

Cleavages, electoral systems and the politicization of Islam in Indonesia and Malaysia

Islam is much more politicized in Malaysia than in Indonesia, at least when it comes to political parties, their programs and their campaigning - one reason why democratization in Malaysia is blocked, whereas post-Suharto Indonesia has witnessed sweeping reforms. While struggles between secularists and followers of political Islam, and reformers and conservatives are losing significance in Indonesia, social cleavages transferred to the political party system are conspicuous in Malaysia. The causes for this are complex, and have to do with electoral systems and the way social cleavages are transformed into conflicts between political parties.

Andreas Ufen

Reformasi and political systems in Indonesia and Malaysia

Indonesian and Malaysian political systems have transformed unexpectedly since 1998. In Indonesia, at the height of the Asian financial crisis, President Suharto was forced to leave office, engendering a range of political reforms and the introduction of electoral democracy. In Malaysia, the sacking and arrest of Anwar Ibrahim, previously the powerful deputy of Prime Minister Mahathir, resulted in the formation of a *reformasi* movement, the establishment of a multiracial pro-democratic party (PKN) and competitive, though still highly manipulated national elections.

Both regimes are hybrid forms combining characteristics of authoritarian and democratic systems. While elections in Indonesia were sufficiently free and fair according to national and international observers, the impact of money politics, weak law enforcement, lack of civilian control over the security apparatus, the fragile situation in the Moluccas and challenges by independence movements in Aceh and Papua clearly show the shortcomings and dangers of democratization.

Malaysia is often categorized as a semi-democracy. Though sufficiently free and fair elections are absent, it would be inaccurate to describe the regime as authoritarian. Opposition parties have opportunities to voice their grievances; occasionally they win elections at the state level. Although the human rights situation is in many ways deplorable, Malaysia differs essentially from South American juntas, New Order Indonesia or the Philippines under Marcos.

Cleavages

Unlike neighbouring Thailand and the Philippines where clientelist, elitist and programmatically weak parties prevail, most parties in Malaysia and Indonesia are deeply rooted in society and represent enduring political traditions. Known in Indonesia as '*aliran* politics' (*aliran* means 'stream' or 'streams'), they remind European observers of the mass integration parties of the 1920s. The structure of European party systems was 'frozen' at that time and survived well into the 1960s - this is the still convincing thesis of political scientists Seymour M. Lipset and Stein Rokkan. But this 'freezing' is also characteristic of Malaysian and Indonesian party systems, where one finds many similarities when comparing current constellations of political parties with those of the 1950s. It therefore seems justifiable to apply Lipset and Rokkan's approach,

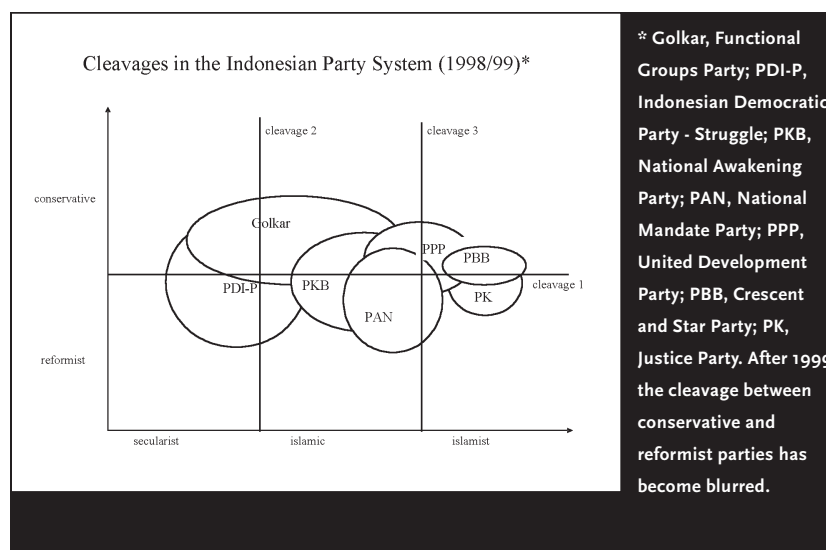
with adaptations, to non-European countries.

Cleavages are the result of fundamental societal conflicts. They structure the discourse on the main issues and are institutionalized by political actors, especially parties. Lipset and Rokkan identify four cleavages produced by the national and the industrial revolutions. During the national revolution, conflict for political and cultural hegemony arose between central nation-building elites and subject populations (dominant versus subject culture or centre versus periphery) and between the church and the centralizing nation-state (church versus secular government). During the industrial revolution two mainly economic cleavages emerged, those between industrial landed interests and entrepreneurs (or more generally: rural versus urban groups) and those between tenants, labourers, and workers on one side and owners and employers on the other (labour versus capital). The resolution of these conflicts led to the establishment of specific political parties. The cleavage structure largely determines the configuration of parties: overlapping cleavages reinforce each other and tend to promote the building of stable political blocs, whereas cross-cutting cleavages generally foster moderation and accommodation.

Cleavages in Indonesia and Malaysia after 1998

In the new states the two revolutions often took place simultaneously and in many cases remain incomplete. In addition, other cleavages need to be considered. An analysis of political party platforms, voting behaviour and key political issues among the public and within parliament shows that the main cleavage in Indonesia and Malaysia divides parties with a more secularist outlook from those with a program based mostly on Islam. In addition, regarding introducing sharia and/or an Islamic state, Islamist and moderate Islamic parties disagree, the latter at times cooperating with secularists.

In Malaysia, different views on religion are strengthened by ethnic identities. Non-Malay parties (MIC, MCA, Gerakan and DAP) are at the same time non-Muslim parties and vice versa. In Indonesia, religious and ethnic cleavages do not, at least at the national level, overlap like this. Moreover, political Islam is much more diverse than in Malaysia because of the split between traditionalism and modernism epitomized by Islamic organizations like Nahdlatul Ulama and Muhammadiyah and the fragmentation of the modernist camp in parliament (PAN, PPP, PBB and PKS, the successor of PK).



* Golkar, Functional Groups Party; PDI-P, Indonesian Democratic Party - Struggle; PKB, National Awakening Party; PAN, National Mandate Party; PPP, United Development Party; PBB, Crescent and Star Party; PK, Justice Party. After 1999 the cleavage between conservative and reformist parties has become blurred.

In Indonesia, the dominant parties representing secular or 'nationalist' forces are PDI-P and Golkar, although both have many orthodox Muslim members and supporters. Islamic parties include the PKB, predominantly based in traditionalist, rural constituencies, and a whole range of modernist, urban-based parties like PAN, PPP, PBB, and PKS which enjoy strong backing on university campuses. Although both PKB and PAN are nominally secular parties, they are in effect - considering their membership, candidates and voters - Islamic.

A cleavage between status quo-oriented and reformist parties is evident in Malaysia. The National Front (a coalition of UMNO, MCA, MIC, Gerakan, etc.) is

in almost every constituency pitted against the Alternative Front (PAS, PKR, the successor of PKN, and, until 2001, DAP). In Indonesia, the dividing lines between former authoritarian and new reformist parties have become more and more blurred since Abdurrahman Wahid became president in 1999. For example, the PDI-P under Megawati Sukarnoputri, once one of the leaders of the pro-democracy movement against Suharto, seems to have evolved into a corrupt network of wheeler-dealers.

The electoral system and Islamization

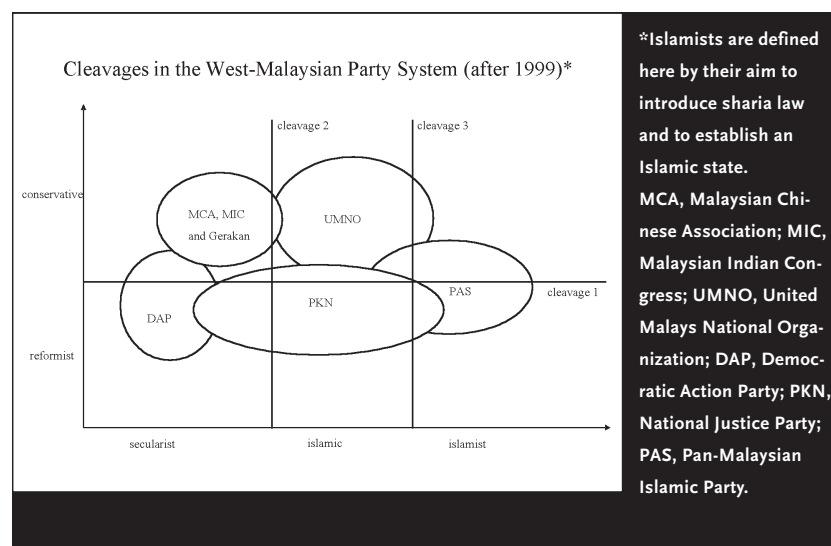
But are these party system structures the sole result of social cleavages translated into the political realm? Stating this would mean applying a sociological approach in a reductionist manner. But to a certain degree, the form of government - and the electoral system - deter-

elections. Because clear majorities are lacking, rainbow coalitions predominate. The popular election of a presidential/vice-presidential team since 2004 seems likely to further motivate moderation. If Indonesia had a plurality system with single-member constituencies, the emergence of two political blocs would be possible. This kind of coalition building materialized for a short time when Abdurrahman Wahid was elected President by the People's Consultative Assembly (MPR) in 1999. During these weeks Islamic parties formed a *poros tengah* (central axis).

Conclusion

Social cleavages - mediated *inter alia* by electoral laws - translate into political cleavages and shape the structure of party systems. In Malaysia this results in competition between PAS and UMNO and in the politicization of Islam. Pre-existing cleavages are strengthened by the electoral system to produce a party system deeply divided by overlapping cleavages. The plurality system supports inter-party competition, resulting in a centrifugal struggle between parties. Since 1998, however, a new cross-cutting cleavage has emerged, namely between status quo (Barisan Nasional) and reformist parties (Barisan Alternatif). All in all, the clear cleavage structure entails a stable constellation of forces, but also paralyzes democratization because the reformist camp is split between Islamists (PAS) and secularists (PKR and DAP).

In contrast, the political cleavage structure in Indonesia is diffuse. The struggle between secularists and followers of political Islam is low in intensity while the conflict between reformers and conservatives is now almost gone. Centripetal forces and moderation, together with multipartism and fragmentation, have fostered a cartelization of Indonesian political parties. Opposition is now hardly detectable. This consensus obstructs the development of a lively democracy with parties offering clear alternatives. Ironically, the only party which from time to time challenges the cartel of establishment parties is the Islamist PKS. Like PAS in Malaysia, many Islamists are pro-democratic reformers and reactionary sharia admirers at the same time. ◀



*Islamists are defined here by their aim to introduce sharia law and to establish an Islamic state. MCA, Malaysian Chinese Association; MIC, Malaysian Indian Congress; UMNO, United Malays National Organization; DAP, Democratic Action Party; PKN, National Justice Party; PAS, Pan-Malaysian Islamic Party.

mines the number of parties and the type of competition between them. Majoritarian systems with single-member constituencies tend to engender two-party systems. Proportional representation systems tend to strengthen fragmentation and to produce multipartism. In Malaysia, the combination of parliamentarism with a plurality electoral system in single-member constituencies has fostered the establishment of two opposing blocs, the National Front and the Alternative Front (Barisan Nasional and Barisan Alternatif). Direct competition between PAS and UMNO has nurtured the instrumentalization of Islam and the politicization of religious issues. If Malaysia introduced a proportional representation system with free and fair elections, PAS would probably become moderate in Islamic terms as it would have to compete for votes across the country.

In Indonesia, the proportional representation system fosters multipartism and the fragmentation of the modernist Muslim camp, but also supports the establishment of Indonesian versions of catch-all parties like Golkar and PDI-P. Most parties are engaged in a fight for the middle ground. Essentially Islamic parties like PAN and PKB have chosen a neutral platform in terms of religion; even an Islamist party like PKS is not willing to play the Islamic card during

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