

## CLIENTELISM AND THE EROSION OF LEGISLATIVE OVERSIGHT: EXAMINING THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVE (*DEWAN PERWAKILAN RAKYAT*, DPR) ROLE UNDER PRESIDENT JOKO WIDODO (2014–2024)

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**ABSTRACT.** This article investigates the weakening of legislative oversight by The House of (*Dewan Perwakilan Rakyat*, DPR) during President Joko Widodo's tenure from 2014 to 2024. Despite the expanded constitutional authority granted to the DPR following the 1998 political reforms, the quality of oversight function has diminished markedly in the Jokowi era. Drawing on theoretical and empirical literature, the article argues that this erosion is not solely the result of institutional shortcomings or inadequate reform, but is primarily driven by pervasive clientelistic relationships between the president and party elites. Such clientelism entrenches political patronage, enabling the executive to exert significant influence over legislative behavior and undermining the DPR's independence. This study uses a qualitative, interpretivist approach, employing in-depth interviews, observation, and literature review within real social contexts. This study aims to provide a critical assessment of how clientelism has reshaped the balance of power between executive and legislature.

**Keywords:** Clientelism; DPR; Joko Widodo; Oversight

### INTRODUCTION

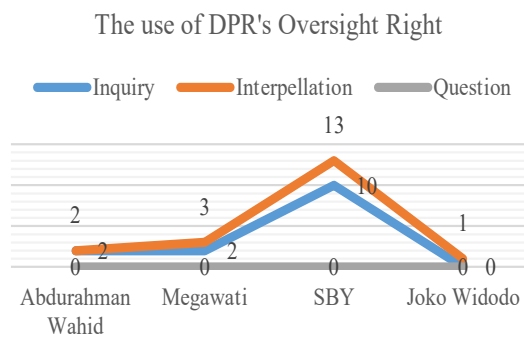
The oversight function of the Dewan Perwakilan Rakyat (DPR) serves as a fundamental pillar of Indonesian democracy. As a legislative body, the DPR is constitutionally mandated to ensure accountability, transparency, and checks and balances in the executive branch. Strikingly, throughout Joko Widodo's administration (2014–2024), the DPR's capacity to exercise robust oversight has experienced considerable decline. This study contends that the diminished oversight function of the DPR primarily stems from clientelist ties between President Jokowi and influential party leaders, which have enabled the president to shape the DPR's conduct. These clientelist connections fostered a network of political patronage, granting Jokowi leverage over legislative activities and decisions, and ultimately undermining the DPR's independence as a supervisory institution.

Political reform 1998 which was marked by the amendments to the constitution has changed the power structure within Indonesia political system including empowering the position and authority of the parliament to control and restrain the executive. The constitution was amended four times between 1999 and 2002, transforming several of its aspects. Firstly, the amendment purposed to minimize the potentiality of the abuse of power particularly by limiting the presidency to two terms. Prior to the constitutional amendments, the president's term lasted five years and there was no restriction on the number of times a president could be re-elected. However, after the amendments, the constitution introduced a two-term limit and required that

presidents be chosen directly by the electorate. In addition, the amendments restructured the parliamentary institutions.

Following the constitutional amendments, Indonesia's parliament consists of three chambers: the People's Consultative Assembly (MPR), the House of Representatives (DPR – Dewan Perwakilan Rakyat), and the Regional Representative Council (DPD – Dewan Perwakilan Daerah). Before these changes, parliament was made up of just two chambers: the MPR, which held the highest authority, and the DPR as the lower house. With the reformed constitution, real legislative power shifted to the DPR, which gained the authority to supervise the executive, pass legislation, and approve the national budget. In contrast, the DPD's function was limited primarily to submitting regional-related bills to the DPR for discussion. The MPR, drawing its membership from both the DPR and DPD, now serves mainly a ceremonial function, such as inaugurating the President and Vice President.

Additionally, constitutional reforms extended the DPR's supervisory powers over both executive and judicial branches. These enhancements included the DPR's right to review reports from the Supreme Audit Agency (BPK), as well as the power to select members of the Supreme Court, Constitutional Court, and Judicial Commission. The 1998 political reforms notably strengthened the DPR's influence and authority. Despite this broadened mandate, legislative oversight by the DPR has waned, with an evident lack of robust investigation into major government actions. The following chart demonstrates a steady decline in the use of mechanisms like interpellation, inquiry, and questioning.



Source: Compilation of author

**Figure 1. Trend of DPR's Interpellation Rights**

Against this background, this article examines why was the legislative oversight role by the DPR weak during Joko Widodo's era? According to existing arguments, the decline in DPR oversight is attributed to ineffective parliamentary reforms, poor alignment between reform efforts and legislative quality, and institutional setbacks limiting effective supervision (Hermanto, 2024). Additionally, too few DPR committees oversee a large number of government partners, resulting in weak monitoring (Ridwan & Mochtar, 2019). A higher Presidential Threshold has created complex coalitions that undermine the DPR's independent oversight during elections (Rizqullah, 2024). Furthermore, the use of interpellation and inquiry procedures forms part of the strategy employed by political parties in the DPR to enhance their bargaining position with the government, particularly given the significant media coverage and public attention these actions receive (Ichwanuddin, 2012).

This article challenges conventional explanations for the DPR's declining oversight, proposing instead that the erosion is principally rooted in clientelist arrangements between the president and party elites. Through the exchange of political allegiance for material or strategic benefits, clientelism has deeply embedded patronage networks throughout Indonesian politics, sidelining effective checks on executive power. While the DPR was empowered by the constitution to hold the executive accountable, these personalized networks have increasingly compromised its ability to fulfill its supervisory role—especially in the context of President Joko Widodo's interactions with party leadership.

Clientelism is a pervasive political phenomenon that manifests in various forms across different polities (Nicholas, 2007). At its core, political clientelism involves an exchange relationship in which patrons—typically individuals or groups with higher socioeconomic status or political influence—provide personal favors such as jobs, contracts,

welfare benefits, or monetary assistance in return for electoral support from clients (Berenschot, 2018).

James Scott (1972) describes it as an “instrumental friendship,” emphasizing its calculated nature, while Landé (1977) frames it as a “dyadic alliance,” highlighting the direct, personal bond between unequal actors. Scott further elaborates that clientelism entails a hierarchical interaction where a patron offers protection or material benefits to a lower-status client, who reciprocates with loyalty and services (Scott, 1972). Similarly, Eisenstadt and Roniger (1984) stress the vertical and asymmetrical nature of these relationships, noting that both parties derive utility from the alliance despite their unequal positions. Kitschelt and Wilkinson (2007), analyse this dynamic through a principal-agent lens, where the client acts as the principal demanding goods or services, and the patron (or politician) serves as the agent fulfilling these demands—often mediated by brokers who connect distant clients to powerful patrons. These relationships are fundamentally based on the exchange of resources, services, or goods for political support, allegiance, or votes (Kitschelt & Wilkinson, 2007).

Susan Stokes suggests that political leaders utilize clientelist exchanges for several strategic reasons. Firstly, clientelism serves as an effective electoral strategy, particularly where voters have limited access to information about candidates or policy issues. By directly supplying goods and services, patrons foster personal loyalty and cultivate a dedicated voter base. Secondly, once in office, leaders may use clientelism as a means to solidify their hold on power, distributing benefits to supporters as a form of reward. Thirdly, this approach helps construct powerful political machines—networks that manage and allocate resources and patronage within communities. Such machines can strongly influence electoral outcomes and public decision-making. Lastly, clientelism can be leveraged to advance certain policy objectives by aligning supporter interests with political goals. However, Stokes cautions that widespread clientelism can undermine democratic governance by diminishing accountability, transparency, and adherence to the rule of law, thereby threatening the health of democratic institutions (Stokes, 2013).

Allen Hicken (2011) attempts to delineate the concept identify four essential features: the dyadic structure of relationships, the conditional nature of exchanges, the presence of hierarchical power dynamics, and the repeated interaction between participants.

First is dyadic relationships, refers to the personal connections between patrons and clients that form the foundation of clientelist systems. Early scholarship emphasized direct, face-to-face interactions, with scholars like Scott (1972) describing clientelism as “instrumental friendship” and Landé (1977) framing it as “dyadic” alliances between individuals of unequal status. However, contemporary research has expanded this understanding to include complex networks of brokers that connect higher-level patrons with ordinary clients (Hicken, 2011).

Furthermore, contingency represents the second defining feature of clientelist relationships. Unlike universal welfare policies, clientelist exchanges are explicitly transactional and conditional on reciprocal benefits. The goods exchanged can range from material items like cash or food to non-material benefits such as jobs, protection, or access to public services. Hierarchy forms the third characteristic of clientelist systems, reflecting the inherent power imbalance between patrons and clients. Traditional interpretations emphasize the vertical nature of these relationships, where higher-status patrons provide resources to lower-status clients in exchange for loyalty and services. However, some scholars like Kitschelt and Wilkinson (2007a) have reinterpreted this dynamic through a principal-agent framework that views the relationship as a more reciprocal, though still unequal, bargain. Regardless of theoretical perspective, the hierarchical structure remains central to understanding how clientelist systems maintain stability and enforce compliance across different levels of society (Allen Hicken, 2011).

The fourth characteristic, iteration, refers to the repeated nature of clientelist exchanges that distinguishes them from one-off transactions. The expectation of future interactions creates incentives for both patrons and clients to uphold their commitments, helping to overcome challenges related to non-simultaneous exchanges and enforcement (Hicken, 2011).

Taken together, these four characteristics - dyadic relationships, contingency, hierarchy, and iteration - provide a comprehensive framework for understanding clientelism as a distinct form of political exchange. While the specific manifestations may vary across contexts, these core elements help distinguish clientelism from other types of political relationships and explain its persistence in various political systems. The interplay between personalized networks, conditional exchanges, power asymmetries, and repeated interactions creates a self-reinforcing

system that can adapt to different social and political environments while maintaining its fundamental nature.

The concept of legislative oversight is critical particularly in explaining the declining number of inquiry and interpellation rights as tools of oversight. Schick (1976) provides a foundational definition, framing oversight as the legislature’s supervision of government policies and programs to ensure they align with legislative intent. Ogul (1976) and Maffio (2002) broaden this definition, arguing that oversight is not merely reactive but also proactive—extending to the examination of legislative proposals initiated by the executive before they become law (Jooji, 2019).

Additionally, Meny Colomer (2002) outlines three primary models of legislative oversight. The first is the partisan model, typically led by the opposition, which proves effective only when the government’s position is unstable. The second is the non-partisan model, where parliamentary scrutiny takes various forms, such as questions, committee investigations, or public hearings. The third type involves oversight paired with sanctions, like a motion of censure, which is a severe measure but cannot be deployed frequently without risking governmental instability (M. Colomer, 2002).

Given this context, Indonesia’s approach to legislative oversight aligns most closely with the non-partisan model for two primary reasons. First, under Indonesia’s presidential system, parliament has never developed an institutionalized opposition, which hampers the effectiveness of oversight. Even though not all political parties join the president’s cabinet, those that remain outside government do not organize themselves as a formal opposition. Second, the Indonesian parliament possesses three key oversight tools—interpellation, inquiry, and the right to express opinions. Constitutional amendments introduced in 2002 further strengthened these oversight powers. Consequently, this research contends that Indonesia’s legislative oversight structure fits the non-partisan model, rather than aligning with the partisan or sanction-based alternatives.

Previous studies on Indonesia’s parliamentary oversight lacks completeness as not fully explain the reduction in DPR oversight during the 2014–2024 period. Existing literature leaves gaps but provides a foundation. This study examines the extent of parliamentary oversight in post-reform Indonesia, arguing that pervasive clientelistic relationships between the president and party elites. Such clientelism entrenches political patronage, enabling the executive to exert significant influence over

legislative behavior and undermining the DPR's independence. This research offers new insights into the relationships among the president, party leaders, and DPR members, moving beyond institution-based explanations that can limit effective checks and balances between the DPR and the president.

## METHOD

This study utilizes a qualitative approach, focusing specifically on the case study methodology. A case study is understood as a thorough investigation of a single instance, chosen to provide insights relevant to a broader category of cases (John Gerring, 2001). As described by Denzin and Lincoln (2005), qualitative research encompasses diverse techniques and is inherently interpretative, adopting a naturalistic lens towards the research subject. Such an approach enables researchers to construct a comprehensive narrative about their topic of inquiry. Central to qualitative research is the interpretive paradigm, which values personal experiences and encourages the researcher to adopt a subjective perspective—an aspect that significantly shapes the outcomes of the study. Vogrin (2008) described this as idiographic, underscoring the importance of an individual's viewpoint regarding the research context, journey, and relationships involved. Furthermore, the case study strategy is closely associated with in-depth exploration of a particular group, individual, or phenomenon, offering detailed descriptions, analyses of the series of events, and accounts of the process of discovery (Biba, 2013).

This study employs a diverse mix of data collection strategies to achieve a nuanced understanding of the subject. Foremost among them are semi-structured interviews, which balance predetermined questions with flexible, open-ended prompts to delve deeply into interviewees' insights while maintaining thematic consistency (Bryman, 2016). Key figures, such as Dr. Fadli Zon (Deputy Speaker of the DPR, 2014–2019), Edy Soeparno (Secretary General of PAN, 2015–2024), and Fachri Hamzah (Deputy Speaker of the DPR, 2014–2019), were interviewed given their direct involvement in overseeing DPR activities during President Jokowi's administration.

The document analysis for this research encompasses several categories. Public records included documents like government reports, legislative proceedings, and organizational archives (Yin, 2018). Primary sources refer to materials created at the time of the events—such as official meeting minutes, government reports, correspondence, speeches,

and personal diaries (Bowen, 2009). Secondary sources offer evaluations or interpretations of primary documents, including news articles, scholarly publications, and biographies (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The overall analysis is conducted from an interpretivist perspective.

## RESULT & DISCUSSION

This article explores why the DPR's political oversight was limited during Jokowi's presidency. Despite the DPR holding significant constitutional powers to monitor and balance the executive, their oversight in practice proved inadequate. The study contends that clientelism shaped interactions between President Joko Widodo and party leaders, undermining the DPR's capacity to fulfill its supervisory role. Through reciprocal exchanges and favours, clientelism encourages political actors to place greater emphasis on personal alliances and transactional gains rather than upholding their legislative duties.

Throughout President Jokowi's administration, the DPR initiated six separate inquiries—covering Pelindo II, the Corruption Eradication Commission (KPK), Freeport, Jakarta's then-governor Basuki Tjahja Purnama, forest fires, and the wiretapping of former President SBY. However, none of these efforts were meaningfully acted upon by the president. The subsequent analysis explores the underlying reasons for the lack of progress in these six DPR initiatives. Using the lens of clientelism, this examination identifies two principal factors behind the stalling of these inquiries: political patronage and coalition management, both of which are characteristic features of clientelist political systems.

### *Political patronage*

In October 2015, the DPR formed a Special Committee (Panitia Khusus, Pansus) to conduct an investigation into Pelindo II, the state-owned port operator, following suspicions of corruption and mismanagement. The Indonesian Democratic Party of Struggle (PDIP) took a leading and vocal stance in championing this inquiry (Koran Tempo, 2015). PDIP's active involvement was particularly noteworthy, as the party had played a pivotal role in nominating Jokowi for the 2014 presidential race and in supporting the formation of his cabinet.

The PDIP, as the ruling party, played a strategic role in steering the investigation towards its own objectives. In its efforts, PDIP used the inquiry to diminish Vice President Jusuf Kalla's sway by seeking the dismissal of RJ Lino, Director

of Pelindo II and a close associate of Kalla. The party also set its sights on SOEs Minister Rini Soemarno, aiming to hold her accountable, driven in part by ongoing tensions between Jusuf Kalla, Rini Soemarno, and PDIP Chairwoman Megawati. Reports suggest that Megawati's ability to communicate with President Jokowi was hampered by the involvement of Rini Soemarno and Jusuf Kalla (Tempo, 2015). Sukur Nababan, a PDIP parliamentarian, publicly declared PDIP's opposition to Rini Soemarno's continued presence in the cabinet, highlighting the party's intent to curb her influence (Tempo, 2015). Despite PDIP's strong push and advocacy for these changes, President Jokowi refrained from removing Rini Soemarno from her ministerial role. This decision may have been influenced by Jusuf Kalla's position as a prominent Golkar leader and his close relationship with Rini Soemarno. Furthermore, Jusuf Kalla's business interests, including an LNG project in Bojonegara, Serang, Banten, which involved Ari Soemarno—Rini Soemarno's brother—may have contributed to Jokowi's choice to retain her in the cabinet (Tempo, 2015).

The president's decision to disregard the DPR's recommendations largely stemmed from Jusuf Kalla's considerable influence—as both Vice President and a central figure within the Golkar party, whose integration into the ruling coalition was anticipated. This dynamic highlights the web of clientelist ties between President Jokowi and Jusuf Kalla, which played a crucial role in shaping presidential choices. Furthermore, the president's inaction was reinforced by the fact that there is no constitutional obligation requiring adherence to the Special Committee's advice.

The DPR's second inquiry during Jokowi's presidency centered on the Freeport affair. The inquiry began when Sudirman Said, the Minister of Energy and Mineral Resources, reported Setya Novanto, then Speaker of the DPR, to the DPR's Ethics Council (MKD). Novanto was accused of attempting to secure 20% of PT Freeport Indonesia's shares, allegedly citing the authority of President Joko Widodo and Vice President Jusuf Kalla, in exchange for facilitating the renewal of Freeport's mining contract. To support his claims, Sudirman Said submitted transcripts and audio recordings to the MKD of conversations between Novanto, Maroef Sjamsoeddin (President Director of Freeport Indonesia), and oil and gas businessman Muhammad Reza Chalid, which revealed a contentious lobbying effort (Kompas, 2015). On December 16, 2015, Setya Novanto resigned from

his position as Speaker of the DPR, stating his decision was meant to protect the dignity of the institution (Detik, 2015).

Although the DPR leadership initially sought to form a special committee to investigate the Freeport affair, the momentum behind this effort gradually diminished and ultimately stalled. According to Merdeka Press, Vice President Jusuf Kalla advised President Joko Widodo to put a stop to the DPR's inquiry process, cautioning that pressing forward with the investigation could have negative repercussions for the government (Merdeka, 2015).

Following this, Tempo magazine reported that President Jokowi hosted a meeting at the palace with leaders of major political parties, including PDIP, Nasdem, PPP, PKB, Golkar, and PAN. The discussions reportedly revolved around Jokowi's plan to reorganize his cabinet, particularly to create space for PAN and Golkar. The exclusive nature of this gathering, as noted by Tempo, reflected the clientelist ties between President Jokowi and these party leaders, shaping key decisions about cabinet appointments (Tempo, 2015).

President Jokowi included Golkar and PAN in the cabinet during the second reshuffle on July 26, 2016. Airlangga Hartarto from Golkar was appointed as the Minister of Industry, while Asman Abnur from PAN became the Minister of Bureaucratic Reform and State Apparatus (Tempo, 2016). The inclusion of members from PAN and Golkar in the cabinet affected the dynamics between political groups within the DPR, including the KMP (Red-and-White Coalition), and had implications for the legislative body's oversight functions.

The third inquiry initiated by the DPR focused on the Corruption Eradication Commission (KPK). In 2017, Indonesia's parliament invoked its right to investigate the KPK's effectiveness in handling the high-profile corruption scandal involving electronic national identity cards (e-ID), a case that entangled several legislators.

The proposal to exercise the DPR's inquiry rights stemmed from an April 2017 discussion between members of Commission III and leaders of the KPK. During this meeting, KPK Commissioner Laode Muhammad Syarif explained that Commission III had requested access to recordings of the interrogation of detained parliamentarian Miryam S. Haryani. The KPK declined, maintaining that such matters were part of the legal process and not under parliamentary supervision (Tempo, 2017).

Faced with disappointment, Commission III saw 25 members from eight of the DPR's ten factions call for the use of inquiry rights. At the

plenary session on April 28, 2017, six factions—Golkar, PDIP, Hanura, Nasdem, PPP, and PAN—voted in favor of the inquiry, while four (PKB, Demokrat, PKS, and Gerindra) were against it. Notably, those backing the inquiry—Golkar, PDIP, Nasdem, Hanura, PAN, and PPP—were parties affiliated with the ruling government coalition and generally expected to champion the KPK's anti-corruption mandate. Yet, because several faction members were also subjects of KPK investigations related to the e-ID scandal, this inquiry seemed largely motivated by a desire to shield their own members, rather than bolster President Jokowi's administration (Jakarta Post, 2017).

On February 14, 2018, the DPR's KPK Inquiry Committee put forward four principal recommendations: first, to reorganize the KPK and implement external oversight; second, to enhance adherence to legal procedures by strengthening collaboration between agencies and providing better witness protection; third, to ensure the management of the KPK's budget complies with BPK audits; and fourth, to promote transparency in human resources, particularly in the recruitment and promotion processes (Kompas, 2018).

Despite the DPR's recommendations, there was a noticeable lack of substantial political momentum, especially as Golkar, PAN, PPP, and Nasdem withdrew their support from the special inquiry committee. This realignment was likely influenced by President Joko Widodo's private consultations with party leaders, which shifted the balance of support for the inquiry rights.

In an interview, PAN Secretary General and Member of Parliament Eddy Soeparno explained that President Jokowi's meetings with party leaders were intended to address pressing political matters and maintain stability, particularly regarding the KPK inquiry. Soeparno emphasized that "PAN's chief objective was to reinforce the KPK's efforts in fighting corruption, but the special inquiry committee was widely seen as a move to weaken the KPK's effectiveness."

Golkar's withdrawal from the inquiry committee coincided with significant shifts in its leadership: Bambang Soesatyo took over as DPR Speaker following Setya Novanto's resignation, while Airlangga Hartarto became Golkar's new chairman. Soesatyo explained that Golkar's earlier support for the inquiry was largely due to Novanto's direction, and that Hartarto's leadership marked a turning point in the party's stance. These changes reflected President Jokowi's considerable

influence on Golkar's leadership, especially during the party's internal disputes that began in 2015.

Furthermore, in 2017 ninety lawmakers from four political factions proposed using the inquiry rights to investigate the decision that allowed Basuki "Ahok" Tjahaja Purnama to return to his gubernatorial position after the first round of the 2017 Jakarta gubernatorial election campaign, despite his ongoing trial for blasphemy.

Although legal controversies persisted, Ahok continued his bid for Jakarta governor in 2017. Election regulations required him to step down temporarily while campaigning. Tensions escalated when the Minister of Home Affairs, Tjahjo Kumolo—a fellow PDIP member—allowed Ahok to resume his position after the first round of campaigning, despite ongoing blasphemy charges (CNN, 2017). This decision, reportedly backed by President Jokowi, appeared to contradict Law No. 23/2014 on Regional Government, which mandates that any regional leader facing charges with a potential five-year sentence must automatically relinquish office.

The Democratic Party was the primary driver of efforts to launch a parliamentary inquiry, with 42 of its 61 members supporting the measure. Additional support came from Gerindra (22 out of 73 members), PKS (16 out of 40), and PAN (10 out of 48), all insisting on clarification regarding Ahok's reinstatement after his campaign leave. These factions argued that allowing Ahok's return violated the provisions of the 2014 Law on Regional Administration (Detik, 2017).

Even though some parties within President Jokowi's coalition had previously supported different gubernatorial candidates, they ultimately joined forces to oppose the proposed inquiry. Golkar, PAN, and PPP's resistance to the inquiry reflected their alignment with Jokowi, shaped by his influence over their party leadership. Together with PDIP and other pro-government parties, this coalition managed to reject the inquiry, underscoring how political alliances and the strength of the majority in parliament determine the fate of such proposals.

### ***Coalition politics***

Another right of inquiry exercised by the DPR concerned forest fires across Sumatera and Kalimantan. The fires in these regions created thousands of hotspots, producing thick smoke that reduced visibility and led to widespread respiratory issues (Tempo, 2015). The incident drew attention to the government's response and highlighted concerns about the coordination of management strategies.

Political parties within the Red-and-White Coalition (KMP)—including Golkar, Gerindra, PAN, and PKS—used this event to question the government's actions. They proposed an inquiry into how the situation was managed, with Nasdem Party member Siti Nurbaya Bakar leading the initiative and focusing on the Ministry of Forestry and Environment. The proposal called for government accountability and also addressed the roles of ministries associated with different coalitions, including the Indonesia Great Coalition (Koalisi Indonesia Hebat, KIH) (Liputan6, 2015).

Deputy Speaker of the DPR, Agus Hermanto, advocated for forming a special committee (Panitia Khusus, or Pansus) to conduct an in-depth investigation into how the government managed the forest fires. Hermanto argued that a Pansus would offer a stronger approach than a Working Committee (Panja), as it could summon corporate suspects to testify and help shape recommendations for law enforcement (Kompas, 2015). Commission IV of the DPR, responsible for areas such as forestry, supported this idea. Edhy Prabowo, the chair of Commission IV and a Gerindra party member within the KMP bloc, noted that there was unanimous backing for the Pansus within the commission and that the proposal would soon be presented to other relevant commissions (Liputan6, 2015).

Nevertheless, Vice President Jusuf Kalla voiced his apprehension that establishing a special committee (Pansus) on the forest fires would be overly time-consuming for cabinet officials, who were already heavily engaged in disaster response. He recommended that while the DPR was entitled to scrutinize the government's actions regarding the crisis, it should conduct its inquiries efficiently to prevent ministers from being distracted from their urgent responsibilities (Kompas, 2015).

The push to conduct the inquiry ultimately stalled. Its rejection came from the Indonesia Great Coalition (KIH), led by PDIP and the Nasdem Party, as well as Setya Novanto, the Golkar chairman and then DPR Speaker—despite his coalition's anticipated support. Novanto's decision was viewed as a calculated political move, given that he was facing scrutiny from the Ethics Council (MKD) over the Freeport scandal. By refraining from strongly criticizing the government's handling of forest fires, Novanto hoped to ease pressure from Jokowi's coalition regarding his own investigation. Additionally, his stance matched the preferences of Vice President Jusuf Kalla and other Golkar leaders, who were closely aligned with the ruling government.

Another incident that underscored the DPR's limited oversight involved wiretapping allegations against Democratic Party Chairman Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono (SBY). He was accused of exerting pressure on Ma'ruf Amin, head of the Indonesian Ulema Council (MUI), to issue a fatwa connected to the blasphemy case involving Ahok. During Ahok's controversial trial, his defense team presented what they claimed was evidence of a phone call between SBY and Ma'ruf Amin on October 7, 2016, asserting that the MUI's fatwa was politically motivated. Supported by President Joko Widodo, Ahok's team questioned Ma'ruf Amin regarding these claims, suggesting that SBY's involvement influenced the issuance of the fatwa (Tempo, 2017).

The Democratic Party strongly rejected these allegations, asserting that the phone conversation between SBY and Ma'ruf Amin had been unlawfully recorded, which they described as a grave criminal offense. SBY called for a comprehensive inquiry into the wiretapping, advocating for police and other authorities to examine the matter thoroughly and requested that President Joko Widodo step in if the interception had been carried out by a government agency (Jakarta Post, 2017).

Benny Harman, a lawmaker from the Democratic Party, reiterated SBY's concerns by emphasizing that the unauthorized wiretapping deserved a formal investigation. The Democratic Party submitted a proposal to the DPR to probe the intent behind the surveillance. However, the proposal encountered major obstacles—it did not receive the backing of PKS and Gerindra, two key opposition parties that declined to support the Democratic Party's move. According to Fadli Zon, the evolving political dynamics within the DPR—where Golkar, PPP, and PAN tended to align with the government—contributed to making the inquiry unlikely to succeed.

The Democratic Party's push to exercise its inquiry rights concerning accusations of wiretapping involving Chairman Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono (SBY) and Ma'ruf Amin, Chairman of the Indonesian Ulema Council (MUI), encountered significant resistance. Major parties such as PDIP, NasDem, and Hanura openly opposed the initiative. PDIP, a principal supporter of President Jokowi, reportedly convened with representatives from seven parties in a coordinated effort to block the Democratic Party's inquiry proposal (Merdeka, 2017).

Risa, a member of DPR Commission III from PDIP, stated unequivocally that her party would resist any attempts by the Democratic Party to invoke inquiry rights. This position echoed a broader reluctance among other parties

concerned about the potential political impact of such a move, especially given the sensitive context (Merdeka, 2017). Likewise, Asrul Sani, Secretary-General of the United Development Party (PPP), also expressed opposition to pursuing an inquiry into the alleged wiretapping involving former President SBY. His remarks reflected a broader consensus among political groups who viewed the Democratic Party's proposal as being heavily influenced by political motives (Kompas, 2017).

Agus Gumiwang, serving as Secretary of the Golkar Party faction, stated that his party would take time to carefully consider the Democratic Party's rationale for invoking inquiry rights (Merdeka, 2017). Gerindra, PAN, and PKS—coalition partners of the Democratic Party within KIH—also withheld their support for the proposal. This collective response exposed the internal divisions among coalition members and the varying willingness to endorse oversight initiatives that could subject key political figures to increased scrutiny (Liputan6, 2017).

The unsuccessful attempt to launch an inquiry into the alleged wiretapping involving Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono and Ma'ruf Amin highlights constraints in the DPR's ability to exercise oversight. This situation reveals how President Joko Widodo strategically diminished the opposition's power by forging clientelist ties with influential leaders from opposing parties. As a result, political checks and balances were weakened, presenting obstacles to robust democratic scrutiny within Indonesia's legislative system.

These events demonstrate that the DPR's application of inquiry rights during Joko Widodo's administration has exposed vulnerabilities in the legislature's oversight role. Though considered an important mechanism for legislative supervision by scholars such as Shick (1976), Ogul (1976), and Maffio (2002), the effectiveness of inquiry rights is often undermined by the nature of relationships between the president and party leadership.

Despite the intent behind these inquiries—to address serious concerns such as corruption, mismanagement, and abuse of authority in prominent cases like Pelindo II, the Freeport contract, and national responses to forest fires—their impact was ultimately limited. Political patronage and clientelist exchanges between President Joko Widodo and party leaders eroded the independence needed for effective oversight, allowing executive interests to override legislative scrutiny.

**Table 1: Reasons for DPR's inquiry right failures under President Joko Widodo**

Inquiry Case	President Response	Reason for Failure
PELINDO	Jokowi declined, likely influenced by Kalla's ties to Rini and shared business interests.	Political patronage
FREEPORT	Jokowi reshuffled the cabinet in July 2016, appointing ministers from Golkar and PAN.	Political patronage
KPK	Jokowi's influence led to Golkar, PAN, PPP, and Nasdem withdrawing from the inquiry committee.	Political patronage
Forest Fires	Kalla objected to a special committee, saying it would burden ministers focused on disaster management.	Coalition politics
Ahok	-	Political patronage
SBY Wiretapping	-	Coalition politics

Source: Compilation of author

## CONCLUSION

The main question explored in this article is why the DPR's legislative oversight grew weaker between 2014 and 2024. The research finds that the effectiveness of the DPR's oversight has declined mainly due to widespread clientelism between the president and party leaders. Clientelism, which refers to the exchange of favors or benefits for political backing, has become a core feature of Indonesia's political landscape. This practice has fostered networks of patronage, hampering the DPR's ability to effectively monitor the executive branch. Although the DPR is constitutionally tasked with holding the executive accountable, many oversight procedures are either abandoned or watered down because of the influence of these clientelistic relationships.

This pattern is especially clear in the interactions between President Joko Widodo (Jokowi) and the leaders of political parties. The erosion of legislative oversight stems from the strong grip of clientelism, which motivates party leaders to focus on maintaining good ties with the president rather than fulfilling their constitutional responsibilities. As a result, the DPR's role in overseeing the executive often becomes compromised, raising serious questions about the checks and balances within Indonesia's political system.

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