confrontational. In the framework of power as influence, Putnam et al. (1994) assert that political power is often realized through consensus that influences the collective process of policy-making. However, recent studies have shown that a consensus pattern that is too dominant risks weakening the checks and balances mechanism. Mietzner (2021) calls it cartelized politics, where dominant parties build stable coalitions but sacrifice public representation.

The analytical relationship between theory and findings shows that the structural position of the legislature, particularly the number of majority seats controlled by the party, directly provides agenda setting capacity as described in the positional approach. This seat dominance allows the party to control the flow of policy discussions and determine the direction of legislation. However, this agenda setting capacity, when combined with the harmonious relationship between the legislature and the executive, creates a situation that is contrary to the principle of checks and balances. Instead of forming a substantive opposition, what emerges is a pattern of executive capture or even cartelization, where major parties choose a stable coalition rather than carrying out critical control functions. This condition is exacerbated by the weak legislative capacity of the majority of DPRD members who are new and lack experience, so that political opposition does not have substantive power to influence the quality of policies.

This combination of weak opposition and low legislative capacity opens up ample space for policy capture, which is the hijacking of the policy process by narrow elite interests. The empirical manifestation of this mechanism is evident in the 2018 Malang City DPRD mass corruption case, when 41 DPRD members were caught in the practice of bribery and gratification in the discussion of the APBD. This fact shows how structural dominance that is not accompanied by legislative capacity and strong oversight mechanisms can lead to institutional vulnerability and transactional political practices that harm the public interest.

Conclusion

This research shows that the distribution of power in the Malang City DPRD tends to be determined by the structural dominance of the majority party, especially the PDI-P, which provides agenda-setting capacity and great opportunities to control policy direction. However, this dominance does not result in an effective oversight function, but rather strengthens the pattern of harmonious relations with the executive, which erodes the principle of checks and balances. This situation encourages the practice of policy capture, where the legislative process is absorbed into elite interests, and emphasizes the characteristics of cartel politics at

the local level. Academically, these findings criticize the normative assumption that the distribution of legislative seats automatically strengthens democratic functions. On the contrary, this study proves that without adequate institutional capacity and substantive opposition, structural dominance creates new vulnerabilities: weakened public representation and increased opportunities for political corruption. Thus, the main problem is not only the quantity of political power, but also the quality of internal party democratic practices, local political culture, and the capacity of legislators to carry out the functions of representation and oversight. It needs to be emphasized that the harmonious relationship between the legislature and the executive, which is often considered positive in maintaining political stability, is actually potentially counterproductive. Excessive harmonization without critical opposition weakens substantive democracy. Therefore, institutional reform should be directed at strengthening the opposition, improving internal party democracy, and increasing the capacity of legislators. Only then can DPRD members escape the trap of cartel politics and truly function as instruments of democratic accountability.

Practical recommendations that can be drawn from these findings include:

1. Reforming political party regulations, especially related to funding transparency and internal democracy, so that the selection of legislative candidates is more accountable and not based on patronage.
2. Strengthening the opposition mechanism in the DPRD, through the structuring of rules of order that provide greater space for minority parties in the oversight function.
3. Increasing the capacity of legislators through political education, technical legislative training, and strengthening policy research so that DPRD members have substantive abilities in formulating and evaluating policies.
4. Transparency and public participation, especially in the APBD preparation process, to ensure that citizen involvement is not merely symbolic, but has an impact on budget allocations that favor the interests of the community.
5. Independent external oversight, for example through collaboration with anti-corruption agencies, academics and civil society organizations to prevent transactional politics at the local level.

With these steps, DPRD members will not only escape the trap of cartel politics, but will also be transformed into institutions that truly carry out the functions of representation, legislation and supervision in order to strengthen substantive local democracy.

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Authenticity Statement

I affirm that this article is the author's original work and is free of plagiarism. All references are listed within the article. This article has not been published and is not under consideration by another journal.

Biography

Moch. Fauzie Said is a permanent lecturer at the Political Science study program, Faculty of Social and Political Sciences, Universitas Brawijaya, Malang. He has expertise in political and public policy research, as well as politics. He was awarded as Best Presenter at the 10th International Conference on International Studies (ICIS), 2024, Universiti Utara Malaysia. He is also active as a LAMPSAK assessor and as a keynote speaker and resource person at various events related to the topics of public policy, politics, and disaster. Recent published works are “Dynastic Politics and Party Persistence: Mechanisms of Elite Power Reproduction in Indonesian Democracy 2024 Elections”.

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