

The Paradox In Indonesian Politics: A Lesson Learned From American Parties

Ricardo Freedom Nanuru¹, Mahyudin Ritonga², Ismail³, Fauzi⁴, Aa Hubur⁵

¹*Universitas Kristen Indonesia Maluku, Maluku, Indonesia. Email: ricardonanuru632@gmail.com*

²*Muhammadiyah University of West Sumatera, Indonesia. Email: mahyudinritonga@gmail.com*

³*Jurusan Ushuluddin, IAIN Bengkulu, Bengkulu, Indonesia*

⁴*STMIK Pringsewu, Lampung, Indonesia*

⁵*Trisakti University, Jakarta, Indonesia*

Abstract

There are many paradoxes in Indonesian politics. For example: The new electoral system is clearly designed to widen the scope for political participation. With the power to elect president and heads of local government placed into the hands of the people through direct elections, now the executive's position is more powerful in relation to the legislative branch; and the locals' position is stronger in relation to the national government. But, there are many paradox in Indonesian politics. Direct elections broaden political participation, but the outcome tends to concentrate political power in the hands of the directly elected leaders, who have enhanced legitimacy through direct election. And, there are many other paradoxes. Other example: The nature of electoral rules is full of conflicting choices and indistinct decisions; and so are Indonesian electoral rules. All electoral laws under reformasi were formulated with great purpose to strengthen political parties. The laws granted parties an exclusive authority to determine who will control the dynamics of the country politics. And accordingly, parties hold the privileges to be the backbones in developing the country, determining the government, and formulating the policies.

Keywords: *Indonesian politics, government, parties, laws, electoral system*

1. INTRODUCTION

The fall of President Suharto in May 1998 has created opportunity for democratic reform in Indonesia. Since then, there has been a process of institutionalization to transform the authoritarian government, which restricted the people's political freedom and participation in the political process by concentrating power in the hands of a selected group of elites, into a democratic regime open to the people with decentralized powers. Indonesia has moved from less accountable to more accountable government, from less competitive to freer and fairer competitive elections, and from weak autonomous associations in civil society to more autonomous and more numerous associations [1]. The empowerment of civil society by strengthening civil society groups, elected bodies and electoral system; and the reform of public administration by reform the functional and financial assignments of local government are examples of this process [2].

In September 1999, B.J. Habibie, who replaced Suharto as president, submitted revisions of three important political bills on political parties, general elections, and composition of the People's Consultative Assembly (MPR), House of Representative (DPR) and Regional House of Representative (DPRD). The democratization process was further developed under the following presidents, Abdurrahman Wahid, who appointed by member of People's Consultative Assembly (MPR) in October 1999. He then was replaced by Megawati Sukarnoputri, the winner of June 1999 General Election, in People's Consultative Assembly (MPR) Special Session held on July 23, 2001. Under Megawati, Indonesian legislators established legal framework for one basic element of representative democracy—an electoral system. The legal stand was composed of the

Laws No. 31/2002 (on political parties), No. 12/2003 (on parliamentary election), No.23/2003 (on presidential election) and No. 32/2004 (on local head of government election). However, just like other laws which are open to amendment by political process, these election laws were also revised in 2008 despite the substance were still significant. To get ready for 2009 election, under President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono, elected in 2004, Indonesian legislators reworked law on political party changed into Law No.2/2008, law on parliamentary election turned into Law No. 10/2008, law on presidential election modified into Law No.42/2008.

Although the 1999, 2004 and 2009 electoral system allows for more competitive elections compared to the previous one held under Suharto Government, the system has consolidated the control of the political parties over the election process [3]. The election laws state that party is the only legal vehicle of House of Representative (DPR), Regional House of Representative (DPRD) and Presidential elections, with exception for DPD election and local head of government election where non-party candidates may participate in the elections. Although the system grants the parties such important power, in reality they have to struggle to stand up even for their own party structure [4]. For example, in candidate selection process in 2004, even though parties were likely to perpetuate their highly centralized structure in House of Representative (DPR) and Regional House of Representative (DPRD) election, the party structure was weak when dealt with their own candidate in presidential election. In some cases, the candidate even had stronger position, such as, Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono over Democrats Party (Partai Demokrat) and Megawati Sukarno Putri over the Indonesian Democratic Party Of Struggle(PDIP). In local head of government elections, the candidate also has relatively strong position but there is a kind of decentralization in the process of candidate selection from national to local party selection committee [5]. The setting is similar in 2009, except the highly centralized party structure in House of Representative (DPR) and Regional House of Representative (DPRD) election has eroded as a result of Decree No.22-24/2008 of Indonesian Constitutional Court (MK).

Indeed, since 1998, Indonesia's political life has changed to be more democratic and lively at both national and local levels. Four sets of constitutional amendments during 1999-2002 and the introduction of administrative decentralization policy in 1999 then 2004 were particularly very critical [6]. The latter substantially curtailed the previous dominance of the central government in local affairs, by devolving extensive power to local levels of the administration. As the powers of the centre weakened, it was assumed then, that the powers of the regions became relatively stronger. These changes sure enough have affected the party transformation process. For example is when national party leaders were forced and persuaded to pass on some of their authority to local party leaders who began voicing their discontent over the balance between national party control and local party autonomy since 1999. This transformation process is so dynamic and since political parties have such vital position in Indonesian politics, it is very significant, then, to examine their position and their growing influence on the country future politics.

2. The Paradox in Indonesian Politics

However, the laws actually negated their own purpose because some of the chosen electoral preferences had tendency to produce the opposite. For example, parties were weakened from the outside -from party competition, party systems, party strategy, and party grassroots, when the rules chose to use different thresholds (low electoral threshold and high parliamentary threshold for Pilleg, and high electoral threshold for Presidential Election (Pilpres) and Regional Head Election (Pilkada)) over many other alternatives of threshold. Parties were weakened from the inside too -from party organization, party cohesiveness, and party decision making process, when the rules chose to adopt party ballot open-list for Legislative Election (Pilleg) and candidate ballot for Presidential Election (Pilpres) and Regional Head Election (Pilkada) over many other choices of ballot structure. And, parties had become weaker since the Indonesian Constitutional Court (MK) reinforced the options by stipulating a popular vote system for Pilleg and independent candidate system for Regional Head Election (Pilkada). These two examples confirmed that besides the spirit to fortify parties, in fact the laws also have a strong will to control parties [7].

Gathering is an association that plays out specific capacities. Shockingly, there is no broad concession to a particular arrangement of gathering capacities. One researcher will include in four exercises, other will list in 7 or 15 focuses. One of those capacities which are basic to discover party position and gathering as discretionary vehicle is when gatherings go about as a delegate contact. While this capacity might be hard to gauge, it isn't so hard to portray [8]. Delegate contact just implies that the gatherings present the perspectives and requests of different social gatherings to public authorities, either emblematically or in propelling explicit interest. Notwithstanding, the worth credited to this capacity is regularly grand. Some case that in light of quite an incredible assortment of perspectives and requests, gatherings should take a specific position especially in the event that they are clashing and connecting to social or attitudinal divisions in the public arena [9]. Others state party is the assembly of predisposition, gathering may choose which and whose interest will be upheld and spoken to in legislative issues. It isn't important for gatherings to accept uncompromising stance as they would produce uphold by animating worry in open issues, and causing to notice specific inclinations [10]. This implies that gatherings drive the general public by driving the general public decisions and restricting the limit of society to decide. This concurs with Schattschneider's words: The gatherings outline the question and characterize the issue. In doing this they go far in figuring out what the appropriate response will be.

Lesson learned from American parties experience shows that there is shrinkage of party functions since the era of new politics in 1960s and 1970s. American parties are struggling to retain only three out of many other functions: recruitment of leadership, campaigning and organizing the elected decision-makers [11]. A number of changes in the American parties' environment has happened, among of them are changes in the party-clientele relationship, changes in the electorate, and changes in the government-electorate relationship. These changes have further reduced the parties' opportunity to perform their functions as representative liaison [12]. For example, now people have options other than party to present their concerns. To channel, such as ecology or energy concerns, Americans does not turn only to political party; instead they might go to the Sierra Club, Energy Watch Club or American Petroleum Institute. No doubt nowadays interest associations become tough rivals for parties. Particularly when they have developed into more organized, specialized, and professionalized in symbolize the concern of the people. However, none of their activities have relation to electoral process and forming a government [13]. All intermediary agents except political party seek to influence policies without competing in elections or being publicly accountable for these policies. On the contrary, it is the party who assist the office holders reach their position and then get authority to decide such policies within competing in elections and being accountable for whatever their policy decisions [14].

The era of new politics also denotes the application of marketing technology to politics —the using of mass media, public opinion polls, and public relation experts. One of the major impacts in applying this is now people more appreciate party individuals rather than party organizations [15]. For example, in structuring their vote, voters-emphasize candidate appeals and issues before party identification. It is because marketing technology enables party individuals approach the voters directly, they have no longer depended on party organizations to do door-to-door voter mobilization or direct personal appeal to the electorate[16]. This new method has replaced, in large part, personal contact via the party organization. In addition, this marketing technology has also caused campaign become unbelievable costly and parties could not afford this expensive tool of the new politics. Parties are lack of resources, skills, and manpower, which are essential for election victory [17]. Parties have gradually lost their control, for example, in the selection of candidates. In Gunther and Diamond's words: 'nominations are largely determined by the electoral resources of the candidates as perceived by party nominating committee rather than by such organizational criteria as years of experience in, or service to, the party'. No wonder if several political offices were then captured by a maverick group or a colorful individual with no previous party responsibility.

To sum up the discussion, this study concluded that with party tendency to focus more on electoral process and party organization depends heavily on party individuals, no surprise if nowadays party individuals have more chance to exploit party as their vehicle in winning the

office [18]. Through the application Of marketing technology, their image has come to assume a prominent role in campaigning. Their position becomes more solid in determining party policies; their influence is also more decisive in selecting and interpreting voter's concerns and preferences particularly in a situation where parties' characteristics have not yet appeared to such an extent that it stand above its structure. However, on the contrary, party individuals should be very thorough in a situation where parties are governed by much older belief and values that the parties had at their founding. Up till now, parties are still needed as 'intermediate structure between society and government'. Because only them who have authority to electoral process and forming a government. Party is still at the heart of political system.

3. The need to conceptualize Indonesian experiences

Latin American political parties' development could not be explained by the classical party theory based on Western experience. Similar findings, some of them, are also in Southern, and East-Central Europe, in Central and East Europe, in Africa, Middle East and Central Asia, in Southeast Asia, and in Asia and Pacific. In Indonesia, it is difficult, for example, to apply ideological polarization from to understand how Indonesian parties compete in 2004 and 2009 presidential elections and 2005-2009 local head of government elections when parties build alliances across the ideological chasms. For that reason, this study tries to find alternative approach which derives from Indonesian own experience. Although, it should be admitted that internationally available scholarly literature discussing alternative approach which could be identifies as typically Asian —especially Indonesian- is somewhat disappointing. This is because of, one of them, '[the] common political science methodologies are predominantly based on non-Asia paradigms... [and] the majority of Asian scholars are still trained in the international, and consequently, Western tradition'.

In fact, study and research on, such as, party structure and organizations, party function and roles, party competition, linkages and loyalties, has not, so far, been utilized particularly in new democracies. While research on Western European party organizations has made significant progress both theoretically and empirically, advance has been much more limited regarding parties in new democracies. Study on the structural evolution of parties in post-communist democracies was still rare. Similar study in East and Southeast Asia also found that if a systematic research on parties was carried out not too much attention has been given to the internal development of political parties and their structures, nor to their changing roles.

One motivation behind why research on ideological group in new popular governments has not made critical commitment yet, maybe, is the frightful hover among hypothesis and practice that an overall hypothesis of gatherings will ultimately be developed uniquely upon the starter work of numerous significant investigations; however these examinations can't be really significant insofar as there exists no broad hypothesis of gatherings. Absence of, for instance, observational information, explicit system, and examination financing on ideological group and gathering governmental issues has caused challenges in building an overall hypothesis of gathering springs from the new fanciful changes majority rules systems special encounters. Additionally, capricious changes of [party] positions, pioneers or even huge quantities of the enrollment, changing unions through consolidations, parts and recently arising parties in all way of impossible alliances between the most odd partners.

4. CONCLUSION

Despite the increasing interest in Indonesian party studies, only a small number of those cited above discussed about internal party development. Mostly, they examined Indonesian inter-party competition. Some of the contemporary already assessed the impact of the political openness post 1998 on party's life. Others examined the impact of 1999 and 2004 electoral systems on Indonesian internal party development or inter-party competition in one single case. But none of them discussed the strong effects of the 2004 electoral system comprehensively, on internal party development and inter-party competition all together, compared legislative to executive elections, and national to local elections in one thorough study based on national and two local cases. Hence, this study will comprehend the literature by contributing the missing knowledge. on the transformation process of Indonesian party's life after the 2004 electoral system.

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