

Comparing Indonesia's party systems of the 1950s and the post-Suharto era: From centrifugal to centripetal inter-party competition

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This article compares Indonesia's party systems of the 1950s and the post-Suharto period. It explores the question of why the party system of the 1950s collapsed quickly, while that of the contemporary polity appears stable. Challenging established assumptions that party systems fail if their individual parties are weakly institutionalised, I submit that the fundamental difference between the party politics of the 1950s and today's democratic system is related to the character of inter-party competition in both periods. While inter-party contestation in the 1950s took place at the far ends of the politico-ideological spectrum, the competition between parties in the contemporary democracy exhibits centripetal tendencies, stabilising the political system as a whole.

In 1957, Indonesia's party system collapsed after seven years of protracted political and ideological conflict. Amid calls for alternative forms of governance, the breakdown of party politics contributed to the downfall of parliamentary democracy and eventually helped to install Sukarno's authoritarian Guided Democracy. By contrast, in 2008 – 10 years after Indonesia's second attempt at a democratic system had been launched – the party system appeared to be remarkably stable, with only the most pessimistic observers believing in the possibility of its early demise. Partly as a result of this stability in the contemporary party system, the effectiveness of today's democratic polity is considerably higher than that of its predecessor in the 1950s. Since the end of Suharto's New Order in 1998, Indonesia has held two parliamentary elections (in 1999 and 2004), followed by two rounds of a presidential ballot in 2004 as well. Since 2005, around 400 direct elections for governors, district heads and mayors have taken place, for all of which the political parties had nominated the candidates. Despite sharp criticism of the parties for their corrupt image, isolation from society and lack of responsiveness, the vast majority of Indonesians do not favour a change in the political system. Electoral participation remains high by international standards, both at the local and national levels, and intellectuals, activists and civil society leaders continue to enter parties to pursue political careers.

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In spite of the fundamentally different transition outcomes, the literature on the party systems of both eras is in fact surprisingly similar. In his seminal work, *The Decline of constitutional democracy in Indonesia*, Herbert Feith described the parties of the 1950s as ‘in general very poorly developed’, with elite figures using them as ‘a principal channel of access to the bureaucracy’.¹ According to Feith, the parties ‘lacked cohesion’, were ‘dominated by their top leaders’ and were deeply fragmented by ‘clique division’.² By the end of 1956, the parties had managed to create a collective feeling that ‘parliamentary procedures and elections were sham and pretense’,³ providing the supporters of authoritarian rule with the necessary arguments to undermine the democratic system. 50 years later, Paige Johnson Tan diagnosed ‘widespread antipathy’ towards the parties of the post-Suharto system,⁴ which were ‘widely seen as corrupt and self-seeking’.⁵ She concluded that parties were ‘divorced from the population, almost uniformly elite-led creations’, whose ‘legitimacy is dissipating’.⁶ Indeed, Johnson Tan even found that ‘Indonesia’s party system has deinstitutionalized slightly since 1999’,⁷ with party leaders seeming ‘to collude to shepherd the business of parliament without transparency’.⁸ Most observers, both in Indonesia and abroad, have agreed with Johnson Tan’s key findings.⁹

What, then, accounts for the sharp contrast between the fast disintegration of Indonesia’s party system of the 1950s and its stability in the post-New Order era? To be sure, there were substantial differences between the economic and political macro-conditions of the two periods. In the 1950s, regional rebellions, the political ambitions of the military and founding president Sukarno’s frustration over his limited role contributed significantly to the decline of party politics. In contrast, the military’s tarnished reputation, international pressure on Indonesia to democratise and a relatively stable economy helped Indonesia’s post-Suharto party system to stabilise. Beyond these exogenous factors, however, there are likely to be reasons inherent in the character of the respective party systems as well. This article will explore such internal developments in the party politics of the 1950s and in contemporary Indonesia, pointing to important distinctions that help to explain their highly divergent paths.

1 Herbert Feith, *The Decline of constitutional democracy in Indonesia* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1962), pp. 123, 126.

2 *Ibid.*, pp. 126–7.

3 *Ibid.*, p. 603.

4 Paige Johnson Tan, ‘Indonesia seven years after Soeharto: Party system institutionalization in a new democracy’, *Contemporary Southeast Asia*, 28, 1 (2006): 104.

5 *Ibid.*, p. 109.

6 *Ibid.*, p. 110.

7 *Ibid.*, p. 109.

8 *Ibid.*, p. 98.

9 See, for example, Dan Slater, ‘Indonesia’s accountability trap: Party cartels and presidential power after democratic transition’, *Indonesia*, 78 (Oct. 2004), 61–92; Dirk Tomsa, ‘The Defeat of centralized paternalism: Factionalism, assertive regional cadres, and the long fall of Golkar chairman Akbar Tandjung’, *Indonesia*, 81 (Apr. 2006): 1–22; Nankyung Choi, ‘Local elections and party politics in post-*Reformasi* Indonesia: A View from Yogyakarta’, *Contemporary Southeast Asia*, 26, 2 (2004): 280–301; and Andreas Ufen, ‘Political parties in post-Soeharto Indonesia: Between *politik aliran* and “Philippinisation”’, GIGA Working Papers no. 37 (Dec. 2006).

In broad terms, I argue that the fundamental difference between Indonesia's party system in the 1950s and the present is related to the nature and direction of inter-party competition. More specifically, I will show that while Indonesia's party system in the immediate post-independence period was eroded by the centrifugal tendencies of the key parties, the institutional stability of current party politics is to a large extent due to the centripetal direction of inter-party competition. In other words, if in the 1950s the parties undercut the effectiveness of the party system by rushing to the margins of the politico-ideological spectrum, in the post-Suharto period they have converged inward towards the centre.

This finding challenges the main thrust of the most recent theoretical literature on party system institutionalisation, which suggests that the stability of party systems is largely determined by the quality of their parties. In this view, poorly institutionalised parties generally produce weak party systems, while strong individual parties tend to support stable frameworks of party politics. The Indonesian case shows, however, that the level of institutionalisation of individual parties is insufficient to explain the solidity (or frailty) of the party system as a whole. Both the 1950s and the contemporary period contained weak political parties, yet the fate of their party systems differed immensely. Accordingly, I offer an alternative explanation, which emphasises the crucial importance of the character, intensity and direction of inter-party rivalry for the stability of the Indonesian party system. In this, I refer to the work of Giovanni Sartori and Christoffer Green-Pedersen, who have highlighted similar tendencies in other party systems around the world.¹⁰

This article discusses the character of the party system of the 1950s and that of the post-1998 polity in successive sections. The analysis focuses on the parties' platforms, their relations with their various constituencies, and their attitudes towards the democratic polity in the respective periods. Having contrasted the different forms of electoral rivalry between parties in both eras, the article then highlights the implications of its findings for the contemporary theoretical debates about the strength of party systems. In conclusion, I submit that despite the public's focus on the weakness, corruption and social isolation of individual parties, it is the overall direction of inter-party competition that determines the quality and durability of party systems. Furthermore, the article shows that centripetal dynamics in party politics do not only occur in two-party or moderate multiparty systems (as suggested by some theorists), but can also take place in extreme pluralist systems such as Indonesia's, which feature five or more parties.

The 1950s: Atomised multipartyism

Indonesia's party system of the 1950s conformed to what Giovanni Sartori called 'atomized multipartyism'.¹¹ There were 17 parties and other groups in Indonesia's

10 Giovanni Sartori, *Parties and party systems: A Framework for analysis* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976); Christoffer Green-Pedersen, 'Center parties, party competition, and the implosion of party systems: A Study of centripetal tendencies in multiparty systems', *Political Studies*, 52 (2004): 324–41.

11 Sartori introduced several 'classes' of party systems, ranging from one-party systems to atomised multiparty systems. Generally, atomised multiparty systems are those that contain nine relevant parties or more. These systems are so fragmented that the addition of another party doesn't make a difference to the pattern of competition; Sartori, *Parties and party systems*, p. 125.

parliament of the early 1950s, the composition of which had been based on the government's estimate of the strength of the various parties rather than a general election. In that non-elected parliament, the parties were clustered in two large, five medium-sized and 10 small factions or caucuses. The two largest parties were Masyumi, an association of modernist and traditionalist Islamic organisations,¹² and the PNI (*Partai Nasional Indonesia*, Indonesian National Party), a nationalist-secular party established by Sukarno in the 1920s. The most prominent of the medium-sized parties were the PSI (*Partai Sosialis Indonesia*, Indonesian Socialist Party), consisting of intellectuals, administrators and technocrats close to Vice-President Hatta,¹³ and the Indonesian Communist Party (PKI, *Partai Komunis Indonesia*), which was struggling to regain influence after a failed coup against the Indonesian Republic in 1948. Besides these main players, there were also a number of smaller parties with narrowly defined support bases. Among them were the *Partai Murba*, a proletarian-communist party which was nevertheless deeply opposed to the PKI; the PSII (*Partai Sarekat Islam Indonesia*, Indonesian Islamic Union Party), a party that had broken away from Masyumi but traced its ancestry to *Sarekat Islam*, the first Muslim political organisation in the Dutch colony; and two Christian parties, *Parkindo* (Indonesian Christian Party) and *Partai Katolik* (Catholic Party) respectively.

The party system fragmented even further as the 1955 general elections approached. In 1952, the traditionalist Muslim organisation Nahdlatul Ulama (NU, Revival of the Islamic scholars), left Masyumi and founded its own party.¹⁴ In addition, a large number of new parties emerged in anticipation of the upcoming ballot. These included IPKI (*Ikatan Pendukung Kemerdekaan Indonesia*, Association of Supporters of Indonesian Independence), an army-sponsored political party, and Perti (*Pergerakan Tarbiyah Indonesia*, Indonesian Islamic Education Movement), a traditionalist Islamic group based in west Sumatra. After the votes were counted, 28 parties and groups gained seats in the new national parliament, highlighting the process of particularisation of Indonesia's party system.¹⁵ Based on the results of the elections, four parties emerged as key forces in the political landscape. PNI finished first by gathering 22.3 per cent of the votes, with 86 per cent of its support concentrated on Java. Masyumi, which was now an almost exclusively modernist Muslim party, received 20.9 per cent, gaining almost half of that outside of Java. In third place was Nahdlatul Ulama, which obtained 18.4 per cent, most of it in its strongholds of central and east Java. The PKI, finally, came in fourth, attracting 16.4 per cent support — more than most observers had expected. The division into four large, almost equally balanced camps, which reflected broader socio-religious cleavages in Indonesian society, made the establishment of stable governments even more difficult than under the old provisional parliament.

12 Traditionalist and modernist Muslims in Indonesia differ in their socio-religious practices and doctrinal orientation. Traditionalists are generally tolerant towards blending the Islamic faith with local traditions, while modernists insist that only the Qu'ran and the exemplary behaviour of the Prophet Muhammad can serve as guidelines for pious Muslims.

13 Jeanne S. Mintz, *Mohammed, Marx and Marhaen: The Roots of Indonesian socialism* (New York, Washington and London: Praeger, 1965), p. 134.

14 Greg Fealy, 'Ulama and politics in Indonesia: A History of Nahdlatul Ulama, 1952–1967' (Ph.D. diss., Monash University, 1998).

15 Herbert Feith, *The Indonesian elections of 1955* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1957).

Only a year after the 1955 elections, Indonesian democracy faced a severe crisis of confidence, and by 1957 it had begun to disintegrate.

However, the collapse of the party system in 1956 and 1957 was neither the result of the extreme proliferation of parties in the context of the elections, nor was it primarily caused by the poor quality of the parties, as emphasised by Feith. In fact, some authors have challenged Feith's assumptions by pointing to several positive features of both the party system and the institutionalisation of individual parties in the 1950s. Greg Fealy, for example, concluded that 'that the party system of the 1950s operated more effectively than that of contemporary Indonesia'.¹⁶ Fealy argued that parties in the 1950s were less driven by individual leaders, were engaged more in policy debates and relied less on money and physical intimidation than parties in the post-Suharto period. Noting that 'parties functioned better than as institutions for informing the electorate and transmitting views to the legislature than do current parties',¹⁷ Fealy also asserted that corruption in the party system of the 1950s was much less of a problem than it is today. Given Fealy's positive assessment, it is difficult to claim that it was the weakness of the parties that led to the disintegration of the party system in that period. And even if we, alternatively, subscribe to Feith's view of the parties as not sufficiently rooted in society, preferring patronage over political representation and misusing party politics as the major vehicle for accessing the resources of the state, we still would have to conclude that these are common features of party systems all over the world, and cannot in themselves explain the breakdown of Indonesia's party-based polity in the 1950s.

Centrifugal self-destruction

Given that the erosion of Indonesia's post-revolutionary party system cannot be attributed to the poor institutionalisation of its parties, other factors must have been at work. In this regard, the direction of inter-party competition is of the utmost significance. Electoral competition in the 1950s took place at the two ends of the political spectrum, with each party trying to mobilise its core support through platforms specially tailored for the narrow interests of its constituency. There was little interest in gaining votes in the ideological centre of the political spectrum, which consequently was left deserted. In all democracies, party systems need centrist parties to survive — parties that endorse the existing democratic structures, pragmatically merge the aspirations of various socio-political segments into a broad policy platform and refrain from using divisive ideological issues to pursue their cause. Indonesia's system of the 1950s lacked not only what Green-Pedersen called a 'pivotal center party' (one that dominates the party system and is difficult to govern against),¹⁸ but it did not possess centrist parties altogether. One of the parties that came closest to having a centrist approach, the PSI, was virtually wiped out in the 1955 elections, further discouraging other parties to direct their attention towards the centre. Instead, parties after 1955 grew more and more stubborn in defending the interests of their electoral

16 Greg Fealy, 'Parties and parliament: Serving whose interests?' in *Indonesia today: Challenges of history*, ed. Grayson Lloyd and Shannon Smith (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2001), p. 103.

17 *Ibid.*, p. 103.

18 Green-Pedersen, 'Center parties, party competition, and the implosion of party systems', p. 326.

constituencies, provoking an escalation of political conflict and, eventually, the collapse of the party system.

The centrifugal tendencies of Indonesia's party system became evident in the debates on a new constitution. In December 1955, elections for a Constituent Assembly (or *Konstituante*) were held. This body was tasked with replacing the provisional constitution of 1950 (upon which the parliamentary system was based) with a more detailed and systematic document. Significantly, the ballot for the Assembly resulted in an even more fragmented political scene than the general elections had produced: no fewer than 35 political parties and groups were represented in the new body, which began its deliberations in November 1956. The debates soon exposed Indonesia's major religio-political cleavage: that between nationalism and political Islam. On one side of the divide were the Muslim parties, which wanted to use the Assembly to reintroduce elements of Islamic political doctrine that had been removed from the original 1945 constitution shortly before it was proclaimed.¹⁹ On the other side were the nationalist parties, which were determined to defend the secularly oriented state ideology Pancasila as the foundation of the state. The nationalist elements held a slight majority in the Assembly, but had far from the two-thirds majority needed to push their concept through. As neither side budged from its respective position, the discussions became deadlocked, further undermining the public image of the parties and the parliamentary institutions they operated in.

The divisions between Islamic and secular politicians were sharp, but equally important for the weakening of the party system was the fact that even in the nationalist camp supporters of the existing democratic state were in the minority. In his study of the Assembly, Adnan Buyung Nasution pointed to the existence of a strong 'integralist' stream within the secular camp — proponents of a more centralised regime under strong, revolutionary leadership, who were openly hostile towards liberal democracy. The *Murba* party called unashamedly on Sukarno to establish a 'dictatorship', while the PNI promoted a so-called 'collectivistic society' and other nationalist speakers 'vehemently attacked Western democracy as a mask for the dictatorship of the capitalists'.²⁰ The PKI, for its part, kept a relatively low profile during the early deliberations, but when Sukarno announced in February 1957 that he planned to dismantle parliamentary democracy, the PKI politbureau issued a statement, saying that 'the Western system of democracy carried out in Indonesia up to the present has been harmful to the development of the revolutionary and democratic movement'.²¹ As the nationalist parties — which vehemently defended the secular foundation of the state against the Islamic camp — turned out to be intensely antagonistic towards the existing system themselves, parliamentary democracy lost its last hope of a credible defence. Dominated by anti-system elements of all colours, the discussions in the *Konstituante* eloquently highlighted the absence of a political centre in the Indonesian party system. Without centrist parties fighting for the maintenance

19 B. J. Boland, *The Struggle of Islam in modern Indonesia* (The Hague: Nijhoff, 1971).

20 Adnan Buyung Nasution, *The Aspiration for constitutional government in Indonesia: A Socio-legal study of the Indonesian Konstituante, 1956–1959* (Jakarta: Pustaka Sinar Harapan, 1992), p. 103.

21 Donald Hindley, *The Communist Party of Indonesia, 1951–1963* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1966), p. 261.

of the democratic polity, it was open to attack from the increasingly powerful and militant margins.

God and democracy: Deserting the centre

The Islamic parties were no less critical of the existing system than their nationalist counterparts. Although opposed to the concept of strong, quasi-dictatorial leadership advanced by large sections of the secular camp, most Muslim politicians were more concerned about the rise of communism than the defence of parliamentary democracy. Disappointed that it had failed to gain a majority in the 1955 elections, the Islamic elite also increasingly felt that the democratic system was not going to deliver them hegemony over the state. Thus in their speeches in the *Konstituante*, a large number of Muslim leaders put forward concepts of state organisation that inherently contradicted the principles of liberal democracy. Osman Raliby from Masyumi, for example, contended that 'real sovereignty is not vested in human society, (it) belongs to Allah'.²² Ahjak Sostrosugondo of NU claimed that atheists had no right to participate in democratic competition as all Indonesian citizens had to acknowledge God's sovereignty.²³ Another NU representative, Ahmad Zaini, demanded that the state should be based on Islam, and urged that political and individual liberties be restricted by Islamic law, or *syariah*. Even Muhammad Natsir, the charismatic leader of Masyumi, gave the fight against secularism precedence over the defence of the democratic system. There were only two choices, he said, namely that between a state based on religion and one not based on religion.²⁴

This intense rivalry with the supporters of secularism absorbed much of the energy of Islamic speakers in the *Konstituante*, and while politicians like Natsir had positioned themselves well in the parliamentary system and had great sympathy for it, they failed to come to its defence. Only at the liberal fringes of the Islamic spectrum – mostly represented by moderate factions in Masyumi and PSII – did critics warn that the democratic system needed to be maintained. In a desperate attempt to contain the growing anti-democratic sentiment, including in his own camp, Masyumi politician Mohammad Sarjan reminded the delegates that if the current democratic system was flawed, then it was not the system that had to be thrown away, but the people who ran it.²⁵ His warnings fell on deaf ears.

With its politico-ideological centre vacated, the multiparty system – and the liberal democracy in which it operated – had no chance of surviving. The foci of political competition had now completely shifted to the extreme margins of the party landscape, with anti-system parties fighting for the narrow ideological interests of their core constituencies (see Figure 1). In fact, the dynamics of the Indonesian polity of the mid- and late 1950s seemed to fit perfectly with the theory developed by Sartori, who argued that atomised multipartyism invariably strengthens centrifugal tendencies in party systems. Subsequently, when regional rebellions, an ambitious military and an equally self-assertive president took central stage, the liberal polity collapsed. In July 1959,

22 Nasution, *The Aspiration*, p. 111.

23 *Ibid.*, p. 111.

24 *Ibid.*, p. 108.

25 *Ibid.*, p. 114.

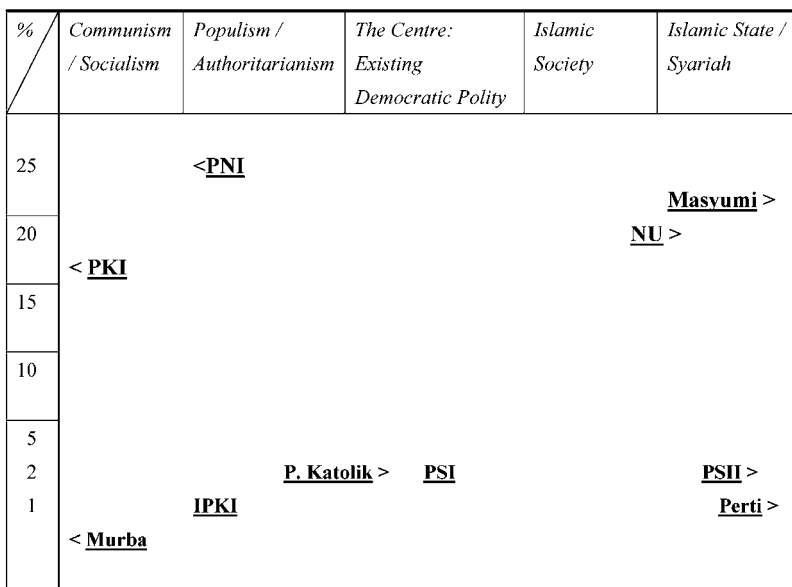


Figure 1. Indonesia’s centrifugal party system, 1955

Note: Election results based on the 1955 parliamentary elections; parties below 1 per cent not listed, except for *Partai Murba*, which had significance beyond its election result of 0.5 per cent. The allocation of positions on the ideological and political scale was extrapolated from parties’ platforms and their views on matters of state organisation as expressed in the *Konstituante*.

Sukarno decreed a return to the presidential constitution of 1945, supported by the armed forces and the PKI. Political activity was severely restricted, and while most parties continued to exist, they played no substantial role any more (with the notable exception of the PKI). Suharto’s New Order, which took over in 1966, regulated and limited the party system even further. It was only after his departure in 1998 that a new, dynamic party system began to emerge.

The Party system after 1998

The almost complete lifting of restrictions on forming political parties after the 1998 regime change resulted in a system of atomised multipartyism that resembled that of the 1950s. More than 200 parties emerged, 48 of which were allowed to participate in the parliamentary elections of June 1999; 21 parties gained representation in the first post-New Order legislature, with the number of effective parties standing at 5.1 (using Laakso and Taagepera’s formula).²⁶ The key parties showed significant lines of continuity with the parties that had dominated the political scene shortly after independence, with some important exceptions. Sukarno’s daughter Megawati led the secularist PDI-P (*Partai Demokrasi Indonesia Perjuangan*, Indonesian Democratic Party

26 Tan, ‘Indonesia seven years after Soeharto’, p. 93. Laakso and Taagepera introduced the concept of the effective number of parties in 1979 in an attempt to weigh the relevance of parties operating in a party system. The number is calculated by squaring the percentage of every party, adding up the squares and dividing one by that sum. M. Laakso and R. Taagepera, ‘Effective number of parties: Measure with application to west Europe’, *Comparative Political Studies*, 12, 1 (1979): 3–27.

of Struggle), which had split off the single nationalist party sanctioned by the New Order regime. PDI-P saw itself in the tradition of the PNI, and became the largest faction in parliament with 33.7 per cent of the votes. Abdurrahman Wahid, son of a senior NU leader in the 1950s, set up PKB (*Partai Kebangkitan Bangsa*, Party of National Awakening), which appealed to NU voters and received 12.6 per cent support. Several parties claimed the succession to Masyumi, but to no great avail.²⁷ *Partai Bulan Bintang* (Crescent and Star Party), which used Masyumi symbols and its political language, only gained 1.9 per cent of the votes. Other Islam-based parties that competed for the former Masyumi vote included PPP (*Partai Persatuan Pembangunan*, United Development Party), the only Muslim party allowed under Suharto; PAN (*Partai Amanat Nasional*, National Mandate Party), founded by the former chairman of the modernist Muslim organisation Muhammadiyah, Amien Rais; and PK (*Partai Keadilan*, Party of Justice), a party run by Islamic puritans who were either preachers or ex-student activists.

While the continuity between the parties in the 1950s and the post-Suharto polity was generally strong, there were also significant disconnects. Most essential was the absence of the PKI or any other left-wing party that could have taken its place. Open references to communism or even Marxism remained outlawed under the new legislation on parties and elections, and several labour- and grassroots-oriented parties participating in the 1999 elections failed to make significant ground. The other element of discontinuity between the 1950s and the late 1990s was the presence of Golkar, a party of administrators and technocrats, which (together with the military) had been the backbone of the New Order state. Acquiring a new centrist and moderate image after Suharto's fall, it made a remarkably smooth transition into the post-authoritarian system. It finished second in the 1999 elections with 22.4 per cent of the votes, successfully entrenching itself in the democratic state. This was much to the relief of its new leader Akbar Tandjung, who had viewed Golkar's complete disappearance after Suharto's fall as a realistic prospect.²⁸

The elections of 2004 led to a further fragmentation of the party system. Although the number of parties participating in the elections declined to 24 and those receiving seats to 17, the number of effective parties increased to 8.55.²⁹ This was the result of a major redistribution of votes benefiting the smaller parties, with now seven parties obtaining more than 5 per cent of the votes as opposed to only five in 1999. The main element in this electoral shift towards smaller parties was PDI-P's sharp drop to 18.5 per cent of the vote. Golkar, by contrast, maintained its support base and emerged as the strongest party. The two new entries into the category of medium-sized parties were *Partai Demokrat* (PD, Democratic Party), which had been founded as Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono's electoral vehicle in 2001, and PKS (*Partai Keadilan Sejahtera*, Party of Justice and Prosperity), the successor to PK.³⁰ The *Partai Demokrat* had a

27 Marcus Mietzner, 'Nationalism and Islamic politics: Political Islam in the post-Soeharto era', in *Reformasi: Crisis and change in Indonesia*, ed. Arief Budiman, Barbara Hatley and Damien Kingsbury (Melbourne: Monash Asia Institute, 1999), pp. 173–99.

28 Interview with Akbar Tandjung, former chairman of Golkar (1998–2004); Jakarta, 17 Nov. 2006.

29 Tan, 'Indonesia seven years after Soeharto', p. 93.

30 PK had been forced to reorganise itself because it had failed to reach the 2 per cent threshold set in 1999 for participation in the next elections.

centrist political platform, which tried to combine the rational-bureaucratic orientation of Golkar and the secular-populist identity of PDI-P. Consequently, it was PDI-P from which *Partai Demokrat* attracted most of its votes in the 2004 elections,³¹ capitalising on the disappointment in large sections of the electorate with Megawati's performance as president since 2001. The PKS, for its part, emerged as a major Muslim party at the modernist end of the spectrum, with many voters rewarding the party for its perceived consistency in policy matters and its clean image.³²

Continued cleavages and weak institutionalisation

The similarities between the party system of the 1950s and that of the post-Suharto period went well beyond the fact that they were both atomised multiparty systems and exhibited significant lines of continuity between some of the individual parties. More remarkably, statistical correlations between the election results of 1955 and 1999 (and, by extension, between 1999 and 2004) show that the religio-political cleavages of the 1950s remain strong influences in the party system of contemporary Indonesia. In his 2003 study on elections in Indonesia, Dwight King concluded that 'the empirical evidence provided here in the form of significant correlations between areas of support for particular 1955 parties and areas of support for particular 1999 parties ... makes a strong case for broad continuity in election outcomes'.³³ These correlations point to the enduring importance of the nationalist-Islamic divide on the one hand and that between modernist and traditionalist Muslims on the other. In the same vein, Anis Baswedan demonstrated that voter movements in the 2004 elections occurred almost exclusively within the large religio-political blocs, and not between them.³⁴ The massive exodus from PDI-P to *Partai Demokrat* is one major example of this intra-constituency shift, and PKS also gained its additional votes from other Islamic parties rather than their nationalist rivals. While the research of King and Baswedan has been challenged by several other scholars, most notably Liddle and Mujani,³⁵ their main thesis of continued religio-political cleavages in Indonesia's party system, which have extended from the 1950s into the current polity, remains valid.

The post-authoritarian party system also shared many of the institutional weaknesses of its predecessor in the 1950s. Paige Johnson Tan used criteria developed by Scott Mainwaring and Timothy Scully³⁶ in order to evaluate the extent to which Indonesia's contemporary party system has become institutionalised. The result of her analysis did not differ much from Herbert Feith's assessment of the party system under

31 Anies Baswedan, 'Sirkulasi Suara Dalam Pemilu 2004' (unpublished manuscript, 2004).

32 Other newcomers to the party system included the Christian party, *Partai Damai Sejahtera* (PDS, Party of Peace and Prosperity), which gained 2.1 per cent of the votes, and *Partai Bintang Reformasi* (PBR, Star Reform Party), a split-off from PPP, which managed to draw 2.4 per cent support.

33 Dwight King, *Half-hearted reform: Electoral institutions and the struggle for democracy in Indonesia* (Westport, CT and London: Praeger, 2003), p. 134.

34 Baswedan, 'Sirkulasi suara'.

35 R. William Liddle and Saiful Mujani, 'Leadership, party, and religion: Explaining voting behaviour in Indonesia', *Comparative Political Studies*, 40, 7 (2007): 832–57.

36 *Building democratic institutions: Party systems in Latin America*, ed. Scott Mainwaring and Timothy Scully (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995).

liberal democracy. Johnson Tan found conflicting tendencies as far as the intensity of inter-party competition was concerned, with continuously high volatility in party support balanced by a decline in ideological disputes.³⁷ She also contended that parties are poorly rooted in society,³⁸ pointing to the discrepancy between votes for parties and for presidential candidates in 2004. In terms of the parties' legitimacy, Johnson Tan noted their low reputation despite the continuously high participation of Indonesian voters in elections that were internationally acknowledged as free and fair. Finally, she emphasised the weak structures of the parties, which are dominated by highly personalised leaderships. The party machines are largely inactive between elections, and internal discipline is low.³⁹ Intra-party divisions continue to keep the courts busy, while the institutions of the parties are left undeveloped. Overall, Johnson Tan concludes that Indonesia's party system is in a process of deinstitutionalisation, with the new direct electoral mechanism for the president and local government heads further undermining the role of the parties in society.

The assessment of Johnson Tan has apparently won the support of most Indonesian and foreign political analysts. In his study on Golkar (and, by comparison, other major parties), Dirk Tomsa has used very similar analytical tools, and arrived at conclusions that differ only slightly from Johnson Tan's.⁴⁰ Andreas Ufen, for his part, has even identified a process of 'Philippinisation' of Indonesian party politics, with cashed-up national and local patrons using parties as their personal vehicles.⁴¹

In Indonesia itself, the analysts are even harsher in their judgement. Academics and commentators slam the parties almost on a daily basis in newspaper and magazine articles for their corruption, political rent-seeking and self-imposed isolation from the electorate. Crucially, these critical views appear to reflect the political attitudes of ordinary Indonesians. The polling institute *Lembaga Survei Indonesia* (Indonesian Survey Institute, LSI), for example, found in 2006 that 75 per cent of Indonesians did not feel emotionally attached to any party, exposing extremely low levels of party identification.⁴² In the same vein, the anti-corruption body, Transparency International Indonesia, revealed in late 2005 that a majority of Indonesians viewed the parties as their country's most corrupt group of political actors, followed by the parliament, which of course is dominated by the parties as well.⁴³ The survey was echoed in an announcement by the Home Ministry that between 2004 and 2006 no less than 1,062 local parliamentarians had been investigated for corruption.⁴⁴ Furthermore, an international Gallup poll in 2004 established that Indonesia's parties were ranked among the most corrupt in the world, alongside those in India, several Latin American countries and the emerging democracies of eastern Europe.⁴⁵

37 Tan, 'Indonesia seven years after Soeharto', p. 98.

38 Ibid., p. 103.

39 Ibid., pp. 107–8.

40 Dirk Tomsa, 'Uneven party institutionalization in Indonesia: Explaining the enduring strength of Golkar in the post-Suharto era' (Ph.D. diss., Monash University, 2007).

41 Ufen, 'Political parties in post-Soeharto Indonesia'.

42 'Parpol Islam Sebaiknya Mengubah Pendekatan', *Kompas*, 17 Oct. 2006.

43 'Parpol Membantah Terkorup', *Kompas*, 27 Dec. 2005.

44 'Aroma Politik di Balik Dana Kompensasi DPRD', *Kompas*, 29 Jan. 2006.

45 'Badan Kehormatan DPR Diharap Proaktif Lanjuti Survei TII', *Media Indonesia*, 10 Dec. 2004.

Centripetal impulses in the contemporary party system

Given these highly critical assessments of Indonesia's contemporary party system, how can we explain its relative stability if compared to its predecessor in the 1950s? Both systems had very similar features, with parties seen as poorly rooted in society, corrupt, self-serving and unaccountable. Parties in both systems centred around charismatic or well-connected leaders, lacked internal democratic procedures and suffered from low (and declining) levels of legitimacy. Yet Indonesia's party system in the 1950s crumbled after seven years amidst escalating political tensions, while the post-Suharto polity has recently entered its eleventh year without showing serious signs of disintegration. Despite widespread criticism towards the parties, there have been remarkably few calls for fundamental changes to the political system — contrasting sharply with the 1950s, when proposals for alternative formats of governance were part of everyday political and intellectual discourse.

One possible approach to explaining the different transition outcomes in the 1950s and in contemporary Indonesia is offered by the work of Vicky Randall and Lars Svasand.⁴⁶ Most importantly, they suggest that the issues of party institutionalisation and party system institutionalisation need to be analytically separated. In particular, they propose that party systems can be unstable even if one or several parties operating within them are well institutionalised. For example, if strongly institutionalised parties use their dominance to restrict the competitiveness of the party system, this can threaten the very existence of the system. Equally, parties with religious or ethnic platforms may in some respect be classified as strongly institutionalised, but their narrow focus on serving the material needs of their primordial constituencies can undermine the effectiveness of party systems in the long run. However, Randall and Svasand have paid less attention to another implication of distinguishing between the institutionalisation of parties and of party systems: the possibility of a party system remaining reasonably stable despite the poor and uneven institutionalisation of its parties. Arguably, post-Suharto Indonesia constitutes such a case.

In order to understand why some party systems can survive despite the weakness of their parties, it is helpful to consult the work of Giovanni Sartori. Sartori asserts that the quality and longevity of a party system is not so much determined by the functionality and competitiveness of its parties, but by the direction that this competition takes.⁴⁷ Consequently, Sartori distinguishes between party systems with centripetal dynamics and those with centrifugal impulses. In centripetal party systems, competition takes place at the centre, with parties struggling to occupy the middle ground in order to add to their core voting base and increase their chances of coming to power.⁴⁸ In centrifugal party systems, by contrast, the political positions of parties (and the electorate in general) move away from the centre, strengthening the margins and ultimately causing the erosion of the party system.

In her work on party systems, Deborah Norden tried to elaborate upon this model by introducing the categories of collusive, combative and moderate inter-party

46 Vicky Randall and Lars Svasand, 'Party institutionalization in new democracies', *Party Politics*, 8, 1 (2002): 5–29.

47 Sartori, *Parties and party systems*.

48 Alan Ware, *Political parties and party systems* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996).

competition.⁴⁹ However, her categorisation failed to fully capture the explanatory power of Sartori's theory. In Sartori's framework, competition between parties can be combative, but as long as it is centripetal, it does not threaten the existence of the party system itself. By the same token, collusive competition (one in which parties collaborate with each other to control the system) can in fact develop centrifugal tendencies if it occurs between parties that temporarily cooperate to destroy the democratic framework they operate in — Weimar Germany being a classic example. The inadequacy of Norden's theory was clearly shown when Johnson Tan tried to apply it to the case of contemporary Indonesia — and found a mixture between collusive, combative and moderate features that had little to say about the overall nature and direction of the party system.⁵⁰

Sartori's notion of centrifugal versus centripetal party systems, on the other hand, seems to provide useful analytical guidance in identifying the paradigmatic differences between the contemporary polity and that of the 1950s. As demonstrated above, inter-party competition in the 1950s occurred at the margins of the party spectrum, with the political centre almost completely deserted. Parties focused on satisfying the needs and aspirations of their core constituency, and showed little ambition to attract voters from across the political spectrum. In the debates on a new constitution, most parties took up positions that reflected their various group ideologies, and consequently refused to discuss forms of state organisation more suitable for a highly heterogeneous nation like Indonesia. Most importantly, the majority of the parties had no strong interest in defending the existing democratic polity, offering alternatives that ranged from an Islamic state to 'collectivism' and authoritarian leadership. With the major political streams pulled towards the far ends of the ideological spectrum, the centre imploded, thereby ushering in Sukarno's Guided Democracy.

By contrast, the post-Suharto party system has developed centripetal dynamics that stabilised and perpetuated its structures — despite the weakness of the parties themselves and the harsh criticism directed towards them. In the following sections, I will discuss the politico-ideological positions of Indonesia's contemporary parties, and seek to show that inter-party competition after 1998 has largely taken place in the centre, with parties using their constituencies only as core bases to launch campaigns for additional votes from the whole spectrum.⁵¹ The analysis will also demonstrate that the contemporary Indonesian party system is dominated by three pivotal centrist parties (Golkar, PDI-P and *Partai Demokrat*), which do what Christoffer Green-Pedersen claimed most centrist parties in multiparty systems manage to achieve — namely to pull the other parties with them into the centre.⁵²

49 Deborah Norden, 'Party relations and democracy in Latin America', *Party Politics*, 4, 4 (1998): 423–43.

50 Tan, 'Indonesia seven years after Soeharto', p. 98.

51 Baswedan's observations on voter movements within politico-ideological blocs, rather than between them, have not prevented the parties from seeking to penetrate the constituency of their rivals. On the contrary, a series of interviews conducted by the author with senior party officials revealed that they view the persistence of socio-religious cleavages as a challenge to further open their parties in order to make them attractive to voters previously out of their reach.

52 Green-Pedersen uses the term 'center party', suggesting that mostly only one such party exists in multiparty systems. In this article, however, I prefer the term 'centrist parties' as the case of Indonesia provides convincing evidence that more than one party can occupy the centre and trigger the centripetal tendencies described by Sartori.

Indonesia's pivotal centrist parties

The centripetal direction of intra-party competition is first and foremost reflected in the political platforms of the major parties and their positions on the post-Suharto constitutional amendments. To begin with, PDI-P has established itself as a moderately conservative and nationalist party, which has largely disposed of the revolutionary and authoritarian features of its predecessor, PNI. While ageing ultra-nationalists like Soetardjo Soerjogoeritno, one of the three deputy speakers of parliament, continue to wield some lingering influence in PDI-P, they form a tiny minority and are likely to disappear from the party mainstream sooner or later. Party chairperson Megawati Sukarnoputri, for her part, has continued to exploit her late father's enduring charisma to remain atop what has become a highly factionalised party, but in doing so she has deliberately avoided references to Sukarno's leadership of the authoritarian Guided Democracy. The period between 1959 and 1965 remains a blind spot in the self-scripted history of the party, with its leaders instead referring to Sukarno's Pancasila speech of June 1945 as their ideological lodestar.⁵³

Megawati's presidency between 2001 and 2004 moved the party further to the centre, mitigating many of its earlier populist and nationalist views on economic, political and international affairs. Most importantly, the pragmatism needed to keep the wheels of government turning every day left a deep mark on the party's political style. It also drove home the point that for it to sustain power over a longer period of time, PDI-P had to reach out to other constituencies.⁵⁴ Thus in order to overcome the impression that the party was uninterested in or even opposed to the development of political Islam, the PDI-P leadership announced in late 2006 the creation of *Baitul Muslimin*, a body for Islamic affairs under coordination of the party's central board.⁵⁵ The party was able to convince the chairman of Muhammadiyah, Din Syamsuddin, to help build the new organisation. This not only triggered speculation that Megawati wanted to win over Din as her running mate for the 2009 presidential elections, but it also lent credibility to PDI-P's effort to broaden its political appeal.

The centrist position of PDI-P was evident in its role in the process of constitutional amendments between 1999 and 2002. While Megawati was personally reluctant to endorse many of the changes made to the 1945 constitution, she listened to advice from within and outside her party not to oppose them. In particular, she resisted the temptation to join the armed forces and prominent retired officers in their calls to abort the amendments and return to the initial version of the constitution. Such a move would have evoked memories of the collapse of the *Konstituante* in the 1950s, with potentially severe consequences for the stability of the post-Suharto system. Eventually, Megawati directed her party to agree to the introduction of direct presidential elections, the creation of a senate-like body of regional representation, a new constitutional court with wide-ranging powers, and substantially expanded rights for the legislature *vis-à-vis* the presidency. In addition, despite her reputation as a strong opponent of decentralisation, she brought legislation before parliament that led

53 Dewan Pimpinan Pusat Partai Demokrasi Perjuangan, *Seri Panduan Partai Demokrasi Indonesia Perjuangan* (Jakarta, 2006), p. 5.

54 Interview with Maruarar Sirait, deputy chairman of PDI-P, Jakarta, 22 Oct. 2006.

55 Interview with Pranomo Anung Wibowo, secretary-general of PDI-P, Jakarta, 18 Oct. 2006.

to the direct elections of governors, mayors and district heads from 2005 onwards. Furthermore, while Megawati has often expressed her view that 'voting' is not in line with the Indonesian spirit of democracy (a vestige of her father's authoritarian-collectivist outlook), neither she nor her party has promoted an alternative to the existing democratic system.

The second large centrist party is Golkar, the long-time electoral machine of the New Order. While it had been an integral part of Suharto's regime, the party cut its ties to the former president shortly after his downfall. In July 1998, Golkar decided to no longer use the money offered by Suharto's numerous political foundations to run party operations,⁵⁶ and subsequently underwent a remarkably quick transformation into an effective player in competitive party politics. Featuring a secular-bureaucratic political platform, which prioritised economic development and efficient governance, the party attracted voters in underdeveloped areas as well as those affected by the financial crisis of 1997 and 1998.⁵⁷ It had most of its support outside of Java, with the island of Sulawesi being a particular stronghold.

Most significantly, Golkar's centrist ideology was reinforced by its 'federal' structure. In majority Muslim areas, for example, the party presented itself as culturally inspired by Islam, with many Golkar politicians in west Java, south Sulawesi or Sumatra promoting explicitly pro-Muslim policies. In predominantly Christian areas like north Sulawesi, Papua, Maluku or east Nusa Tenggara on the other hand, the party was headed by Christian politicians, forming symbiotic relationships with powerful local churches and missionary organisations.⁵⁸ In the same vein, the Golkar leadership on Bali consisted almost exclusively of Hindus, reflecting the religious composition of the island. This federal system of party organisation, practised by no other Indonesian party with such consistency, meant that Golkar effectively became a pluralist association of highly heterogeneous branches. As a result, the national party board was inherently prevented from taking partisan stances on religious, ethnic or other controversial issues, even had it wished to do so. Political centrism was therefore not only a short-term choice for Golkar; it was built into its organisational structures.⁵⁹

Golkar's centrist orientation was also a direct result of its self-perception as Indonesia's pre-eminent government party. Seeking participation in government was a major element of the party's strategic platform, with party chairman and Vice-President Jusuf Kalla declaring in August 2006 that Golkar was unqualified to be in opposition because 'it had been born to support the development process carried out by the government'.⁶⁰ Kalla himself had been elected as party chairman in December 2004, largely because his predecessor Akbar Tandjung had failed to deliver participation in the government of Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono. Kalla offered precisely that, and his election had ended Golkar's short-lived flirtation with the prospect of permanent opposition. Given its aspirations for long-term participation in government,

56 Interview with Akbar Tandjung, former chairman of Golkar (1998–2004), Jakarta, 17 Nov. 2006.

57 Interview with Rully Chairul Azwar, deputy secretary-general of Golkar, Jakarta, 18 Sept. 2006.

58 Interview with Theo Sambuaga, deputy chairman of Golkar; Jakarta, 28 Nov. 2006.

59 Idrus Marham, *Partai Golkar dan dinamika politik multi partai: Memantapkan posisi partai Golkar sebagai partai modern* (Jakarta: AMPG Press), p. 143.

60 'Kalla: Golkar Susah Jadi Oposisi', *Suara Merdeka* 22 Aug. 2006.

Golkar had no other choice but to deeply anchor itself in the political centre. Accordingly, it could not afford to take extreme positions on ideological and political issues, let alone assume an anti-system stance towards the government and the existing polity.⁶¹

Golkar's disinclination towards an adversarial opposition role became also palpable during the debates on constitutional amendments. Contrary to the expectations of many observers, Golkar not only refrained from blocking liberal reforms to the political system, but it was in fact a driving force behind them. Many of the key ideas about direct presidential elections, empowerment of the parliament and the formation of new state institutions were developed and promoted by seasoned Golkar politicians. Among them was Slamet Effendy Yusuf, who played a crucial role in reaching consensus with other parties and steering the amendment process through the various sessions of the General Assembly.⁶²

The third key centrist party, *Partai Demokrat*, gained only 7.5 per cent of the votes in the 2004 elections, but its influence under the incumbent Yudhoyono government was greater than this result might suggest. Many governors, mayors and district heads joined the party to improve their standing *vis-à-vis* the central government, and pollsters regularly put *Partai Demokrat* into the category of 'large parties', together with Golkar and PDI-P. The party was founded in 2001 as an electoral vehicle for Yudhoyono, who at that time was still uncertain if he wanted to run for president himself or only as Megawati's deputy. Thus Yudhoyono did not put substantial resources into *Partai Demokrat* before early 2004, when he had finally made up his mind to seek the top job for himself.⁶³ Reflecting Yudhoyono's own political image and outlook, *Partai Demokrat* portrayed itself as a catch-all party, appealing to moderate Muslims as well as secular voters previously attracted to Golkar and PDI-P. Consequently, party strategists identified Golkar and PDI-P as their most serious competitors in the fight for the political centre.⁶⁴

That the competition between centrist parties can be 'combative', to borrow Norden's term, was indicated in internal documents drafted by *Partai Demokrat's* electoral department in September 2006. Echoing the military background of many of its leading officials, the election strategy papers called for a three-way approach to the party's opponents in the political centre: 'beginning with intelligence operations or data collection to design the initial strategy, followed by destroying the adversary's strategy through a myriad of intervening measures, and [finally] hitting the target'.⁶⁵ Despite its bellicose language, however, the party was keen to cooperate with its centrist counterparts in order to reduce opposition towards Yudhoyono's administration, often reminding them that they shared the same middle-of-the-road values.

61 Interview with Agus Gumiwang Kartasmita, deputy chairman of Golkar, Jakarta, 2 Oct. 2006.

62 Slamet Effendy Yusuf and Umar Basalim, *Reformasi konstitusi Indonesia: Perubahan pertama UUD 1945* (Jakarta: Pustaka Indonesia Bersatu, 2000).

63 Interview with Subur Budhisantoso, former chairman of *Partai Demokrat*, Jakarta, 28 Sept. 2006.

64 Interview with Anas Urbaningrum, deputy chairman of *Partai Demokrat*, 13 Nov. 2006.

65 Dewan Pimpinan Pusat Partai Demokrat, *Sukses Pemilu* (Jakarta, 2006), p. 15.

The Muslim 'wing' parties: Pulled into the centre

In his discussion of centripetal party systems in Europe, Green-Pedersen has argued that it is often the existence of pivotal centrist parties (or 'center parties') that pulls other parties from the political fringes into the centre. Challenging Sartori's assumption that centripetal competition mostly occurs in two-party systems, Green-Pedersen shows that 'if a pivotal center party exists, party competition in multiparty systems may also be highly centripetal'.⁶⁶ He proposed that 'wing parties', that is parties at the margins of the political spectrum, face a dilemma between office- and vote-seeking behaviour. As the vast majority of parties ultimately seek participation in government, however, they are forced to move to the centre in order to become attractive to the centrist parties as potential coalition partners. With parties from both ends of the political spectrum pulled into the centre, the differences between the wing parties begin to dissipate, and they can form coalitions among themselves against the previously dominant centrist parties. The result of this process is ideological levelling within the party system, with intra-party competition concentrated on the centre.

In Indonesia, the phenomenon described by Green-Pedersen was most visible within the large community of Muslim parties. To be sure, some of them had traditionally been moderate and pragmatic, favouring nationalist coalition partners and orienting themselves towards the politico-ideological centre. Abdurrahman Wahid's PKB, for example, was the successor to the NU party that had operated as an independent entity until 1973. In the 1950s, NU had often cooperated with its nationalist counterparts to outmanoeuvre its rival Masyumi, from which it had bitterly seceded in 1952. After the establishment of PKB in 1998, Wahid tried to give the new NU-based party an even more inclusivist image than that possessed by its predecessor. Against considerable opposition from some of the NU's most prominent clerics, or *kiai*, Wahid insisted that the party be open to all religions and constituencies, and that it not adopt Islam as its ideological foundation. In fact, he threatened to establish his own nationalist party if the religious leaders within NU refused to follow him.⁶⁷

Wahid's extraordinary political flexibility earned him the presidency in 1999, but it also paved the way to his political decline. Eventually, there was not a single party in the political landscape that Wahid had not entered into coalitions or fought deeply divisive battles with — often in quick succession. For example, he secured Golkar's support for his election as president in 1999, then tried to ban the party in 2001, but moved to back its presidential nominee in 2004. Not everyone in NU found this pragmatism appealing, however, and from 2001 onwards, PKB was in a state of constant internal conflict. Consequently, senior politicians left PKB, establishing their own parties or joining already existing ones. Wahid's politico-ideological centrism remained the strongest political influence in the NU community, however, with other, more religiously defined NU-based splinter parties gaining little support.

What was more surprising than the centripetal orientation of the traditionalist Muslim parties was the increasing politico-ideological centrism exhibited by their

66 Green-Pedersen, 'Center parties', p. 338.

67 Marcus Mietzner, 'Nahdlatul Ulama and the 1999 general elections in Indonesia', in *Pemilu: The 1999 Indonesian election*, Annual Indonesia Lecture series no. 22, ed. Susan Blackburn (Melbourne: Monash Asia Institute, 1999), pp. 74–5.

modernist counterparts. After Suharto's fall, a large number of modernist Muslim parties emerged, promising to 'Islamise' politics following four decades of authoritarian restrictions on political Islam. However, after several years trying to leave an Islamic mark on the new polity, the majority of Islamic parties moved to the political centre. PPP, which had a large modernist component in addition to the many NU leaders in its ranks, was one of them. It had switched its political base from Pancasila to Islam after the regime change, but was pulled more and more towards the centre by its strong ambition to participate in government. In 2001, party chairman Hamzah Haz became vice-president to Megawati, who many Islamic clerics (including those active in PPP) believed should not have been allowed to rule because of her gender and secular convictions. Clearly, the wish to be represented in government had gained precedence over ideological or religious considerations.

Even after this unhappy political 'marriage' ended in 2004, PPP stayed on its course towards the centre. At its 2007 congress, PPP affirmed its commitment to *ummatan wasathan*, a stance that 'avoids the political left as well as the right'.⁶⁸ The candidates competing for the chairmanship of the party pledged to further open it to non-Muslims, aiming to transform PPP into a genuinely moderate and modern party that not only bridged the differences between diverse Muslim groups, but also reached out to other religions.⁶⁹ Even the firebrand Muslim activist Eggi Sudjana, who also ran for the chairmanship, was forced to present himself as a moderate to maintain his electoral prospects. 'Islam is not a group', he said, 'but a value system, which includes justice, peace, prosperity, equality and freedom [for] everybody.'⁷⁰ A moderate NU-affiliated politician was eventually elected party chairman, and beside his genuinely centrist profile, it was primarily his membership in Yudhoyono's cabinet that ensured that PPP would remain oriented towards the centre.

The developments in other Islamic parties were similar to that in PPP. *Partai Bulan Bintang*, for example, which had started in 1998 as the successor to Masyumi and appealed to puritanical modernist Muslims at the Islamist fringes of the political spectrum,⁷¹ moved slowly but steadily to the centre. In 2004, it entered into a coalition with the ultra-nationalist party PKPI (*Partai Keadilan dan Persatuan Indonesia*, Party of Indonesian Justice and Unity), led by the retired generals Edi Sudradjat and Try Sutrisno. Together, *Bulan Bintang* and PKPI were the only parties besides *Partai Demokrat* to support Yudhoyono's nomination as president in 2004, providing evidence for Green-Pedersen's notion that wing parties from both ends of the spectrum tend to approach successful centrist parties and adjust their political orientation in the process. Senior *Bulan Bintang* politicians joined the cabinet, a move that drew their attention to issues of government administration rather than demands for an Islamic state. The lifestyles of the party leadership also became increasingly secular. Yusril Ihza Mahendra, then state secretary in Yudhoyono's administration and the founding chairman of the party, divorced his long-time wife in 2006 to marry a 22-year-old

68 Partai Persatuan Pembangunan, *Rancangan materi Muktamar ke VI* (Jakarta, 2007), p. 22.

69 Interviews with Arief Mudatsir Mandan, Jakarta, 19 Oct. 2006; Endin AJ. Soefihara, Jakarta, 13 Dec. 2006; Alimarwan Hanan, Jakarta, 11 Dec. 2006; and Yunus Yosfiah, Jakarta, 6 Dec. 2006.

70 'Jangan Hinakan Partai degan Politik Uang', *Kompas*, 30 Jan. 2007.

71 Mietzner, 'Nationalism and Islamic politics', p. 189.

beauty of Japanese descent from the Philippines. The high-profile wedding of the couple led to serious debates both within the party and the general public about the credibility of *Bulan Bintang's* puritanical Islamic image. Yursil tried to contain these discussions by announcing that he would take his new wife on a *hadj* pilgrimage to Mekkah as soon as possible, but the impression of declining piety in the party elite was difficult to disperse.

The party established by former Muhammadiyah leader Amien Rais, PAN, also oriented itself more at the political centre than at the Islamic fringes. In 1998, Amien had given the party a pluralist outlook because he was convinced that in order to become president, it was insufficient for him to only collect votes from pious Muslim voters. Nevertheless, the majority of party officials at the grassroots were Muhammadiyah members, and the organisation openly supported Amien and PAN in the 1999 and 2004 campaigns. With Amien's loss in the presidential elections of 2004, however, the Muhammadiyah elements in the party felt increasingly sidelined. The number of former Muhammadiyah officials in the PAN faction in the national and local legislatures declined, and at the party congress in 2005, little-known entrepreneur Soetrisno Bachir took over from Amien as party leader. Soetrisno pushed PAN further towards the centre, leading to disorientation among many members of its founding generation, who wanted PAN to continue as a moderate, but still Muhammadiyah-affiliated party.⁷² Consequently, as PAN tried to remodel itself as a centrist party, Muhammadiyah activists established a new political party in November 2006 — the *Partai Matahari Bangsa* (PMB, Party of the People's Sun). Initially, PAN leaders brushed off the notion that PMB could constitute a threat to their electoral constituency, but after both Amien Rais and incumbent Muhammadiyah chairman Din Syamsuddin were rumoured to consider backing the party, it quickly gained momentum.⁷³ Even if they become involved in PMB, however, Amien and Din are unlikely to anchor it at the Islamic margins of the political spectrum. Rather, they seem intent on turning PMB into an improved version of PAN, with moderate pluralism remaining its principle.

PKS: Centre-oriented or Islamic agenda?

Even PKS, the party most frequently identified with an uncompromising defence of Islamic values, has recently undertaken efforts to moderate its image. Founded by Islamic leaders of the 1998 student movement and urban-based Muslim preachers, PKS initially presented itself as the most puritanical of all Muslim parties, imposing a strict code of morality on its members and committing them to an extraordinarily high degree of organisational discipline. With a relatively small support base in the 1999 elections, and its only minister in the Wahid cabinet sacked after only a short tenure, PKS managed to build up its reputation as a party without links to the corruption, infighting and moral decadence of the political mainstream. Thus in the 2004 elections,

72 According to one senior PAN parliamentarian, Soetrisno had moved the party to the centre not so much because he wanted to distance it from Muhammadiyah, but in order to break with the oppositional attitude of Amien Rais towards the incumbent government. Interview with Djoko Susilo, 14 Sept. 2006.

73 Interview with Rizal Sukma, member of Muhammadiyah's central board, Bandung, 23 Jan. 2007.

riding on a strong wave of disappointment with the existing parties, PKS increased its 1999 result fivefold, and emerged as an important medium-sized party.

The growing political importance of PKS heavily impacted on its image, however. With three of its members sitting in the cabinet appointed in 2004, and the party a major player in parliaments and in direct local elections, PKS increasingly had to engage with the system it had previously criticised.⁷⁴ Accordingly, the political rhetoric of the party elite began to change. In November 2006, senior PKS figure Hidayat Nurwahid said that 'PKS has always been in the centre, never on the right of the political spectrum.'⁷⁵ Claiming that the alleged insistence of PPP and *Bulan Bintang* on an Islamic state had resulted in the re-emergence of 'Islamaphobia' in Indonesia, Hidayat asserted that PKS stayed away from such issues because it was genuinely committed to pluralism and bridge-building between diverse communities.

While this centrist rhetoric allowed PKS to increase its political flexibility in coalition-building, it has yet to take roots in the broader community of the party. As PKS cooperated with parties of all colours at the local and national levels (in Papua even with the Christian PDS), many party officials and activists remained deeply committed to an Islamic political agenda. A poll taken in 2005 revealed that 70 per cent of PKS supporters were suspicious of non-Muslims, believed women should not become president and thought that bank interest payments should be outlawed.⁷⁶ Similarly, a large number of political observers and officials from rival political parties believed that PKS' shift to the political centre was purely tactical, and that the party leadership would continue to push for the Islamisation of Indonesia's state and society once it had achieved more influence over policy-making in the legislative and executive institutions.⁷⁷ Whatever its true motives are, it is significant to note that PKS apparently believes it can only reach its political goals by forming alliances with centrist parties and, in order to facilitate such coalitions, equipping itself with a more moderate reputation. In other words, PKS's strategy is in itself an implicit acknowledgement of Indonesia's inherent religio-political plurality.

Despite residual doubts over the long-term ideological agendas of some Islamic parties, the vast majority of them have been stabilising factors in Indonesia's contemporary democratic polity. In contrast to the 1950s, when key Muslim parties prioritised their insistence on the ideal of an Islamic state over defending the existing parliamentary democracy, the Islamic parties of the post-Suharto era have played a largely positive role in the process of amending the country's constitution. To be sure, PPP and *Bulan Bintang* submitted largely symbolic proposals to the General Assembly in 2002 to reinstate the Jakarta Charter, which would have given the state a role in ensuring that all Muslims practised their faith.⁷⁸ However, it was clear from the start

74 Sapto Waluyo, *Kebangkitan politik dakwah: Konsep dan praktik politik partai Keadilan Sejahtera di Masa Transisi* (Bandung: Hsrakutana Publishing, 2005), p. 246.

75 Interview with Hidayat Nurwahid, Jakarta, 7 Nov. 2006.

76 Saiful Mujani, 'Analisis parpol: PKS, tantangan baru politik Indonesia', *Media Indonesia*, 28 July 2005.

77 For instance, senior Golkar politician Hardisoesilo believed that PKS planned to fundamentally change the demographic composition of Indonesia's society, aiming to increase the number of pious Muslims to such an extent that would make the establishment of an Islamic state inevitable. Interview with Hardisoesilo, Jakarta, 30 Nov. 2006.

78 Umar Basalim, *Pro-kontra Piagam Jakarta di era reformasi* (Jakarta: Pustaka Indonesia Satu, 2002), pp. 182, 187.

that this submission had no chance of being accepted, and PPP and *Bulan Bintang* consequently withdrew it as soon as their position on this issue had been publicly noted. PKS, for its part, proposed that all Indonesians be obliged to live according to the code of their various religions, but most other parties rejected that suggestion as well.⁷⁹ Different from their counterparts in the 1950s, however, the Islamic parties in the contemporary party system not only accepted their 'defeat' in the constitutional debate, they also moved their parties further to the centre. It was this centripetal tendency of the party system in general, and of the Muslim parties in particular, that stood in sharp contrast to the centrifugal, self-destructive character of party politics in the 1950s.

Conclusion: Stable party system, weak parties

The discussion so far has shown that the major difference between the Indonesian party system of the 1950s and that of today's polity is related to the direction of inter-party competition, not to the quality of party institutionalisation. Political parties in both systems suffered from weak institutionalisation and low legitimacy, but diametrically opposed dynamics were at work as far as the trend of inter-party rivalry was concerned. The party system of the 1950s was centrifugal, with parties deserting the politico-ideological centre and competing for support at the margins. By contrast, political competition in the post-Suharto polity is largely centripetal, pulling parties from the fringes towards the centre and homogenising their ideological profiles as a result (see Figure 2).

Using Green-Pedersen's adaptation of Sartori's work on centripetal party systems, the article has also shown that the existence of three pivotal centrist parties in Indonesia has had a significant effect on the wing parties, particularly at the Islamic fringes. Determined to participate in government or increase their support base, Muslim-based parties have gradually shifted towards the centre. Remodelling themselves as moderate and pluralist organisations, Islamic parties have formed coalitions with centrist parties at the national and local levels. Data collected by an election-monitoring network revealed that 37 per cent of all coalitions in Indonesia's post-2005 local elections featured Islamic and nationalist parties. On the other hand, only 2.4 per cent of all alliances were forged exclusively between Muslim parties.⁸⁰ In consequence, as they compete for votes at the centre rather than the Muslim fringes, Islamic parties have largely suspended demands for the creation of an Islamic state or even the full implementation of Islamic law — something their counterparts in the 1950s had insisted upon, with severe consequences for the democratic polity.

Beyond the attractive force of centrist parties described by Green-Pedersen and Sartori, another explanation for the centripetal dynamics of the post-Suharto party system can be found in Indonesia's very specific historical contexts. Most importantly, the legacy of the New Order on the political orientation of post-Suharto parties should

79 Interview with Hidayat Nurwahid, Jakarta, 7 Nov. 2006.

80 This data was put together by JPPR (*Jaringan Pendidikan Pemilih untuk Rakyat*, People's Voter Education Network), an association of civil society groups engaged in election monitoring and voter education. I am grateful to Jeremy Gross, programme manager at The Asia Foundation in Jakarta, for sharing the data, which reflects elections held up to June 2007.

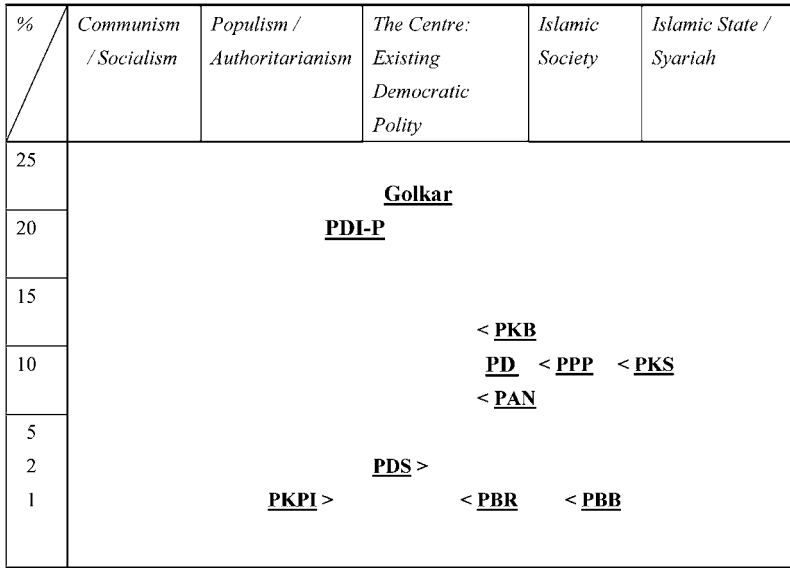


Figure 2. Indonesia’s pivotal centrist parties and centripetal wing parties, 2004

Note: Election results based on the 2004 parliamentary elections; parties below 1 per cent not listed. The allocation of positions on the ideological and political scale was extrapolated from parties’ platforms and their views on matters of state organisation as expressed during the debates on constitutional amendments between 1999 and 2002.

not be underestimated. Ideologically, the New Order’s ritual denunciation of ‘left and right extremes’, its propagation of Pancasila as the guideline for all parties and its negative depiction of the political collapse in the 1950s have left a lasting impression on the post-1998 party system. As a result, most parties have retained Pancasila as a key element in their party platforms and have shied away, almost instinctively, from promoting agendas that could be seen as extremist. Politically, the experience of three decades of authoritarian rule under Suharto provided a strong warning to all parties not to repeat the mistake of the 1950s, when insistence on narrow ideological group interests had paved the way for non-democratic regimes to take over. This was a bitter experience that the parties in the 1950s had been unable to foresee when formulating their uncompromising stances in the *Konstituante*. Thus both as a shaping ideological influence and as a political deterrent, the New Order has clearly contributed to the current centrism of the contemporary party system.

The findings presented in this article suggest that the Indonesian case can provide helpful insights for the further development of party system theory. Sartori has introduced the notion of centrifugal versus centripetal party systems, but believed that the former trend occurs in multiparty systems while the latter is the trademark of two-party systems. Green-Pedersen demonstrated that this is not necessarily the case, showing that centripetal dynamics in moderate multiparty systems can exist if pivotal centrist parties pull the wing parties towards the centre. The analysis of the Indonesian case, however, has provided evidence that centripetal dynamics can even develop in systems of atomised multipartyism, so long as several pivotal centrist parties serve as a magnet for the wing parties to shift to the centre.

Despite the centripetal character and relative stability of the contemporary party system, the parties themselves remain poorly institutionalised. Randall and Svasand's separation between the institutionalisation of parties and party systems suggests that party systems can stay stable even if the parties operating in them are weak, and Indonesia appears to be a case in point. But certainly continued public perceptions of the parties' corruption, declining legitimacy and isolation from society, as described by Johnson Tan and others, have the potential to undermine the party system in the longer term. Accordingly, although Indonesia's contemporary parties have so far successfully avoided the centrifugal self-destruction that buried their equivalents in the 1950s, they are well advised to deepen their roots in society in order to move the process of democratic consolidation to the next level.