

# Political Party System and Democratization Process in Indonesia

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**Abstract:** Among the newly emerged “democracies” during the "Third Wave of Democratization" in East Asia, Indonesia is a typical case study of the process of transition and consolidation of democracy founded on a multi-ethnic and multi-religious society grappling with deep cleavages. After President Suharto's resignation in 1998, the country was confronted with major challenges in its economy and politics, as well as the prospect of the democratization process. The question is ‘what role do political institutions play in the transition period and consolidation of democracy in Indonesia’? The article explores the relationship between the democratization process in the country, mainly in the post-Suharto period, and the institution of the party system. Thereby, the author points out the impacts of the democratization process on the party system, leading to the transformation of the party system in a particular tendency, as well as examines the role of the party system to the democratization process. Research shows that the Indonesian party system maintains a relative level of stability and institutionalization, playing a positive role in the transition and consolidation of democracy after Suharto.

**Keywords:** Political party system, institution, democratization process, Indonesia.

**Subject classification:** Political science.

## 1. Introduction

Indonesia is the leading country in Southeast Asia in terms of gross domestic product (GDP). It is the largest Muslim country in the world and the third-largest

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“democracy” after India and the United States. Indonesia has undergone a process of democratization on the foundation of/against the backdrop of a multi-ethnic and religious society. At various points in its history, Indonesia has faced challenges to its unity and territorial integrity. The country’s development has faced "difficult questions about the place of religion in politics and public life" (Setiawan & Tomsa, 2022: 4). In other words, it must find a way to reconcile the relationship between religious politics and the consolidation of democracy. In addition, there have always been cleavages in Indonesian society, such as that between secular nationalists and devout Muslims. These cleavages have shaped Indonesian politics since independence. Therefore, the progress or regress of Indonesian democracy will have reference value for Southeast Asia in particular and the world as a whole, especially when considering aspects related to the democratization process such as religion, ethnicity, political institutions and culture.

Indonesia, an archipelagic nation made up of some 4,000 islands stretching over 3,400 miles from east to west along the equator and separating mainland Southeast Asia from Australia, is home to over 400 ethnic groups. The two largest ones, the Javanese (accounting for 40%) and the Sundanese (accounting for 15.5%), make up over half the population (Hefner, 2018: 3). Since gaining independence from Dutch colonialism in 1945, Indonesia's democratization process has experienced periods of both development and setbacks, including: Parliamentary Democracy, Guided Democracy, New Order, and Post-Suharto Democracy. The practice of democratization in Indonesia poses the following questions: What were the main factors that determined the direction of democratization in this period? What role did political institutions in general and the party system in particular play in the process of democratic transition and consolidation in Indonesia, especially considering the enormous challenges that Indonesia faced immediately after the fall of the Suharto regime?

Given its diverse population, its geographical dispersion, and the failed experiment with democracy in Indonesia in the 1950s, as well as other institutional designs, the Indonesian party system in the post-Suharto era has been the subject of institutional design, of rules and regulations, through which the party system is expected to contribute to resolving social conflicts and cleavages related to ethnicity and religion.

Most studies on the democratization process in Indonesia to date have focused on assessing the quality and prospects of Indonesian democracy after

Suharto as well as considering the issues arising from the democratization process that led to the formation of the multi-party system. This article aims to shed light on the relationship between the Indonesian party system and the country's democratization process. This helps to clarify the factors of Indonesian democracy as well as how the democratization process has transformed the Indonesian party system. In addition, the role of the party system in the process of transition and consolidation of democracy is also considered, mainly in the post-Suharto period, as a factor influencing the democratization process.

## **2. The democratization process in Indonesia**

### *2.1. Key factors shaping democracy and the polarization in Indonesian democracy*

#### *Pancasila State Philosophy*

At the time when its independence was declared in 1945, Indonesia needed an ideology to bridge the positions and views between those who supported a secular Indonesian state and those who championed an Islamic state. The first president of Indonesia, Sukarno, proposed a philosophical foundation for a unified Indonesia to secure a diverse nation comprising hundreds of ethnic groups and major religions. Sukarno proposed the Pancasila ("Five Principles" in Sanskrit) ideology.

The First Principle - Belief in God: affirms that the Indonesian state is based on religious faith and that all Indonesians must believe in God. The state recognizes the diversity of beliefs and religious expression.

The Second Principle - Humanism: affirms that Indonesia is an equal member of the international community. This principle emphasizes tolerance and respect among all Indonesians.

The Third Principle - National Unity: emphasizes the importance of unity and integrity of Indonesia as a unitary state.

The Fourth Principle - Democracy Led by Deliberative Wisdom: affirms that the state must be faithful to its commitment to democracy of the Indonesian type. It

incorporates the idealized concept of traditional village governance such as "consultation" and "consensus". With this principle, the Western model of parliamentary democracy or party democracy is not compatible with the traditional decision-making process of Indonesia.

The Fifth Principle - Social Justice: aims for economic and social egalitarianism and prosperity for Indonesia. Sukarno emphasized that the rise of political democracy alone would not guarantee economic democracy. This principle became particularly important for the legitimacy of the New Order and provided the ideological basis for the active role of the state in the national economy (Ramage, 1995: 3).

Pancasila is positively viewed as a vague adhesive value in Indonesia's pluralistic society and has always been the "anchor" of legitimacy for all governments (Ramage, 1995: 124). It is Pancasila, not Islam, that is the essential political formula, necessary for Indonesia's national unity.

#### *Cultural-Social Groups (Aliran)*

Aliran is an Indonesian term for cultural-social groups, which are primarily distinguished by religious practice, and to a lesser extent, by class. Aliran has been used to explain Indonesian politics in many ways, such as when considering the extent to which political parties remain socially rooted in aliran and the implications of this for the further development of the Indonesian party system. In the 1970s, aliran was used to explain the development of Indonesian politics since the 1950s, which led to the concept of "aliran politics" (politik aliran) in the sense of mass-based political parties attached to a specific cultural stream. Support for Indonesian aliran political parties, when they emerged in the post-colonial context, was based on specific political, cultural, ethnic, and religious worldviews (Feith & Castles, 1970).

There are three widely recognized cultural streams (aliran): Priyayi (aristocracy - traditional bureaucratic class), Abangan (Muslims who follow the local belief system, integrating some other religions such as Hinduism, Buddhism), and Santri (more orthodox Muslims, the product of the Islamic education system). These aliran act as cultural and political resources in mobilizing political support that influenced cultural politics during the Sukarno and Suharto periods. For political parties, the socio-cultural worldview is as

important as the ideological platform. Indonesian political leaders must effectively represent specific ethno-cultural groups to secure support regardless of any class cleavages within that group.

In the post-Suharto period, some studies have observed the resurgence of aliran politics. This is evident in the striking similarities between the 1955 and 1999 parliamentary elections. The parties that won the most votes were the PDI-P (the Indonesian Democratic Party of Struggle, the successor to the Indonesian National Party - PNI), and the PKB Party (the National Awakening Party, founded by the Nahdatul Ulama (NU) - (meaning "Revival of the Scholars") organization. This similarity suggests that voters tend to lean towards the familiar, and that the success of Indonesian political parties depends largely on their ability to reflect cultural memory, or at least the perception of it. This suggests that "politik aliran" continues to play an important role in post-Suharto Indonesian politics.

#### *Decentralization in Indonesia*

During both the Sukarno and Suharto presidencies, there was a strong emphasis on centralizing power in order to strengthen the Indonesian state and achieve national integration. This was manifested in economic centralization, the suppression of civil society, and the dominance of central government over regional and local authorities (Ferrazzi, 2000: 68).

Efforts to decentralize power began shortly after the fall of Suharto. In the context of mass pressure, democratization, and some form of power-sharing among the elites, was seen as a way to manage social tensions. Decentralization (devolution) was an important manifestation of the democratization process. However, decentralization involved the realignment of political power between quite diverse political actors at both national and local levels. As a result, the process of decentralization has been as protracted as the process of democratization.

The processes of democratization and decentralization have had a number of unintended consequences, including the weakening of the Indonesian state through administrative fragmentation and the increase in ethnic and communal conflict. This has led to the state of "decentralized corruption" (increased corruption at the local level). Increasing competition for local power has created fertile ground for money politics. The process of regional autonomy has resulted in increased administrative fragmentation, the driving forces behind which are money politics and the desire for

political power. As a result, most political spaces opened up by democratization and decentralization have been captured by local elites.

### *Political Islam in Indonesia*

In post-colonial Indonesia after 1945, there was a historical recognition of Islam and at the same time the government imposed significant restrictions on politicized Islam. During the New Order period, the party system consisted of only three parties. Large Islamic organizations such as NU and Muhammadiyah (the Muhammadiyah Society) had to stand under the banner of one party, the PPP (United Development Party). In reality, the PPP was the only means by which NU and Muhammadiyah could gain political representation. However, the government's marginalization of political Islam actually led to greater civil society activity by the Muslim community.

In the early 1980s, Islamic activists were seen as those who brought democratic ideals to the public (Schwarz & Paris, 1999: 45). At the time of the democratic transition in 1998, Indonesian Islamic leaders repeatedly emphasized the compatibility of Islam with democracy (Carnegie, 2010: 87) and effectively blocked calls for the establishment of an Islamic state. Thus, the resurgence of Islam did not run counter to democratization. To date, the participation of Muslims in Indonesian electoral politics has remained moderate. The majority of Indonesian Muslims are still more interested in a democratic state, and this has contributed to the process of democratization and democratic consolidation in Indonesia.

### *Political Polarization in Indonesian Democracy*

Rising political polarization is a key feature of the global democratic crisis, and understanding the patterns and drivers of polarization is essential for understanding Southeast Asian politics (Carothers & O'Donohue, 2020: 4).

In Indonesia, the democratization process since Suharto's resignation in 1998 has been largely free of ideological competition in politics. While Indonesia's party system has long had a certain ideological divide between Islamic and pluralist (secular) parties, parties and politicians have regularly cooperated. As a result, the country has been considered "one of the least polarized democracies in Asia." (Carothers & O'Donohue, 2020: 25).

However, since 2014, Indonesia has become more politically polarized with three major elections leaving it more divided than it had been in decades: the 2014

presidential election, the 2017 Jakarta gubernatorial election, and the 2019 presidential election. The 2014 election marked the end of a decade of President Yudhoyono's rule, and led to a deepening divide between Islam and secularism. In particular, the 2019 presidential campaign between President Jokowi and challenger Prabowo Subianto created an electorate deeply divided along religious and social lines.

As with many other countries, populist candidates have recently emerged as major contenders in elections in Indonesia, both at national and local levels. The rise of populism in Indonesia is driven by disillusionment with elite politics, fueled by ineffective institutions and the central role of patronage (money politics) in politics (Hefner, 2018: 102). This can be seen as one of the defining features of Indonesian democracy today.

Two main factors have contributed to the deepening polarization in Indonesia: firstly, the strategies and personal imprints of political elites have played a role in activating polarization, while secondly, Indonesia's susceptibility to populism and the increasing Islamization of Indonesian society have created polarizing political messages that have broad appeal among voters (Carothers & O'Donohue, 2020: 31, 38).

The consequences of the polarized electoral conflicts in 2014, 2017, and 2019 have eroded the quality of Indonesian democracy. The Jokowi administration's purge of opposition figures and perceived ideological threats is unprecedented in Indonesia's democratic history since 1998. This practice undermines Indonesia's still-fragile democratic institutions.

## *2.2. Stages of Indonesian democracy*

After gaining independence in 1945, Indonesia's political system was structured as a presidential representative democratic republic, with the Indonesian president as both the head of state and the head of government in a multi-party system. The democratization process is reflected in the different stages:

### *Parliamentary Democracy (1945-1955)*

This stage was characterized by the formation of a highly fragmented political party system. Indonesia was governed by coalition cabinets, dominated by three major parties: the Indonesian National Party (PNI), the Islamic Masyumi

Party, and the Nahdlatul Ulama (NU). Cabinets during this period did not last long, and the diversity of parties reflected deep political, social, religious, class, and ethnic cleavages.

*The Rise of Authoritarianism (1955-1965)*

This stage was characterized by the rise of President Sukarno's authoritarian rule. Sukarno dissolved parliament and established a new form of governance called "Guided Democracy" based on the cooperation of the major parties and functional groups with members from youth, worker, peasant, and women's organizations. This period was characterized by the centrality of Sukarno in political life. The military emerged as a major political force, and political parties had a minimal role.

*The New Order (1966-1998)*

The New Order period was characterized by an aversion to party politics and a strong emphasis on political stability. This period maintained the 1945 constitution and did not restore the parliamentary system that Indonesia had before 1957. The priorities were modernization and economic development.

*The Post-Suharto Era (after 1998)*

The post-Suharto era marked the beginning of the Reformasi period. The previous three decades of authoritarian rule had influenced the patterns of political participation, as Indonesia had no left-wing political organizations. In addition, there were social cleavages between those who supported and opposed a greater role for Islam in politics; the relationship between the center and the regions; and the political role of the military. As a result, the democratization process in Indonesia became vulnerable as it had to deal with the legacies of the authoritarian past.

The democratic transition in Indonesia began with the fall of President Suharto in May 1998 and was completed in 2004 with the adoption of direct presidential elections (Case, 2015: 371). Since 2004, Indonesia has made efforts to consolidate democracy. The process of democratic consolidation, or in other words, deepening democracy, means that all relevant groups in society increasingly see the main political institutions as the only legitimate means of the political power struggle (Bunte & Ufen, 2009: 17).

However, the process of democratic consolidation in the context of political polarization in Indonesia has led to a certain degree of democratic erosion. This



reality has led to the observation of a "trade-off" between stability and the quality of democracy in Indonesia (Case, 2015: 14).

### **3. The Indonesian Party system**

The development of the party system in Indonesia has been closely linked to the stages of Indonesian democracy since independence in 1945. Indonesian democracy can be divided into the following periods: The Sukarno presidency (Parliamentary Democracy: 1945-1955; Guided Democracy: 1955-1965); the Suharto presidency (Pancasila Democracy/New Order: 1966-1998), and post-Suharto Reform-era Democracy (post-1998).

The Indonesian party system in the 1950s followed the model defined by Giovanni Sartori as "an atomized party system" (Mietzner, 2008: 433) in the sense that the party system was so fragmented that adding another party to the system would not make any difference to the pattern of competition. The party system in the period had 17 different parties and groups represented in parliament (not through elections) in the early 1950s. The composition of the parties was based on the government's estimate of the strength of the different parties rather than through a general election.

In this parliament, the Indonesian party system was organized into two large groups and five medium-sized and small factions. The two largest parties were Masyumi (the Association of Modern and Traditional Islamic Organizations) and PNI (the Indonesian National Party) - a nationalist and secular party founded by Sukarno in the 1920s. Prominent among the medium-sized parties were PSI (the Indonesian Socialist Party) and PKI (the Indonesian Communist Party). There were also a number of smaller parties with relatively narrow support bases.

Leading up to the first general election in 1955, the Indonesian party system became fragmented with the NU leaving Masyumi and witnessed the emergence of a large number of political parties. The election results led to the rise of four parties that played key roles in the political landscape, namely PNI, Masyumi, NU, and PKI. This four-party division reflected the broader religious-social cleavages in Indonesian society. The New Order period under the Suharto regime restructured the electoral system in 1971. A three-party system was then formed consisting of

Golkar, PDI, and PPP, with Golkar seen as an organization transcending class, ethnicity, religious identity, and encompassing all social cleavages.

The Suharto regime was able to both co-opt and control political activity within the New Order political system. With the regime change in 1998, which lifted restrictions on the formation of political parties, there was a resurgence of an "atomized" party system similar to that of the 1950s. More than 200 parties emerged, 48 of which were allowed to participate in the June 1999 parliamentary elections, while 21 parties won legislative seats for the first time in the first post-New Order legislature (Mietzner, 2008: 438).

The first election in 1999 marked Indonesia's post-Suharto democratization process. In 1999-2000, the legislative power of the House of Representatives (DPR) was significantly strengthened. However, the impeachment and subsequent resignation of President Abdurrahman Wahid in 2001 was the result of a power struggle between the House of Representatives (DPR), the People's Consultative Assembly (MPR), and a president (A. Wahid) who disagreed with parliament on the definition of presidential authority.

Faced with the volatility created by Wahid's downfall, the post-Suharto democratization process was marked by the holding of the first direct presidential elections in Indonesian history in 2004. Prior to that, during the 1998-2004 period, Indonesia had a parliamentary political system in the sense that the president was only indirectly elected by the House of Representatives. However, even during this period, Indonesia was characterized by strong, real-power presidential elements, which were a legacy of Suharto's New Order authoritarianism.

The direct presidential election reform has created a complete institution for the presidential system in Indonesia. In addition, the regulation requiring the elected president to win more than 50% of the total votes, with at least 20% in at least half of the provinces (Allen, 2012: 50), has forced presidential candidates to gain broad public support across the archipelago. This aims to encourage the moderate ones who can attract different interests and thus form inter-party coalitions. Parliament also has more power to veto legislation and limit the president's power, forcing the president to maintain broad support in the legislature. Thus, since 2004, the Indonesian presidential system has been characterized by a strong presidency and a strong House of Representatives.

Two elements of Indonesia's democratization process have had a profound impact on the party system in the post-Suharto era: the decentralization of power from the central government (devolution), and direct presidential elections by the Indonesian people since 2004.

Indonesia's transition from a highly centralized authoritarian state under Suharto to a semi-federal form with significant local autonomy has led to the increasing influence of money politics in Indonesian party politics resulting in the Indonesian party system still heavily tied to individuals with most political parties seen as corrupt and self-serving (Tan, 2006). To a certain extent, the rise of money politics has diminished the importance of ideology, which is considered the foundation of building a political party. At that time, the priority of political parties is seen as attracting individuals who are able to contribute financially to the party. Factors such as party organization (one of the manifestations of institutionalization of political parties) and intra-party democracy will be more or less neglected. In other words, political parties become personalized. Additionally, the direct presidential election system leads to the "presidentialization" of political parties and the separate elections for the executive and legislative branches (president and parliament) "enhances the incentive for politicians in different branches of the same party to go their own way" (Samuels & Shugart, 2010: 9). "Presidentialization" of political parties is defined as "the way the separation of powers fundamentally shapes parties' organizational and behavioral characteristics, in ways that are distinct from the organization and behavior of parties in a parliamentary system (Samuels & Shugart, 2010: 6). Direct presidential elections encourage political parties to focus on the goal of putting forward candidates and winning the highest position in the executive branch. Political parties become electoral machines with more expensive resources rather than focusing on ideological foundations. The consequence of direct presidential elections is the personalization of political parties, and the Indonesian party system after 2004 has been divided into two groups of parties, including a group of large, strongly presidentialized parties such as the PDI-P (Indonesian Democratic Party of Struggle), and Golkar. In addition to this group, there are Islamic parties that cannot put forward presidential candidates with a high probability of being elected and they are less presidentialized. For example, the PKB (National Awakening Party) is the only Islamic party to receive more than 10% of the vote since 2004 (in the recent 2019 elections, the party received 9.69% of the vote). Based on the number of votes won in the presidential elections from 2004 to the 2019 general election, the presence of large political parties that play a central role in the Indonesian party system is illustrated in the following table:

Percentage (%) of votes in the National General Election				
Party	2004	2009	2014	2019
PDI-P	18.5	14.0	18.95	19.38
Golka	21.6	14.4	14.75	12.31
PKB (Islamic)	10.6	4.9	9.04	9.69
PPP (Islamic)	8.2	5.3	6.53	4.52
PAN (Islamic)	6.4	6.0	7.59	6.84
Gerinda	-	4.5	11.81	12.57
Hanura	-	3.8	5.26	-
PKS (Islamic)	7.3	7.9	6.79	8.21
PD (Democratic Party)	7.5	20.8	10.19	7.77
Nasdem			6.72	9.05
* 6 leading parties	73.7	68.4	72.33	71.21
* 7 leading parties	76.32	73.3	79.12	79.98
(additional 2.62% of PBB – Crescent and Star Party)				

*Source:* Compiled from national general elections in Indonesia from 2004 to 2019: Indonesia Investment (2014), Lane (2019), Tan (2006).

From the table above, some of the prominent parties in the Indonesian political party system over the past two decades can be identified:

- The Indonesian Democratic Party of Struggle (Partai Demokrasi Indonesia Perjuangan PDI-P). The PDI-P essentially inherits the legacy of secular nationalism initiated by Sukarno and the Indonesian National Party (PNI), becoming the Indonesian Democratic Party during the New Order period and under the leadership of Megawati Sukarnoputri (the female president 2001-2004) was renamed the Indonesian Democratic Party of Struggle in 1999. The PDI-P has always expressed

its preference for anti-discrimination laws to provide universal protection favoring no person or group over another, which is a legacy of the nation-building days of the PNI under Sukarno. The PID-P is the party of President Joko Widodo.

- Golkar (Partai Golongan Karya - Functional Group Party). Golkar was the dominant party during the New Order period and maintained a clear secular nationalist platform aimed at economic development but with limited redistribution policies. Under Suharto's leadership, Golkar recruited prominent local figures and leaders of religious and social organizations. In the post-Suharto period, it focused its efforts on creating new sub-national entities that it could best control based on the new democratic playing field. Golkar was also the party of the technocrats and bureaucracy under the New Order, hence its open view on the possibility of reform.

- The PD (Partai Demokrat - Democratic Party). It was through the PD that Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono ran for office (president 2004-2009, and 2009-2014). Under his influence, the PD was strengthened and achieved remarkable successes in 2009, winning 25% of the vote and seats in the national legislature, with quite popular support from across the archipelago.

- The United Development Party (Partai Persatuan Pembangunan - PPP). One of the three parties of the New Order period, acting as an umbrella for Islamic parties. As an Islamic party, the PPP presents a moderate view on various aspects of Shariah law and women's participation in political life but pursues a rather conservative view when it comes to political, social, and economic reforms. The party maintains the view that Indonesia is a unitary state with national goals, tending to support limited decentralization and restructuring of the state.

- The National Awakening Party (Partai Kebangkitan Bangsa - PKB). A moderate Islamic party founded in 1998 by Abdurrahman Wahid (president 1999-2001) with roots in the NU. The PKB aligns with Wahid's vision of an Indonesia based on religious pluralism. Under his leadership, PKB's attitude towards reform focused more on social life and protecting religious freedom and minority rights than on political or economic reforms. The PKB represents traditional Muslims whose "religious identity had long been characterized by the acceptance and even preservation of beliefs and practices that have evolved in local cultural context over the centuries" (Setiawan & Tomsa, 2022: 88).

- The National Mandate Party (Partai Amanat Nasional – PAN). It was founded in 1998 by Amien Rais, Chairman of Muhammadiyah. Among the parties in the post-transition period, PAN is one of the most reformist in terms of ideological positioning and its desire to correct inefficiencies in the political system.

While it is affiliated with Muhammadiyah and is a more socially conservative organization than the NU, PAN also does not pursue the goal of an Islamic state based on Sharia law.

- The Great Indonesia Movement Party (Partai Gerakan Indonesia Raya - Gerindra). Founded in 2008 by Prabowo Subianto, Suharto's son-in-law, the Gerindra party used poverty alleviation as one of its party platforms.

The above table shows that while parliamentary elections can lead to some changes in the strength of different parties, the Indonesian party system is generally quite stable. In other words, instability in the party system - in the sense of the level of change in voter support for each party from one election to the next - is still a notable feature. However, voters mainly switch between major parties rather than supporting entirely new ones. It is important that there is always a clear base of six to seven parties: PDI-P, Golkar, Gerindra, PD, PKS, PAN, and PKB have continuously been represented in the Indonesian parliament. The existence of such a clear core can be seen as the Indonesian political party system becoming increasingly institutionalized based on the criterion of stability in competition between parties.

The data in the above table also shows that secular parties won more votes than Islamic ones, indicating that the religious-political (secular) cleavage of the 1950s continues to have a strong influence on the current Indonesian party system. However, the major difference, which determines the nature of a party system, when one compares between the party system of the 1950s and the current one, lies in the direction of the competition between parties in the system. Specifically, the Indonesian party system of the 1950s is considered a centrifugal (competitive) system with parties focused on meeting the needs and aspirations of their core constituencies with little ambition to attract voters from across the political spectrum. The Indonesian party system in the 1950s is considered centrifugal due to the absence of a "pivotal center party" (Mietzner, 2008: 435) in the sense of a system with "parties that endorse the existing democratic structure, 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" (Mietzner, 2008: 435).

The centrifugal tendency of the Indonesian party system was revealed during the debates on the new constitution in 1955. Most parties took positions reflecting different ideologies, refusing to discuss forms of state organization that would be more appropriate for a highly heterogeneous country like Indonesia. The majority at this time did not have a strong interest in protecting the existing democratic polity.

Instead, for example, Islamic parties proposed Islamic political doctrine (which had been removed from the original constitution in 1945), in contrast to the ideology of nationalist parties, which advocated a secular state ideology, with Pancasila as the foundation. The party system was highly polarized, reflecting very different political orientations, leading to the opening of Sukarno's Guided Democracy.

In contrast to the 1950s, the post-Suharto party system developed centripetal dynamics to stabilize and maintain the structure of the system. In centripetal party systems, competition takes place in the center, with parties competing to strengthen their core vote and increase their chances of coming to power. In fact, party competition after 1998 has mainly taken place "in the center" with parties only using their constituencies as a core base for their vote-seeking campaigns. Specifically, the post-Suharto Indonesian party system is dominated by a number of large, key parties such as the PDI-P, Golkar, PD, and Gerindra which play a role in attracting other parties to the center. Green Pedersen's research on multi-party systems argues that "if a pivotal center party exists, party competition in a multi-party system may also be highly centripetal" (Mietzner, 2008: 447). In a centripetal system, the concept of "wing parties" emerges. These are parties that face a dilemma between mobilizing for votes and gaining positions in government. However, the vast majority ultimately prioritize participation in government, thus forcing themselves to move towards the center as potential coalition partners for the center parties. In Indonesia's case, the most specific manifestation of "wing parties" being pulled to the center is the Islamic parties.

After the fall of Suharto, a large number of modern Islamic parties emerged with the ambition of "Islamizing" politics after four decades of authoritarian rule. However, after a few years of trying to leave an Islamic mark on the new polity, most of them have moved to the center of politics. Influential ones such as the PPP, PAN, PKS, and PKB have compromised by stating "PKS has always been in the center, never on the right of the political spectrum" (Mietzner, 2008: 450) ... as well as Islamic activist Eggi Sudjana - who ran for the chairmanship of the PPP in 2007 - who declared that "Islam is not a group but a value system, which includes justice, peace, prosperity, equality and freedom (for) everybody" (Mietzner, 2008: 448). Eggi Sudjana himself, as a member of the Yudhoyono administration cabinet, is a testament to the PPP's move towards the center. The fact is that the majority of Islamic parties are a stabilizing factor in Indonesia's contemporary democracy and post-Suharto Islamic parties have played a positive role in the country's constitutional amendment process. Therefore, the Indonesian party system has undergone a marked transformation during the democratization process (post-Suharto) through the fragmentation of the system (with many political parties) with

a group of core parties and no hegemonic or dominant party. This reality is different from the party system under Suharto, which only had three parties, of which Golkar was the dominant one. The particularly important point that determines the nature of the competitive trend, and the interaction between the parties is the centripetal nature, pulling the parties from the periphery to the center and to some extent homogenizing their ideological structures. Along with the declining polarization (ideological distance) of the Indonesian party system, it has generally contributed to the stability of the party system.

Furthermore, the electoral system, designed and shaped to address concerns about national integrity, as well as the political party law (2008) which requires a political party to demonstrate the ability to organize in 60% of municipalities in 60% of all provinces in order to be registered, have limited the number of small, regional, and ethnic-based parties. As a result, the Indonesian party system has been "nationalized" with restrictions on the number of parties that can be formed during the post-Suharto democratization period.

#### **4. The role of the Indonesian political party system in the democratization process**

The Indonesian party system played a particularly important role in the prospects for successful democratization, especially in the immediate aftermath of Suharto's resignation and the succession of President Habibie's transitional government. Politically, Habibie responded to the demands for democratization by implementing a four-step process: (1) submitting new laws to the parliament in early 1999 that paved the way for free and fair elections and allowed for political party competition; (2) convening a special session of the People's Consultative Assembly (MPR) (which met every five years to select a new president) in late 1998 to set a new date for elections; (3) holding parliamentary elections in mid-1999; and (4) convening a special session of the MPR in late 1999 to elect a new president and vice president and to set out the "broad outlines of state policy" for the next five years. These steps taken by the Habibie administration served to both strengthen the legitimacy of the government and focus attention on key issues such as electoral models and the type of party system appropriate for Indonesia's democratization process. Specifically, would the democratic Indonesian polity continue to apply the proportional representation electoral system or switch to the majority system? And should political parties be based on ethnic or religious backgrounds, or should all political parties in principle be open to all Indonesian



citizens? In the context of the post-Suharto democratization process, the prospects for democratic consolidation would depend on the nature of the party system and the political leadership chosen after each election (Schwarz & Paris, 1999: 37). If Indonesia had a new parliamentary party system consisting of small parties with leaders lacking national vision or a sense of common purpose and were constantly immersed in conflict, it would be a persuasive reason for military leaders to step in and save the country and the nation.

Fortunately, for Indonesia's democratization, Suharto's resignation and the initial reform momentum were compatible with an elite-led transition. In other words, it was a situation where pressure from below created incentives for reform from within, a condition that allowed moderate opposition to emerge through the cracks in the old regime's previous unity (Carnegie, 2010: 106). Political elites were able to manage the transition on their own terms. From a party politics perspective, leaders of both secular and Islamic parties such as the PDI-P, NU, PAN, etc., agreed on Indonesia's democratic path, avoiding turning political mobilization into violence. A significant contribution of the contemporary party system to democratic transition and consolidation is that Indonesia has a party system that, although still influenced by the legacies of the New Order period, has not experienced major polarization between parties within the system, and inter-party competition is centripetal, contributing to the creation of political consensus. Political parties respect democratic values and promote the development of democratic institutions.

While the party system continues to reflect the religious-political cleavages in Indonesian society, on the positive side, Indonesia's party system has contributed to the creation of a consensus-oriented multi-party democracy, where political decision-making is not dominated by political forces with majority mandates, but instead involves a variety of political subcultures (religious, ethnic, etc.,) in Indonesian society (Gyene, 2019).

The end of the authoritarian regime in 1998 ushered in a process of democratization that led to the transformation of the party system. Changes in the party system, in terms of the size of the system, the nature of interaction between parties within the system, and ideological polarization, have their roots in the dynamics of post-Suharto Indonesian politics. The role of the party system was shaped during the democratization process through the practice of decentralization from central government to the local level and the adoption of a direct presidential election system. Decentralization has led to the increasing influence of money politics through political parties sharing resources and benefits at the local level, diminishing the significance of ideology for political parties. Regardless of their

ideologies, all Indonesian political parties share a common desire for access to, and financial patronage from, the state. To seize these funding opportunities, parties are willing to participate in ruling coalitions, leading to "promiscuous power sharing" within the executive branch. This has been described as "an especially flexible coalition-building practice, in which parties express or reveal a willingness to share executive power with any and all other significant parties after an election takes place, even across a country's most important political cleavages" (Setiawan & Tomsa, 2022: 44). This results in a multi-party cabinet that reflects the declining ideological struggle between political parties.

Overall, as a political institution, the Indonesian party system has contributed to democratic consolidation through democratic values and elections. However, the nature, dynamics, and post-election leadership of the party system, as well as political leadership, ultimately determine the prospects for democratic consolidation. The Indonesian party system also contributes to the formation of a consensual political culture. The level of institutionalization achieved by the party system, along with its relatively low level of polarization, has had a positive impact on the development of a consensual political culture and respect for democratic values among political parties.

## 5. Conclusion

This article examines the relationship between the democratization process in Indonesia and the party system - the most important political institution in a democracy, thus shedding light on the role of the party system in the democratization process in the country, mainly in the post-Suharto period. By approaching the nature of Indonesian democracy and examining the dynamics of democratization affecting the party system, the article demonstrates the transformation of the Indonesian party system according to particular trends, in terms of the size of the party system and polarization.

The Indonesian party system reflects the factors that shaped Indonesian democracy at each stage, such as political Islam, socio-cultural groups (aliran), and the process of decentralization. The result of the democratization process, especially the post-Suharto period, led to a clear transformation of the Indonesian party system, manifested in fragmentation with the formation of a large number of parties. However, the significant transformation of the Indonesian party system towards democratization is manifested in the nature of inter-party interactions. The 1950s saw a highly polarized party system, characterized by centrifugal

(competitive) dynamics that resulted in the collapse of parliamentary democracy. In contrast, the post-Suharto party system has developed centripetal dynamics that have maintained a stable party system, and thus have positively contributed to the consolidation of democratic values. It is noteworthy that Islamic politics in Indonesia does not run counter to democratic values. The current reality is that there are no extremist Islamic parties seeking to establish an Islamic state based on Sharia law in the country (Setiawan & Tomsa, 2022: 91).

The democratization process has also led to an increase in the influence of money politics, which has led to a decline in the role of party ideology. As a result, the party system has given rise to multi-party coalitions and cabinets that are based on compromise, which can potentially weaken the effectiveness of the executive branch. Despite this, the institutionalized post-Suharto party system has played a positive role in consolidating democracy in the context of political polarization in Indonesian democracy.

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