

Electoral Reform and Political Parties Within Indonesia

Following President Suharto's resignation in 1998, the electoral reforms passed into law on January 28, 1999 shaped Indonesia's first democratic election in almost fifty years. Under Suharto's repressive rule, five general elections were held between 1977 and 1997, with only three political parties allowed to participate: Golkar, PPP, and PDI (King, "The 1999 Electoral Reforms" 90). These elections were designed to present a façade of legitimacy for Suharto's government; they were neither free nor fair. Under Suharto's corrupt "New Order" government, Indonesians were deprived of their rights and effectively excluded from the political process. Although Suharto held regular elections in order to portray a false image of democracy, he refused to submit to direct election and forbid the organization of opposition parties in rural areas, where most voters were located. Instead, Suharto's term was extended by an electoral college whose members he had individually appointed to ensure his continued power (Case 9). In view of Indonesia's long history of authoritarian control, the 1999 elections signified its tentative transition to democracy. The legitimacy and quality of Indonesia's emerging democracy heavily depended upon the electoral system, rules, and institutions developed by these electoral reforms. To break away from its corrupt and tyrannical past, the first free and fair elections to occur in over 50 years carried significant consequences for Indonesia, ultimately determining which leader would be chosen to guide its course towards individual liberties and freedom of democratic rule.

In contrast to Suharto's corrupt government-controlled electoral college, the existence of an independent body to preside over elections suggested greater legitimacy for the results. How did the establishment of an Independent Election Commission during Indonesia's 1999 electoral

reform influence the number of political parties within Indonesia? This is an important question to examine because the number of political parties can affect levels of vote segmentation, ability to produce an effective leader, and political fragmentation within the country. Since Indonesia's Independent Electoral Commission carried the responsibility of administering elections, which was previously a task controlled by the government, this body held the ability to greatly shape the breadth of political parties competing. In transition governments, such as Indonesia's, the quantity of political parties is of great importance for the emerging government's stability and quality, as well as the degree of representation for the median voter's preferences.

According to Paige Johnson in "Anti-party Reaction in Indonesia: Causes and Implications", Indonesia's Independent Election Commission, now known as the KPU, was formed as a key electoral reform in 1999 as a specific reaction to the government's manipulation of elections during Suharto's ruling years (485). The Independent Election Commission was conceived in order to plan and oversee the execution of the elections, collect data on results of the election, and determine the number of seats won by each party (King, "Half-Hearted Reform" 54). It was composed of five government officials and one individual from each of the parties qualifying to participate in the election. In order to qualify for participation, parties had to have an organization established in one-third of the provinces and half of the districts in each of those provinces (King, "Half-Hearted Reform" 51). The presence of party representatives on the commission was designed to prevent the former government-backed party, Golkar, from using the election administration to declare its own party as the winner.

While more than 200 parties requested to compete in the 1999 elections, the Independent Election Commission determined that only 48 met the qualifications for participation (Evans 136). The Commission's resulting 48 parties were significantly greater in number than the

previous three designated eligible to compete, supporting my initial hypothesis that the number of participating parties would drastically increase. However, with such a large number of parties competing for seats, the Independent Electoral Commission reached an impractical size of 53 members. An additional component of the electoral reforms required political parties to obtain two percent of the seats in the national legislature in order to participate in subsequent elections. As a result, when 42 of the 200 parties did not meet this threshold, they were plunged into “lame-duck status” according to Dwight King in “Half-Hearted Reform: Electoral Institutions and the Struggle for Democracy in Indonesia” (210). This caused the commission to break into factions and led to a deadlock over the certification of the election results. According to Hermawan Sulistyio in “Electoral Politics in Indonesia: A Hard Way to Democracy”, the election results were required by the Law on Elections to be endorsed and signed by at least 75 percent of the competing parties, or 36 of the 48 parties competing in the 1999 elections (82). When the parties that failed to meet the two percent threshold refused to endorse the final results, acting President B.J. Habibie signed a presidential decree recognizing the outcome.

Literature Review

Despite the domineering influence of the Independent Electoral Commission on the number of political parties in Indonesia, there are theories presenting other institutional variables as the cause for such a large number of parties. According to William Clark and Matt Golder, Duverger’s theory states that more permissive electoral systems, such as proportional representation, produce more political parties (681). However, Clark and Golder argue that Duverger’s views are not solely focused on institutional factors, but take into account societal influences as well. Duverger believes political parties are a “reflection of social forces,” with greater social forces leading to the multiplication of parties, depending upon the degree of

constraint applied by electoral institutions (Clark and Golder 681). The degree to which party systems reflect existing social cleavages depends upon the type of electoral institution. Permissive electoral systems, such as proportional representation, producing a large number of parties when levels of social heterogeneity are high (Clark and Golder 683). Given that Indonesia is an ethnically and regionally diverse archipelago, this theory may appear attractive for explaining the large number of political parties. However, Indonesia has a mixed electoral system, dubbed “PR Plus,” allocating 76% of the seats in the legislature to single-seat districts according to the plurality principle and distributing the remaining 24% of the seats according to proportional representation (King 56). Therefore, while Indonesia is a very heterogeneous country, its electoral system is only partially designed as proportional representation, and therefore this theory cannot fully be applied to its specific case.

In addition to competing theories attributing the quantity of political parties to other institutional factors, the influence of further electoral reforms must also be taken into consideration. Other aspects of the electoral reform package, such as the requirements that parties must have an organization in one-third of the provinces and half of the districts in each of those provinces, certification of non-involvement in leftist organizations, and an ideology that did not conflict with the national philosophy of Pancasila influenced the number of political parties participating in the 1999 elections. These reforms eliminated narrow ethnic or religious parties, promoted parties with mass-based organizational structures, prevented leftist orientation from gaining any representation, and ensured that the national ideology was upheld. These reforms not only limited the number of political parties eligible to compete in the 1999 election, but also ensured that Indonesia’s democratic transition did not cause the country to stray from its past.

Research Design and Method

In order to analyze the influence of Indonesia's Independent Electoral Commission on the number of political parties within the country, I will examine the quantity of political parties participating in elections over the course of the past four decades, which will reveal any change following the 1997 Electoral Reforms. In addition, I will assess the change in inter-party competition following the establishment of the Independent Electoral Commission by studying the number of political parties participating during the elections of 1971, 1977, 1982, 1987, 1992, 1997, 1999, and 2004. To determine the degree to which smaller minority parties gained representation following the 1997 reforms, I will consider the participation of such parties in the subsequent election as compared to their inclusion in previous elections. Inter-party competition will also be explored in an effort to better understand the degree to which the 1997 Electoral Reforms increased competitiveness within the government in comparison to the authoritarian-style pseudo-democracy and its lack of true opposition.

To address the effects of the electoral reform, political parties will be defined as those competing in elections. I hypothesize that the establishment of an Independent Electoral Commission will result in a dramatic expansion of the number of political parties competing for seats within Indonesia's government. Due to decades of profound censorship by the military-controlled government, a vast array of groups will strive for representation of their interests. Previously, political parties served the sole purpose of establishing legitimacy for Suharto's power. By maintaining frequent elections, the government provided a limited sense of public access and participation in the political process. However, the establishment of an independent body, rather than a government-run electoral college, would guarantee the inclusion of parties beyond the previous government-sanctioned three. With the world watching to see how

Indonesia handles this opportunity for transition, the Independent Election Commission holds the responsibility of establishing free and fair elections and proving that Indonesia deserves to be regarded as a legitimate democracy rather than a falsely depicted one. The establishment of an independent body to oversee the 1999 election addresses the greatest flaw of Suharto's government: the lack of "an arena of contestation sufficiently fair that the ruling party can be turned out of power" (King, "Half-Hearted Reform" 5). Instead of simply allowing a select few parties to compete under a fixed election, the Commission provides a neutral electoral institution to prevent such government manipulation.

I hypothesize that the creation of an Independent Election Commission will increase inter-party competition. Given that electoral contest will be opened to all parties who wish to request to compete, it would follow that the level of competition between parties would increase as well. With more parties eligible for inclusion in the election, the competition to gain a seat will become tighter. The great importance of this election also influences the political aspirations of parties who wish to gain power within the government during such a significant period of Indonesia's history. An independent body such as the Commission will no longer prevent competition within political parties, as had occurred under Suharto's regime, but will instead encourage a healthy level of contest indicative of a democratic electoral system. Furthermore, I hypothesize that the Independent Election Commission will result in greater representation for smaller, minority parties. Such parties were previously forbidden from competing under Suharto's rule, essentially neglecting the interests of ethnic minorities within the country. With the expansion of electoral participation under the new rules of inclusion, smaller political parties will have a newfound opportunity to compete for the representation of minority interests. The Commission's impartiality will apply rules equally to all parties wishing

to compete, allowing those who meet the qualifications to participate, regardless of size or ethnic membership.

Data Analysis

Table 1.0
Results of Indonesian Elections, 1971-2004 (In Percentages)

Party	1971	1977	1982	1987	1992	1997	1999	2004
Golkar	62.8	62.11	64.34	73.16	68.1	74.51	25.99	21.6
PDI	10.09	8.60	7.88	10.87	14.9	3.06	33.12	18.5
PPP	27.11	29.29	27.78	15.97	17.0	22.43	12.55	8.1
PKB							11.04	10.6
PAN							7.36	6.4
PBB							2.81	2.6
PK							1.52	7.3
PNU							1.08	
DP								7.5
PBR								2.4
PDS								2.1
PKP								1.2
PPDK								1.2
PNBK								1.1

As evidenced by Table 1.0, the number of political parties participating in elections from 1971-1997 remained stagnant at three parties, while the number expanded to eight parties receiving at least one percent of the vote in the 1999 elections and thirteen parties gaining one percent or more of the vote during the 2004 elections (Suryadinata 32). This dramatic increase in political parties competing in the elections following the electoral reforms of 1997 affirms the hypothesis that the establishment of an Independent Election Commission would result in a greater number of parties. Despite the fact that the three parties permitted to participate in elections from 1955 to 1997 remain active during the 1999 and 2004 elections, they receive competition in the form of additional parties. The Independent Election Commission took

control of party inclusion and participation out of the government's hands, enabling more parties to compete in subsequent elections.

The Independent Election Commission may have successfully enabled more parties to compete in the election, but it failed to account for the high levels of inter-party competition that would unavoidably result. According to Shaheen Mozaffar and Andreas Schedler in "The Comparative Study of Electoral Governance", high levels of distrust between parties in democratizing countries motivates them to create an independent election-management body (17). During a country's transitional regime, opposition parties are particularly suspicious of the electoral process due to the government's former manipulation of electoral structures and processes (Mozaffar and Schedler 9). Therefore, election authorities must ensure that their political neutrality is widely accepted in order to ensure an effective transition. However, the structure of the party system also affects the decision to establish an electoral commission. Within a two-party system, political parties are more likely to choose to relinquish their powers of electoral governance to an independent commission, which allows them to share power while retaining the right to veto. In a more fragmented multiparty system, political parties tend to choose a multiparty commission instead in order to retain a level of control (Mozaffar and Schedler 17).

When governments choose to arrange a multiparty commission to manage their elections, some parties may form exclusionary alliances against others (Mozaffar and Schedler 17). This occurred under the Independent Election Commission in Indonesia when it became apparent that most seats would be concentrated among the top six or seven parties. Thirty-one of the 48 total parties refused to sign off on the election results, preventing the commission from receiving the two-thirds majority needed to certify the election (King, "Half-Hearted Reform")

87). According to King, the party representatives were effectively overturning the decisions of their colleagues to verify the results (“Half-Hearted Reform” 87). In addition, several representatives for the small parties also demanded legislative seats for all parties that had participated in the elections, regardless of how many votes they had acquired, citing the defense that they had helped successfully administer the elections and did not have sufficient time to prepare for their campaigns following Suharto’s resignation (Johnson 488). This request was not granted, however, and these small parties abused their positions in the Independent Election Commission by uniting in an effort to block the Commission’s decision and buy themselves time to obtain seats through corrupt measures (King, “Half-Hearted Reform” 77). This evidence supports my second hypothesis that the establishment of an Independent Electoral Commission would result in increased inter-party competition. Thirty-one of the smaller political parties that failed to obtain a sufficient number of votes manipulated their positions on the Commission in an effort to secure seats in the legislature from parties that had received more votes.

Competition for seats was extremely high, with only six parties receiving a sufficient amount of votes to meet the 2% threshold required to compete in the next election and only 21 parties receiving a seat (King, “Half-Hearted Reform” 77). Since this election occurred during Indonesia’s influential transition from an authoritarian regime to a democratic government, the level of distrust between parties was particularly high. In addition, parties were accustomed to governmental manipulation and were willing to resort to corrupt measures in order to secure a position for their party in the legislature.

In order to test my third hypothesis, which speculates that the establishment of an Independent Election Commission will result in greater representation for smaller, minority political parties, I must first examine the preceding election of 1997. Under Suharto’s regime,

the predetermined three parties were given permission to participate: the United Development Party (PPP), the Indonesian Democratic Party (PDI), and the government-backed Golkar. Since the two opposing parties were participants merely to present an image of electoral competition and legitimacy for Suharto's regime following Golkar's fixed victory, PPP received 22.4% of the total votes and PDI only received 3%, leaving Golkar the majority of votes with 74.5% in the 1997 election, as evidenced in Table 1.0 (Suryadinata 32). Smaller parties had no opportunity to compete in this election, let alone obtain representation. During the 1999 election, 21 political parties may have won seats, but the top five parties accounted for 90% of the votes and therefore almost all of the 462 seats in the House of Representatives (King, "Half-Hearted Reform" 207). PDI-P received 33.7% of the votes, Golkar obtained 22.4%, PKB acquired 12.6%, PPP gained 10.7%, and PAN won 7.1% (King, "Half-Hearted Reform" 78). In total, these five parties obtained 416 of the 462 seats in the House, leaving parties that each acquired less than 1% of the vote with less than 10 seats each and 10 parties with only one seat. Despite the electoral reform, the three parties which were formerly the only electoral participants still received 66.8% of the votes and 331 of the seats, leaving the lesser parties susceptible to their majority control in the legislature.

The lack of representation for smaller parties can be traced to the electoral restrictions enforced by the Independent Election Commission. In order to qualify to compete, parties had to have an organization established in one-third or nine of the provinces and half of the districts in each of those provinces in an effort to exclude ethnically and regionally based parties (King, "Half-Hearted Reform" 51). Suharto's government had restricted participants to three political parties, but these reforms now limited on the basis of "insufficient geographical coverage and depth or penetration of their organizations" (King, "Half-Hearted Reform" 51). This data

disproves my third hypothesis, revealing that minority interests continued to be overlooked and smaller parties were unable to gain enough votes to contend with the top five winning parties. For instance, the ethnic Chinese party PBI was eligible to compete in the 1999 election, although it only captured 0.34 percent of the Indonesian vote, securing a single seat (Suryadinata 132). This may be due to confounding variables, however, such as fear of voting for an indigenous political party. Within Indonesian society, ethnic Chinese were often victims of ethnic violence, causing them to stray from political participation as a defense strategy. According to a survey conducted by the Indonesian weekly news magazine *Tempo*, many Chinese were still afraid to express their political views in 1999 (Suryadinata 127). Nevertheless, smaller parties fortunate enough to gain a single seat in the legislature, such as the PBI, would be incapable of advancing any of their interests when met with the larger parties that dominated the House of Representatives.

However, while each of these requirements did limit and curtail the number of parties participating in Indonesia's elections, the institution of the Independent Election Commission carried out these electoral rules and limitations. Initially designed to prevent the government from intervening in the election's outcome, the Independent Election Commission ultimately failed to perform its obligations to ensure a truly free and fair election as necessary for qualification as a truly democratic nation. Its expansive, largely undefined and misused powers allowed each party to overstep and manipulate its boundaries. As evidenced by the formation of a coalition of 38 parties refusing to recognize the election results, this institutional body was corrupt and far from independent. In its final report, the central supervisory committee of the Independent Election Commission charged the body with overreach and abuse of its authority,

stating that the commission allowed “parties greater authority than the law allowed in determining their elected candidates” (King, “Half-Hearted Reform” 87).

According to Larry Diamond in “The Global State of Democracy”, for a country to be considered a liberal democracy, a truly independent electoral commission must first exist to ensure the possible removal of corrupt elected officials from office through frequent, free and fair elections (418). Truly free and fair elections are one of the greatest indicators of a democratic government, revealing the power of the public to hold its representatives accountable and restrain their authority. In emerging democracies, the role of an independent electoral commission is particularly vital to the legitimacy of the subsequent government. Electoral governance in such transitional regimes must balance administrative efficiency, political neutrality, and public accountability (Mozaffar and Schedler 8). Credibility of electoral results can be attained when electoral rules and institutions meet each of these challenges. Within electoral governance, the level of rule application is most susceptible to errors due to the magnitude and complexity of tasks and the authorized discretion of officials involved while accomplishing such tasks (Mozaffar and Schedler 9). During Indonesia’s 1999 election, whenever new electoral procedures were ambiguous or poorly understood, members of the Independent Election Commission tended to resort to old operating procedures, contributing to the relatively high incidence of procedural violations (King, “Half-Hearted Reform” 86). Although thousands of violations of election laws and regulations were documented, international and domestic election monitors agreed that the 1999 election was the freest and fairest election since 1955 (King, “Half-Hearted Reform” 77).

Conclusion

The results of this research indicate that the establishment of an Independent Election Commission helped to bring a higher degree of legitimacy to the election's results than had been achieved under Suharto's regime. Although the Commission was not without flaws, it is expected that the first elections to occur following the fall of an authoritarian government will contain a degree of attempted manipulation on the part of participants. The Commission did allow the expansion of electoral participation to encompass a greater number of political parties, although competition among participating parties increased as well and minority interests were not represented to a greater degree than before. Continued research is necessary to further assess the role of electoral governance in relation to political parties within emerging democracies. According to a growing compilation of evidence, ineffective electoral governance is an important cause of many flawed elections that have occurred in transitional regimes within the last three decades (Mozaffar and Schedler 6). However, electoral governance has been largely overlooked as an influential variable of democratization in political research (Mozaffar and Schedler 6). The importance of electoral institutions that enforce the rules, carry out the elections, and determine the allocation of seats among parties should not be discredited as inconsequential. Electoral results are due to party systems, political participants, individual campaigns, and voter turnout, but electoral governance plays a greater role than is typically acknowledged.

In addition to indicating the need for additional research regarding the role of electoral commissions, this research reveals the influence of social, economic and political variables that affect the process, outcome, and legitimacy of elections. The institutional changes and electoral rules established in Indonesia by the 1999 electoral reforms contain restrictions; they cannot reverse the damage that decades of authoritarian rule have inflicted upon the integrity and

strength of elected representatives. Factors outside the limitations of an electoral institution such as the Independent Election Commission also affect the number of political parties, levels of inter-party competition, and degree of minority representation. Establishing an Independent Election Commission in an effort to ensure the neutrality and legitimacy of electoral results will not yield the preferred outcome of increased legitimacy for Indonesia's government without taking into consideration the factor of human error. Individuals working as members of the Commission do so as agents of its authority, but institutional regulations cannot compensate for their corrupt ambitions of personal advancement. This research indicates the large degree of uncertainty, even within electoral rules and institutions, which cannot be controlled in an effort to democratize a nation. Rather than seeking to contain unexpected circumstances, electoral bodies and the laws they enforce must instead account for such factors in advance in order to avoid the breakdown of well-intended establishments, as occurred in the case of Indonesia's Independent Election Commission.

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