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Democratisation & new voter mobilisation in Southeast Asia: forms of campaigning and the transformation of political parties in Indonesia

Report

Forms of **Campaigning** and the Transformation of Political Parties in Indonesia

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Introduction

The relationships between forms of electioneering, socio-structural change and the transformation of political parties in Southeast Asia are not well researched. In the West, three stages of campaigning can be discerned, and these have depended – inter alia – on the phase of technological evolution. Initially campaigning was characterised by mass events, rallies, and face-to-face communication among party members and voters. Consultants were not important in comparison with canvassers and other party activists. In the second phase, mass media, especially television, played a decisive role. Large-scale opinion polls were sources of feedback, specialist consultants were gaining prominence, and campaigns were organised nationally by the central party apparatus with party-based salaried professionals. TV debates, press conferences, and 'pseudo-events' were central to campaigning. During this second, modern stage, catch-all parties trying to mobilise voters across all categories replaced the mass-integration or mass-class parties of stage one. The ties between citizens and parties were weaker in the second stage, and party activists at the grass-roots level lost their previous importance. At the same time, charismatic personalities and the central party apparatus in general became focal points for voter mobilisation. The current, third stage, of campaigning began in the late 1980s and early 1990s and refers post-modern or 'American style' electioneering. In this stage, parties use new communication technologies such as the internet and public relations consultants who base their findings on sophisticated opinion polls and focus-group interviews. Campaigning is much more targeted and business-like. Consultants are quite independent from the traditional party leadership. The so-called electoral-professional parties are said to be the typical organisational outgrowth of these developments.

Campaigning in the 1950s

With reference to Indonesia, these three stages of campaigning and party development are, at least to a certain extent, also identifiable. The first elections in 1955 were not unlike those of stage 1 described above. Some particular campaigning characteristics stood out:

- Agencies and consultants were absent, and there were no opinion polls
- TV and radio were not widely used; even the newspapers had only a combined circulation of 821,000
- Mass rallies and face-to-face communication were the major channels used to popularise parties and their platforms
- Campaigning was not about selling or marketing concepts, but was intended to broaden knowledge about parties and their goals
- A decentralised campaign organisation with strong local branches was of tremendous importance

The latter feature in particular necessitated parties with strong village-level organisations, high membership numbers, and an efficient apparatus. Although parties were weakly organised until 1953 – with the communist PKI (Partai Komunis Indonesia, Communist Party of Indonesia) and the Islamic Masyumi (Majelis Syuro Muslimin Indonesia, Consultative Council of Indonesian Muslims) the exceptions – the election campaign itself transformed parties and voters alike. Parties developed more advanced organisational forms, and the elections produced a shift in the village-status balance and new 'collectivist entities'. According to Herbert Feith in his The Indonesian Elections of 1955, in a number of village areas 'party branches acquired the characteristics of living communities'.

These communities have to be seen against the background of aliran or sociopolitical 'streams'. The four most important parties, with their affiliated women, youth, religious, professional, and labour organisations, politicised these streams. Nahdatul *Ulama* (NU, Renaissance of Islamic Scholars), a traditionalist Muslim party, represented mostly Javanese *ulama* (religious scholars) and their rural followers. NU members belonged to the orthodox Muslims or santri. This was also true of the modernist Muslim Masyumi, which counted urban intellectuals, traders and artisans among its followers and was particularly successful beyond Java in the Outer Islands. The non-orthodox or syncretist (that is: abangan) parties were the nationalist PNI (Partai Nasional Indonesia, Indonesian National Party), strong among state employees and civil servants and their clients, and the communistc PKI, a well-organised party with followers among abangan workers and peasants in urban and rural areas.

The parties of the 1950s may thus be tentatively classified as variants of mass-integration parties. They were rooted in social milieus and mobilised voters along social cleavages: *abangan* versus *santri*, traditionalist versus modernist Islam, urban versus rural, Java versus Outer Islands, capital versus labour.

Campaigning after the fall of Suharto

At least some elements of stage two and three are also typical of Indonesia after the fall of Suharto in 1998. The elections that have taken place since 1999, when the first free elections after 1955 were held, have to a large extent centred on television as the primary campaigning site. Talk shows, duels between presidential candidates, and particularly TV advertising have been – according to different surveys – the main venues for political parties and candidates to spread information and heighten their popularity. The costs of campaigning are rising rapidly, and at least thirty percent of party funds are used for TV, radio and print media advertisements.

Today elements of campaigning associated with stage three can also be identified. For instance, a 2009 study by Marcus Mietzner perceived a decisive change in the style of electioneering since 2005, that is after the introduction of direct local (***pilkada***) and direct presidential elections, in which pollsters have emerged as the 'makers and breakers of political campaigns'. Especially in *pilkada*, parties have had to identify the most popular

candidate and would-be candidates have had to conduct surveys to check their own popularity ratings. In some cases, consultants have engineered an entire campaign and actively created new images. They have identified popular would-be candidates and offered them a package complete with investor financing for an entire campaign with the expectation of being rewarded after the successful election of such candidates.

All this shows that the introduction of TV and surveys has had an impact on party politics. It is not clear, however, whether it is predominantly these factors that have caused political parties to change or whether other factors have played a stronger role.

The transformation of parties in Indonesia

In Europe, the transformation of parties has been affected by new forms of campaigning, mainly due to technological developments, and by socio-structural change – that is, the decline of religious and class linkages, the pluralisation of milieus, and individualisation of the voters. Today, catch-all and electoral-professional parties dominate in Europe. Has a similar transformation of parties since stage one of campaigning taken place in Indonesia too?

Indonesian election results since 1999 suggest that despite major socio-economic change, some of the main cleavages structuring the party system are still alive. The most obvious is the division between secularist and Islamic/Islamist parties. 'Islamist' parties are those such as the PPP (Partai Persatuan Pembanguan, United Development Party) and the PKS (Partai Keadilan Sejahtera), which support – more or less openly – the implementation of shari'a law (including the penal code). Secular parties include the PDI-P (Partai Demokrasi Indonesia – Perjuangan, Indonesian Democratic Party – Struggle), the PD (Partai Demokrat), and, to a certain extent, Golkar (Partai Golongan Karya, Party of Functional Groups). Among the moderate Islamic parties are the traditionalist PKB (Partai Kebangkitan Bangsa, National Awakening Party), a successor of the NU of the 1950s, and the modernist PAN (Partai Amanat Nasional, National Mandate Party), which is linked to the Muslim mass organisation Muhammadiyah. The salience of other cleavages has been documented by a range of surveys and analyses.

However, a range of indicators suggest that the age of mass-integration parties is over. First, parties have poor platforms and/or are usually no longer as deeply rooted in social milieus. Linkages between voters and parties are, according to surveys, mostly 'emotional'. Second, there is a tendency among political parties to form cartels; inter-party competition is centripetal, whereas in the 1950s it was centrifugal. Third, new parties without predecessors, such as the PD, Gerindra, and Hanura, have successfully been formed. The reasons for this realignment are as follows:

- Socio-structural change and suppression by the New Order regime (1966–1998) led to the decline of communism/socialism and marhaenisme (the Sukarnoist radical nationalism with its notion of the suppressed 'small people').

- The religious cleavages have been weakened within the party system because of the pluralisation of political Islam and the convergence of abangan and santri as well as of traditionalist and modernist Islam due to the modernisation of traditionalist lifestyles and the globalisation of Islam. Religious knowledge is now individualised because of new communications technologies, expanded education, and the emergence of new interpretations of Islam.

- New media has weakened traditional leaders such as *ulama* and strengthened direct linkages between party leaders and the electorate.

- Direct presidential and local elections as well as the 'open candidates list' since 2009 have caused a personalisation of politics. The 'open list' strengthened local identities during the 2009 electoral campaign, in which candidates from the same party competed against each other and were more independent of the central executive in Jakarta.

Concluding remarks: The rise of clientelism?

But are Indonesian parties today catch-all parties or electoral-professional parties like their Western counterparts? Today there are parties such as the PKS and the PDI-P that still exploit the inherited charisma of the Sukarnos, and parties such as Golkar, PAN, and the PD that have at least some similarities with catch-all parties.

New forms of campaigning interact with dynamics often overlooked by political scientists. In this vein, Herbert Kitschelt differentiates between charismatic, clientelist and programmatic linkages in Comparative Political Studies 2000. Charismatic parties are dominated by single personalities, whereas politicians in clientelist parties '… create bonds with their following through direct, personal, and typically material side payments'.

The work on Indonesia in general has to take into account the role of different kinds of clientelism. Clientelism encompasses:

- the rise of canvassers and vote-buying, particularly after the introduction of the 'open list' and due to the increasing competition in the electoral districts;
- the usual practice that candidates buy their candidacy and finance their own campaign;
- the impact of businessmen such as Yusuf Kalla or Aburizal Bakrie in party organisations;
- and the growing strength of traditionally powerful families with extended patronage networks, especially beyond Java.

The evolution of campaigning in Indonesia is to a certain extent comparable to that in Western countries. Even the dealignment of political parties is related to Western developments; however, different forms of clientelist voter mobilisation are undermining democratic elections. Today Indonesia combines forms of campaigning typical of all three phases of campaigning with clientelism, and features of electoral-professional and catch-all parties are intertwined with different forms of clientelism. This is what makes the analysis of Indonesian parties so difficult. More suitable concepts and terms for analysis have yet to be developed. ■

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