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Party Systems, Critical Junctures and Cleavages in Southeast Asia

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ABSTRACT

This article differentiates between clientelist (Thailand and the Philippines) and cleavage-based parties and party systems (Malaysia and Indonesia) with reference to insights of historical institutionalism. Clientelist parties, in contrast to cleavage-based ones, often undermine democratization because, on average, representativeness is weak, bureaucracy is more politicized, and rent-seeking behavior is widespread.

KEYWORDS: political parties, party systems, critical junctures, historical institutionalism, Southeast Asia
Introduction

What kind of parties and party systems exist in Southeast Asia? What are the major differences between them and how can we theoretically conceptualize these types? One possibility is to employ a sociological approach that explains differences with reference to deep-seated social structures that have a marked impact on party politics. The best-known model in the wide literature on political parties is the cleavage approach by Lipset and Rokkan (1967). In a path-breaking article in 1967, they compared Western European party systems with a focus on critical junctures and path dependencies of major conflicts and patterns of political party oppositions. This paper has since triggered thousands of articles on cleavages within party systems around the world. Yet, the literature on party politics in Southeast Asia is not much affected by the work of Lipset and Rokkan. On the one hand, this has to do with the peculiar characteristics of parties and party systems in the region. On the other, it is connected to the theoretical weaknesses in this research field.

Party systems in Cambodia and Singapore (and, of course, Vietnam) are so strongly dominated by one party that the cleavage approach is almost irrelevant. This was also true for East Timor until the 2007 elections when the Fretilin (Frente Revolucionária do Timor-Leste Independente) lost its hegemonic position. Yet, it is too early to draw elaborate conclusions about cleavage patterns, as the now-discernible regional divisions are still fairly new. Therefore, the focus is on Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, and Thailand, all of which are characterized by multi-party systems with competitive elections, although regime types vary

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2 The party system is now marked by a strong regional cleavage between Firaku and Kaladi — those living in the Eastern or Western part, respectively. This cleavage is not based on religious or ethnic differences, but likely has economic roots since Firaku enjoy advantages in the distribution of government jobs, particularly in the military.
to a certain degree between electoral democracy (Indonesia since 1999 and, for a long time, the Philippines and Thailand) and electoral authoritarianism (Malaysia).

This article assumes that the representativeness of government in most cases rises when party system structures reflect social diversities. The argument here is that clientelist parties, in contrast to cleavage-based ones, have the potential to stall democracy or to undermine democratic consolidation because, on average, accountability is eroded, cynicism is higher, bureaucracy is more politicized, and electoral volatility is higher as are rent-seeking and corruption.3

But it has to be noted that cleavage-based party systems are not necessarily more democratic.4 In Malaysia, this form of rootedness even has some contradictory effects because ‘primordial’ (ethnic and religious) conflicts have been manipulated by the regime to stabilize authoritarianism.5 It is only the “status quo” versus “Reformasi” cleavage that can result in the

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5 See on this Kitschelt’s distinction between distributive, sociocultural and ethno-cultural cleavages [Herbert Kitschelt, “Parties and Political Intermediation,” in *The Blackwell Companion to Political Sociology*, eds. Kate Nash and Alan Scott (Malden: Blackwell 2004), p. 155]. Distributive cleavages are based on different economic policy preferences; sociocultural ones on individualist libertarian versus collectivist, particularistic authoritarian worldviews; and ethno-cultural cleavages “define friend-foe relations based on ascriptive and often immutable group membership and concern the very political definition of citizenship.” One may add that some social cleavages are only partly or indirectly represented by parties (e.g. the rural—urban divide), others often more directly and fully (particularly the ethno-cultural ones).
erosion of the whole system. In this case a transcending cleavage is formed around the question of whether the entire system is legitimate or not.

The paper starts with a short introduction of the Lipset/Rokkan model and its major assumptions. The main part consists of a comparative analysis of clientelist and cleavage-based party systems. In other words, it looks at how and to what extent social cleavages have been translated into the party systems. The patterns of, and reasons for, (non)-translation are discussed at the end. The paper concentrates on tendencies, major transformations and structures and does not try to measure in detail voter behavior.

The paper shows that party systems in Malaysia and Indonesia are structured by marked cleavages. In contrast to these cleavage-based party systems, those in the Philippines and Thailand are essentially characterized by clientelist parties. It is assumed that the way social cleavages are translated into political ones has a decisive impact on the representativeness of government.

**The Lipset/Rokkan Model and Critical Junctures**

The cleavage model by Lipset and Rokkan provides a basis for a historically oriented sociological comparison of party systems in Western European democracies. Cleavages arise from fundamental social conflicts. They structure the discourse regarding major political questions, and as a consequence shape the patterns of the party system. Political actors and political parties institutionalize cleavages. Politicized cleavages are manifested as voter behavior, and as party platforms, policies, and party symbolism. The cleavage structure results from the complex relations of crosscutting and reinforcing cleavages, and largely
defines the setup of a party system: political platforms, the behavior of individual parties, and the potential for forming coalitions. The specific resolution of these conflicts, especially since the beginning of the 19th century, has led to the formation of diverse party systems in Europe. In many countries, certain cleavage structures within party systems were ‘frozen’ in the 1920s and have partially endured until today. Lipset and Rokkan distinguish four social cleavages against the background of two revolutions. Two cleavages (centre/periphery, religious/secular) are products of the national revolution, two others of the industrial revolution (urban/rural, capital/labour).6

The structure of parties and party systems, the way parties reflect real social conflicts, tells us a lot about the political systems in general. Moreover, the ability to democratize polities or to enhance democratic consolidation hinges to a large extent on the way people are politically mobilized and interests are articulated. The nexus between social cleavages and particized, political cleavages is the establishment of a linkage or a rooting of parties via the mobilization of large social groups.7

To understand the current alignments of voters, according to Lipset and Rokkan, “it is not enough to analyze the contemporary issues and the contemporary socio-cultural structure; it is even more important to go back to the initial formation of party alternatives and to analyze the interaction between the historically established foci of identification and the subsequent changes in the structural conditions of choice.” In other words, there are “extended time periods of considerable stability — referred to as ‘path-dependency’ — interrupted by

turbulent, ‘formative moments’.” Path-dependencies are defined by self-reinforcing sequences, that is the “formation and long-term reproduction of a given institutional pattern.” Events that take place in the early stages of a historical sequence can be exceptionally important for future developments. But these events are contingent, themselves not fully determined structurally, and during these periods political actors are able to choose between different alternatives.\(^8\)

This article focuses on critical junctures prior to and during “national revolutions” and/or processes of democratization and/or re-democratization when political parties are able and willing to articulate and represent the common aspirations of huge parts of the populace. Where parties mobilized masses along social cleavages, these divides were politicized for a very long time, in many cases until today. This has provided political parties with a specific rootedness. The establishment of such a linkage was and is prevented in the Philippines by political elites that are to a large extent based on family ties; in Thailand by elites of the bureaucratic polity, later by strongmen based in their constituencies and in the national parliament in factions (\textit{phuak}).

\textbf{The Enduring, but Weakened Power of Cleavages in Indonesia}

With reference to this approach it is reasonable to look at two critical junctures in Indonesia because during these periods of time the role of agency was especially high. The first was

during colonialism when some of the major parties were established in the 1910s and 1920s.\footnote{The parties that emerged after 1945 reflected to a large extent the organizational and cleavage patterns that were established in the 1910s and 1920s.}
The second decisive period was after the fall of Suharto in May 1998.\footnote{To be sure, there were other events that had a lasting impact on the evolution of the Indonesian party system. The first time parties were legally established was after World War II, but most parties at that time had prewar predecessors and were the products of the mass mobilization beforehand. In the early 1970s, the forcefully constructed new party system was essentially stabilized by repression.}

Major structures of Indonesia's party system were laid very early. Political parties such as the PNI (Partai Nasional Indonesia) or the PKI (Partai Komunis Indonesia), and Muslim mass organizations such as the modernist Muhammadiyah and the traditionalist Nahdatul Ulama (NU), arose in the 1910s and 1920s. These highly politicized, mostly anti-colonial associations were capable of mobilizing large parts of the population. The patterns of mobilization became clear in the 1950s with a party system based on \textit{aliran}\footnote{Clifford Geertz, \textit{Peddlers and Princes} (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1963); Herbert Feith, \textit{The Decline of Constitutional Democracy in Indonesia} (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1962), pp. 132ff; Donald Hindley, “Alirans and the Fall of the Old Order,” \textit{Indonesia} 9 (April 1970), pp. 23–66.}: clusters of women, youth, religious, professional, and labor organizations. Members of these clusters usually shared a similar worldview and would affiliate with one of the parties, which would serve as a unifying core. The four “classic” cleavages were mirrored in the Indonesian party system. Secularism was represented by the PNI and the PKI; Islamism by Masyumi (Majelis Syuro Muslimin Indonesia — Consultative Council of Indonesian Muslims) and the NU.\footnote{As a religious mass organization, NU was part of Masyumi until 1952, afterwards a mass organization and a political party at the same time. Under the New Order regime it was part of the PPP, but left this party in 1984 to become, again, merely a religious mass organization.}

The center-periphery divide could be seen in the conflict between those parties based on Java
(PNI, NU, and PKI), and those with their strongest backing in the so-called Outer Islands (among others, Masyumi). The NU was a rural-based party; Masyumi was strongest in cities. The electorates of both the PNI and the PKI were more diverse in this respect. The capital-labor cleavage was equally complex. Whereas the PKI was clearly a party of workers and tenant farmers, the PNI tended to attract people from various social strata.

This party system collapsed. It seems to contradict the main thesis of this article — that cleavage-based party systems promote the quality of democracy. It has to be kept in mind, though, that this only holds true if political parties represent divergent, but not extremely polarized interests and do not aim to abolish democracy.

After the turbulent Guided Democracy period, an engineered three-party system under Suharto's New Order (1966-98) was instituted. During the initial phase of this military regime, the PKI was destroyed. The armed forces took control of Golkar (Golongan Karya — Functional Groups), a loose corporation of mostly professional, youth and women’s associations that evolved into a real party with individual membership only in the 1980s. Golkar was conceived of as an organization to transcend class, ethnic and religious identities and to cover all cleavages. Nevertheless, since the early 1970s, many orthodox Muslims were represented by the state-controlled PPP (Partai Persatuan Pembangunan — United Development Party); secular nationalists by the tamed Sukarnoist PDI (Partai Demokrasi Indonesia — Indonesian Democratic Party). Yet, these two pseudo-opposition parties helped to perpetuate some of the identities and issues that buttress current cleavage structures. Likewise, NU and Muhammadiyah were able to hibernate as supposedly apolitical mass organizations.
After 1998, major cleavages within the new party system of the second Indonesian democracy re-emerged. Based on the organizational background of parliamentarians, the attitude of the party faction in parliament (for instance, their position on the Jakarta Charter issue), the political platform, and the party symbolism, the most salient cleavages structuring the party system today are still based on religious worldviews: “traditionalism versus modernism” and “secularism versus moderate political Islam versus Islamism.” Thus, some of the new parties have constituencies comparable to parties of the 1950s. The moderate Islamic PAN (Partai Amanat Nasional — National Mandate Party) and the Islamist PKS (Partai Keadilan Sejahtera — Prosperous Justice Party) stand, to a certain extent, within the tradition of Masyumi. The PDI-P (Partai Demokrasi Indonesia–Perjuangan — Indonesian Democratic Party–Struggle) is seen as the PNI successor and the PKB (Partai Kebangkitan Bangsa — National Awakening Party) originated directly from Nahdatul Ulama. The PDI-P fights the politicization of Islam, such as during the debates surrounding a so-called pornography law restricting freedom of press and speech. The party is backed by nominal Muslims (abangan) and religious minorities, most notably Christians and Balinese Hindus. As a hybrid, the

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15 The so-called Jakarta Charter, seven words in the original draft of the constitution, forces Muslims to obey shari’a law.

16 I define parties as Islamist (and not as merely Islamic) if they support the introduction of shari’a laws (including a shari’a based penal code) and aim at the establishment of an Islamic state.

former New Order government party Golkar seems to bridge the cleavage between secularism and Islam. 18 The PKB and the PAN place strong emphasis on their secular political objectives. Yet, with an organizational base consisting to a large extent of traditionalist and modernist Muslims, who are often somehow affiliated with Nahdatul Ulama and Muhammadiyah19, they can in fact be considered Islamic parties. The PPP has a strong Islamist wing — at least if one looks at the debates on the Jakarta Charter until 2002.

There is, however, a decline of cleavage voting and a marked dealignment of parties. 20 This is a result of weakened political ideologies, loosened links between parties and mass organizations, the pluralization within the electorate and the individualization of voters, as well as the mediatization and commercialization of politics. Today, there are different types of parties in Indonesia: more programmatic ones such as the PKS; those like the PDI-P that still exploit the inherited charisma of Sukarno; catch-all parties such as Golkar and the PD (Partai Demokrat — Democratic Party) — the latter an instrument of Yudhoyono who used cash handouts as compensation payments for cuts to fuel and kerosene subsidies.21


21 In 2009, the PD won 20.8 percent and was thus able to almost triple its 2004 result. The devastating results for the PDI-P in 2004, and the sudden rise of the PD, but also of Hanura and Gerindra in 2009, are testimony to a certain extent of electoral volatility. Rather atypical for general political party developments after 1998 has been the rise of the Islamist cadre party PKS, that has strong links to an urban milieu of highly educated young Muslims. On the 2009 elections: Marcus Mietzner, *Indonesia's 2009 Elections: Populism, Dynasties and the Consolidation of the Party System* (Sydney: Lowy Institute for International Policy, 2009).
The dealignment of political parties is connected to the cartelization of parties. The ensuing centripetal inter-party competition is now much more constrained.\textsuperscript{22} Mietzner\textsuperscript{23} observes “centrifugal tendencies of the key parties” in the 1950s, in contrast to a “centripetal direction of inter-party competition” since 1999. Parties form grand coalitions (“rainbow coalitions”) and water down their programmatic commitments in order to share the spoils of office. Cartels are in some measure a result of a fragmented party system with unclear majorities, but are predominantly due to the commercialization of politics.

Although cleavages today are much weaker than in the 1950s, I would still term the party system “cleavage-based.” This is in contrast to Mujani and Liddle who deny the significance of religious orientation in elections.\textsuperscript{24} They also affirm an eclipse of a linkage between parties and social class.\textsuperscript{25} Yet, other studies still provide evidence for specific voter alliances. In a 2008 survey, the PDI-P had the largest percentage of non-Muslim voters and of those who were “not at all religious.”\textsuperscript{26} Van Klinken\textsuperscript{27}, referring to a survey of the Indonesian Research

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{26} Lingkaran Survei Indonesia, \textit{Peta Kekuatan Partai Politik Menjelang Pemilu} [Map of Political Parties’ Strength ahead of General Elections] (Jakarta, 2009).
and Development Institute (IRDI), notes significant differences between supporters of Yudhoyono and those of Megawati: Well-educated people, many of them civil servants, generally prefer Yudhoyono, whereas poorly educated farmers and fishers, and the unemployed, tend to back Megawati.\textsuperscript{28} A survey from 2008 indicated that the PDI-P is particularly supported by low-income voters and those without a high school or university degree\textsuperscript{29}; research by the newspaper \textit{Kompas} illustrates that PKS voters are far more well-educated than voters for the PKB, the PPP, and the PDI-P\textsuperscript{30}; and the statistical analysis by Baswedan backs the thesis of a significant presence of \textit{aliran} politics at the national level.\textsuperscript{31}

The center-periphery cleavage manifests itself in a specific regional distribution of votes. The contrast between urban-based parties, such as the PD and the PKS, and rural-based parties such as the PKB, is obvious. This cleavage between industrial, professional, and trading elites on the one hand, and village elites on the other, is indirectly reflected in the antagonism between modernist Muslim and traditionalist Muslim parties. Once again, an economic cleavage is recast in terms of religion.

The 1999 elections in particular were characterized by a divide between those trying to defend their privileges and slow down the pace of reform, and those wishing to accelerate

\begin{footnotes}
\footnote{\textit{Indonesian Economic Studies} 44:3 (December 2008), p. 379.}

\footnote{This means, there is a cleavage based on differences in education and income, but it is not the “classical” capital-labor cleavage identified by Lipset and Rokkan in Europe.}

\footnote{Lingkaran Survei Indonesia, \textit{Peta Kekuatan}.}


\end{footnotes}
democratization. However, this status quo – *Reformasi* cleavage has been of minor importance in recent years.

Some political institutions seem to support the translation of cleavages in Indonesia. The proportional system and the low electoral threshold (now at 2.5 per cent) facilitate multi-partyism, and make it easier for parties to run on a more specific platform. Electoral laws, especially the regulation to establish branches all over the country, enhance to a certain extent the nationalization of parties and their organizational depth. At the same time, direct presidential and local elections since 2004/05 further the personalization of politics and lower the degree of party institutionalization. In local elections candidates often have only loose connections to the nominating party or parties and rely in their campaigns more and more on professional consultants, their own money or external financiers rather than on party machineries.

The Transformation of Predominant Cleavages in Malaysia

If we look at the current party system in Malaysia, we can also identify two critical junctures: the first in the period immediately after the Second World War until the early 1950s when most parties were founded ahead of national independence; the second in the wake of the

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32 This personalization seems also to be amplified by the introduction of an open candidates list in the 2009 legislative elections.

Asian financial crisis in 1997/98, when a new opposition movement arose. This *Reformasi* movement was able to translate the sudden emergence of this deep societal cleavage into the party system via a new party, the PKN (Parti Keadilan Nasional — National Justice Party)\(^{34}\), and the oppositional Alternative Front.\(^{35}\)

From the very beginning, the party system was cleavage-based, and in contrast to Indonesia a dealignment has not yet taken place. The major cleavage within the party system has been ethnic. Starting in the 1970s, it was incrementally replaced by a religious cleavage. After 1998, a “*Reformasi* versus status quo” cleavage came to the fore. With different intensities, and in changing constellations, all the three major cleavages have left their imprint on the current party system.

One of the major legacies of British colonial rule was the segregation of the population into three major ethnic groups. The use of “Malay,” “Chinese” and “Indian” as a key organizing principle appeared for the first time in the 1891 Straits Settlements Census,\(^{36}\) and the distinction was subsequently sustained by the colonial administration. After the Japanese left Malaya in 1945, the returning British attempted to establish a “Malayan Union,” undermining further the power of Malay aristocrats and granting citizenship to most of the Chinese and Indians that were born in Malaya. Under the leadership of the conservative UMNO (United Malays National Organization), which had risen from a stream of Malay nationalism that was dominated by aristocrats, large parts of the Malay population quickly began to resist the

\(^{34}\) A few years later renamed Parti Keadilan Rakyat (People's Justice Party).


British plan. Neither Muslim reform movements, nor an intelligentsia with Malay education, were able to build up such a mass support.\(^{37}\)

Within each ethnic group, the British fostered those that appeared to least oppose a controlled transition towards independence, i.e. elites that decided to fight the rebelling political left\(^ {38}\) or Islamist tendencies within society. In the 1950s, the British thus supported the conservative, ethnically based parties. The three partners of this first ruling coalition — the Alliance — were UMNO, the MCA (Malaysian Chinese Association), and the MIC (Malaysian Indian Congress). They are still the most important parties in the ruling coalition, which since the 1970s has been known as the National Front (Barisan Nasional).

Since independence in 1957, Malaysia is an electoral authoritarian regime with semi-competitive elections.\(^ {39}\) The authoritarianism, in combination with the first-past-the-post system, usually guarantees large parliamentary majorities for the ruling coalition. The control of enormous financial means, the bureaucracy, the judiciary, and the media apparatus allow for the framing of political conflicts and the suppression of independent associations. The institutional hindrances of electoral authoritarianism were too high to allow for the translating of social issues into party political and parliamentary conflict. Trade unions and labor parties

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were still restrained and economic conflicts were ethnicized. This strategy of “racialization” stabilized the hegemony of the ruling coalition.

In the 1950s and 1960s, ethnicity was also a marker for other cleavages (rural-urban; center-periphery; capital-labor) since most Malays worked as peasants far from urban commercial centers near the West coast of the peninsula. UMNO functioned as a vocal representative of the underprivileged Malays, yet ethnicity was toned down at that time by the need to uphold the tenuous coalition with Chinese and Indians within the Alliance. It was only in the early 1970s with the radical New Economic Policy (NEP) prescribing affirmative action in favor of Malays that ethnicity pervaded the discourse on politics fully. Yet, because of the rising integration and “Malaynization” of ethnic minorities (in terms of language and national consciousness) and the dynamics of the competition with the opposition party PAS (Parti Islam SeMalaysia — Pan-Malaysian Islamic Party), Islam began to replace ethnicity as the major cleavage. PAS adopted a much more Islamist agenda at the beginning of the 1980s; at the same time, Mahathir started a nationwide Islamization drive, inter alia by co-opting Anwar Ibrahim, one of the leaders of the extra-parliamentary Islamic opposition, as minister. However, elections in the 1980s and 1990s did not focus entirely on religious issues, especially not since UMNO presented itself as a protector of Malay interests. Malays are constitutionally defined as Muslims and Islam is a fundamental part of the Malay identity, which is why ethnic conflicts are always related to religious differences. Yet, because of the stress on Islam, the ethnic cleavage was increasingly overshadowed by the cleavage of

“political Islam versus secularism.” UMNO took part in the conservative Islamization because religious radicalism, at times instigated by the government and UMNO, was a useful strategy to divide the opposition.43

Only with the emergence of the Reformasi movement in 1998 has a mass mobilization entailed a new cleavage (“Reformasi versus status quo”) that could facilitate a thorough democratization.44 In the 1999 elections, the most important opposition parties — PAS, the overwhelmingly Chinese, social-democratic DAP (Democratic Action Party), and the predominantly Malay, but multi-ethnic and multi-religious PKN — united and formed the Alternative Front (Barisan Alternatif — BA).45 This was due to the pro-democratic Reformasi movement, which arose out of protest and solidarity for the Deputy Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim, who was arrested at the time. Until now, the party system is based on clear cleavage patterns, but elections are so unfair that some cleavages are not effectively translated into the party system. The Reformasi period reached its peak at the 2008 elections, when the BN only obtained 49.8 percent in West Malaysia. After the elections, the three opposition parties formed the People's Alliance (or Pakatan Rakyat) to strengthen cooperation. Meanwhile, the Pakatan Rakyat is far better institutionalized than the Barisan Alternatif ever.46 All these


developments have to be measured against the background of new media (blogs, social networks, internet news portals, etc.) that have opened up the political.

Although the status quo—Reformasi cleavage has been predominant since 1999 (although it weakened somewhat between ca. 2002 and 2005), this does not mean that religious and ethnic cleavages are today absent. From time to time, there is even a marked rise of non-Malay identities. The demonstrations by Hindraf (Hindu Rights Action Force) in 2007 for improving the position of Hindus (and Indians in general) are an example of that. But the political dynamics are currently essentially marked by the status quo—Reformasi cleavage. This may again change after a successful transition towards electoral democracy when other issues will arise.

What almost all current Malaysian parties have in common is a connection to social milieus. PAS, for instance, has close links with various orthodox Muslim milieus: on the one hand with the rather urban, conservative Malay middle class, and on the other with villagers in the north. The PKR arose out of the multi-ethnic, pro-democratic Reformasi movement, and the DAP has been the voice of many Malaysians since the mid-1960s, especially of ethnic Chinese frustrated by the Malay-centric development policies. The coalition partners of the Barisan Nasional are to a certain extent intricate patronage networks, but after more than half a century they also have built machineries that are socially entrenched. The stability of the Malaysian party system is based on the strong roots many parties possess — the Barisan Nasional model of inter-ethnic compromise — but also the subtly balanced control over the opposition. Whereas UMNO utilizes ethnic and religious cleavages that reinforce each other.

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to safeguard its hegemony, a part of the opposition wants to transcend the fixation on these
primordial cleavages and promote multi-religious and multi-ethnic cooperation.

A History of Non-Translation in the Philippines

In the Philippines, the way was paved for a clientelist two-party-system immediately after
national independence. A second critical juncture came with the downfall of Marcos in 1986,
when a range of new parties was formed. And yet, despite the democratic revival, one of the
hallmarks of political parties has remained — the tendency not to translate social cleavages.

Imposed by the American colonial administration, democratic elections were introduced in
1906. The independence movement had already been crushed by the Americans, and political
parties did not become an outgrowth of mass mobilization, but rather instruments in the hands
of local and regional elites: “… early elections, the relatively benign colonial administration,
and the promise of independence combined to undermine the development of a strong
independence movement that might have formed the basis for strong, institutionalized
political parties.”

Early introduced elections helped the oligarchs to entrench their position and to design parties and electoral laws. A landed elite of “mestizo caciques” took, as
Anderson makes clear, advantage of “[…] the huge proliferation of provincial and local
elective offices — in the absence of an autocratic territorial bureaucracy.… Here is the origin

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of the ‘political dynasties.’” The land-owning oligarchs built patron-client networks and prevented mass mobilization.

This clientelism has from the beginning characterized the party system, that evolved in four phases. From 1907 until 1946, still under colonial rule, the NP (Nacionalista Party) dominated Philippine politics, and internal factional struggles between the followers of Quezon and those of Osmeña prevailed. During the first Philippine democracy from 1946 to 1972, a two-party system with the NP and the LP (Liberal Party) as dominant players emerged. Both clientelist parties did not substantially differ in terms of organization or ideological profile, and party switching was common. The third phase began with the announcement of martial law by Marcos in 1972. Party politics was restrained and no elections held before manipulated polls in 1978. Only in the last years of the Marcos regime were a few regional opposition figures allowed to organize and to compete for some posts. The final period of party system development started with the fall of Marcos in 1986. In spite of socio-economic change, the rise of a new financial and industrial business class, the weakening of some of the old oligarchs, and the erosion of the traditional patron-client relations, the post-Marcos party system that prevails until the present day does not differ substantially from the one before 1972. This is striking considering that in 1986 the Philippine population was politically highly

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mobilized (“people power”) and a deep divide emerged between conservatives, Corazon Aquino supporters, and a re-strengthened extreme left.

But soon political parties again adopted their elitist features. Manacsa and Tan speak of the “transient nature of Philippine parties.” Voters often split their votes between different parties, and very few identify with any political party. Local political clans dominate most parties, and funding is decentralized to a large extent. Clientelistic networks undermine institutionalization. Internal discipline is low since parties are electoral vehicles for candidates and do not invest much energy in the deepening of the apparatus and the elaboration of programmatic platforms. The loyalty of party members and especially of candidates to parties is weak, so that party switching is common. Multiple memberships are not unusual, and parties do not have to nominate or endorse candidates for elections. Presidential vehicles such as Aquino’s LDP (Laban ng Demokratikong Pilipino), the Partido Lakas-Tao for Ramos, or Estrada’s Partido ng Masang Pilipino (PMP) have been organizationally loose networks. One reason for this is the 1987 constitution that gives the president the power to allocate huge sums of money. In order to get a share of these pork barrels, many parliamentarians switch to the party of the president after elections, and “political parties are more dependent on the government (in the form of patronage and government appointments), than the government is dependent on the support of political parties.” Moreover, like their Thai counterparts,

53 Manacsa, “Manufacturing Parties: Re-examining the Transient Nature of Philippine Political Parties.”
Filipino parties usually do not have nation-wide organizations: “Few, if any post-Marcos parties could be described as national parties.”

The predominant majoritarian system in the Philippines strengthens local elites and candidates over their parties. Members of the House of Representatives are elected in single-seat districts. Candidates are hardly controlled by the party central executive. They choose parties (if at all) and not the other way around, and there are no restrictions on party switching. Senatorial elections also tend to be contests between candidates that are typically not identified with specific parties. Moreover, all candidates for the Philippine Senate are elected on a national basis. The whole country serves as one electoral district. All these measures favor name recognition and not party affiliation. The so-called party list system adds a proportional element to the parliamentary elections, but each party or organization taking part in these polls can obtain only up to three seats. Furthermore only 20 per cent of the seats in the House of Representatives are reserved for the party list candidates.

Because of historical legacies, the entrenched position of conservative elites, and institutional barriers, cleavages are merely inchoately translated. According to a study by Landé, regional languages were the strongest explanatory variable during the 1992 presidential election, whereas religion and class were less important. In subsequent presidential elections, clear divides became manifest between populist figures pretending to speak on behalf of the lower

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58 Another factor that furthered personalism was the write-in system, whereby voters had to write in candidates’ names on the ballot paper. This write-in ballot was ended by automated elections in 2010.

classes (such as Estrada) and politicians from the old establishment (like Macapagal, Arroyo, or Aquino) or between “populism” and “reformism.” But these divides are hardly reflected in the structure of the party system. It would be difficult to name, for example, a “reformism party,” especially not one that is not predominantly clientelist in nature. With respect to inter-party competition, the only consistent predictor in the 2004 legislative election was center-periphery. Lakas and supporters of the Nationalist People's Coalition (NPC) were more likely to come from the periphery, whereas voters of the Liberal Party came often from the National Capital Region. All in all, the translation of social cleavages is very feeble.

Recurrent Attempts at Translation in Thailand

The cleavage approach is more relevant in Thailand than in the Philippines, but with clear limits. There are politicized conflicts between urban and rural interests, and between regions (the south and northwestern part of the country as heartlands of different parties), as well as economic cleavages (urban middle class versus peasants and urban lower class), but the party system remains fluid.

The party system has constantly shifted and parties have not been able to develop stable and deep-rooted organizational structures (with the Democrat Party as a partial exception).

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Because of the country's extremely volatile political history, the tracing of critical junctures is much more difficult than in the three other countries discussed here.

Kuhonta identifies two critical junctures: the 1932 revolution and the immediate post-war period.\(^62\) But in both cases, party institutionalization largely failed. The People’s Party as a revolutionary clique did not extend its base. After the revolution of 1932, led by the so-called Promoters of the People’s Party, conservative bureaucrats banned political parties. Party activities began again in 1946, with the main cleavages dividing Royalists and their opponents, centralists and supporters of greater regional autonomy, as well as conservatives and moderate leftist forces.\(^63\) And after the Second World War, parties articulated social interests, but most of them remained elitist organizations “with quite shallow roots in society.”\(^64\) “Social cleavages were beginning to shape the party system, albeit in a very rudimentary manner, but because democracy was aborted, in the long run, the party system did not become based on social cleavages.”\(^65\)

This early formative phase ended quickly after a military coup in 1947. The elections in 1957 were marked by cleavages not unlike those in 1946. But political parties were again banned in the successive military regimes. The following short democratic phase from 1973-76 saw the emergence of military-backed parties such as the Social Action Party and the Chart Thai party. Democratic elections were held in 1975 and 1976 with a marked polarization between

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\(^64\) Kuhonta, *Path Dependence and Party System Institutionalization in Thailand*, p. 4.

\(^65\) Ibid.
leftist and right-wing parties. This cleavage was reinforced by a center-periphery conflict since parties of the left generally succeeded in the Northeast. General Prem, prime minister from 1980-88, allowed political parties to take over some responsibilities in a system conveniently described as semi-democratic.\(^{66}\) But due to suppression and a lack of financing, leftist parties were again marginalized in the 1980s and 1990s. After a coup in 1991, the crackdown of street protests, and the democratization in 1992, the two elections that same year brought to surface a new cleavage between “angels” and “devils,” that is between parties that were somehow involved in the demonstrations or had backed the military, respectively. The cleavage slowly vanished in the following years, but in subsequent polls cleavages between Bangkok and the periphery (the Northeast and the South), between urban and rural voters, and between populist-nationalists around Thaksin and proponents of a more neoliberal agenda (Democrats) appeared.

Ganesan identifies two major cleavages during the Thaksin government: one between rural and urban electoral constituencies; and the other one between the new business elite and the old establishment consisting of the monarchy, the military and the bureaucracy.\(^{67}\) Thaksin's populism was directed at the new business elite and the rural poor, and was opposed by the old elites and growing parts of the urban electorate. Because of the hegemony of the TRT, and Thaksin's ambitions to also increasingly check the power of the armed forces and the monarchy, a military coup in September 2006 forced him to leave the country. In May 2007,


the TRT was banned. Then, Thaksin’s followers established the PPP (People’s Power Party). It was dissolved after a decision by the Supreme Court in December 2008 and substituted by the Pheu Thai (For Thais) Party that won the elections in 2011.

This evolution of cleavages has to be seen against the backdrop of fundamental socio-economic change and the succession of different elite groups. In this vein, Siripan Nogsuan Sawasdee distinguishes three stages of party and party system development. In the first stage, bureaucratic and military forces dominated parties. Because of the lack of a nationalist movement struggling for independence the intensity of mass mobilization was low and an elite of officers and bureaucrats dominated the “bureaucratic polity.” The rise of “rural network politicians” marked the second stage in the 1980s and 1990s. Parties and individual MPs acted as intermediaries between voters and the state. Powerful local political-bureaucratic and business alliances increasingly entered. In the current third stage, business conglomerates (i.e. new capitalist groups) have taken over political parties. The TRT (Thai Rak Thai) is a prime example of such a development.

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68 The 2007 constitution has again reduced the power of the prime minister with new regulations on party switching, cabinet ministers retaining their seat in the House, and a two-term limit on the office of the prime minister.


passage of a new constitution that helped the unprecedented rise of the TRT as an electoral professional party.\footnote{On this party type: Angelo Panebianco, Political Parties: Organization and Power (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988). Until 1997, large national parties generally were not formed because of the dangers of factionalism, the cost to party cohesion, and significant reserve domains such as the senate and the institution of the monarchy (see: Hicken, Building Party Systems in Developing Democracies, p. 121). The new constitution in 1997 introduced a mixed-member system with 400 single-seat constituencies and 100 national party list seats. The senate was elected through single non-transferable vote, and candidates were not allowed to be party members. The powers of the prime minister relative to the party faction were increased because cabinet members had to give up their seats upon joining the cabinet, and candidates had to be members of a party for at least 90 days if they wanted to run in an election. The prime minister had the power to dissolve the parliament and to call new elections, and thus to exclude factional rivals.}\footnote{McCargo, The Thaksinization of Thailand, p. 78. In this case, electoral professionalism may undermine certain forms of clientelism. Thaksin offered programmatic club goods such as cheap health services and established direct links to the electorate via mass media. Yet, the factions and canvasser networks within TRT remained essential for success at the polls.} Within the TRT, professional politicians worked closely together with media, marketing and advertising experts. The party was fully controlled by billionaire media mogul Thaksin, and was not based on ideologies but on certain marketable policies.\footnote{McCargo, The Thaksinization of Thailand, p. 78. In this case, electoral professionalism may undermine certain forms of clientelism. Thaksin offered programmatic club goods such as cheap health services and established direct links to the electorate via mass media. Yet, the factions and canvasser networks within TRT remained essential for success at the polls.}

During the last few years, the violent political conflicts around the country have entailed prolonged protests and demonstrations. But it is much to early to state a translation of these social into political, that is particized cleavages.\footnote{See: Mark R. Thompson, “Class and Charisma in Thai and Philippine Populist Parties: Cleaving Clientelism,” in Party Politics in Southeast Asia. Clientelism and Electoral Competition in Indonesia, Thailand and the Philippines, eds. Dirk Tomsa and Andreas Ufen (London: Routledge, 2012, forthcoming). Thompson postulates the development of a major cleavage due to Thaksin’s capability to establish direct links to voters via populism and political marketing. The emergence of a huge social movement (the “Red Shirts”) in defence of Thaksin is testimony to this.} Thus, the cleavages between populists and
reformers in the Philippines, or between “red shirts” and “yellow shirts” in Thailand, are not (or not yet) enduring ones within the party system.\footnote{See on the political crisis: Catharin Dalpino, “Thailand in 2010. Rupture and Attempts at Reconciliation,” Asian Survey, 51:1 (January/February 2011), pp. 155–162.}

According to Ockey, several basic cleavage patterns are detectable over a long period of time, but there are hardly any structural or organizational continuities.\footnote{Ockey, “Variations on a Theme.”} Only the Democrat Party has existed for a few decades and is better institutionalized than its contenders. It has supporters in Bangkok and the southern part of the country, and among advocates of liberal democratic, free market policies. Thai parties are usually organizationally and programmatically weak and short-lived.\footnote{Aurel Croissant and Paul Chambers, “Unravelling Intra-Party Democracy in Thailand,” Asian Journal of Political Science 18:2 (August 2010), pp. 195–223.} Many are not nationalized, but focus on local constituencies in which political cliques mobilize voters with the help of vote canvassers.\footnote{Michael Nelson, “Thailand’s House Elections of 6 January 2001: Thaksin’s Landslide Victory and Subsequent Narrow Escape,” in Thailand’s New Politics. KPI Yearbook 2001, ed. Michael Nelson (Bangkok: King Prajadhipok’s Institute & White Lotus, 2001), pp. 315ff.} Party switching by factions and candidates is common. Since the 1990s, the famous \textit{Wang Nam Yen} (“Cold Water Basin”) faction led by Sanoh Tientong switched a few times from one party to another and brought about the downfall of various cabinets. Factionalism is one of the main reasons for the under-institutionalization and instability of the Thai party system.\footnote{Elin Bjarnegård, “Who’s the Perfect Politician? Clientelism as a determining feature of Thai politics,” in: Party Politics in Southeast Asia: Clientelism and Electoral Competition in Indonesia, Thailand and the Philippines, eds. Dirk Tomsa and Andreas Ufen (London and New York: Routledge, forthcoming, 2012).} Whereas the average effective number of parliamentary parties is low, the effective number of


\footnote{77 Ockey, “Variations on a Theme.”}


parliamentary factions is high. Factions are being led by powerful brokers and are not based on ideological programs, but rather focus on securing cabinet portfolios as means to generate funds. Parties do not seek to cultivate a mass base, and they usually do not have close links with civil society organizations.

Concluding Remarks

Parties and party systems are essentially clientelist in nature or are based on cleavages. In Indonesia in the 1950s, and less after 1998, as well as in Malaysia since independence, party systems have been cleavage-based, whereas the Philippines displays an example of a clientelist party system in which social cleavages are hardly translated. Thailand's party system represented at times cleavages, but has been all in all also essentially clientelist in nature.

In general, cleavage-based party systems tend to be more stable and to produce a better representativeness of government. But this presupposes that parties accept the democratic rules of the game. In Indonesia, for example, the first democracy in the 1950s failed due to deepening cleavages and a strong polarization within the party system. Since 1998, weaker cleavages appear to have stabilized the party system and led to a fragile democracy, yet party dealignment may slowly undermine the established pattern of party politics. The Malaysian


82 “Factionalism also indirectly prevented the rural-urban divide from taking centre stage since factions were often represented by provincial strongmen who lobbied for their constituencies,” (Ganesan, “Worsening Schisms in Thai Domestic Politics,” pp. 135f).
party system, and the cleavage structure within it, has been remarkably stable over a very long period of time. The electoral authoritarian regime has been locked in because of ethnic and religious cleavages strengthening one another, among other reasons. But the transcending of ethnicism by the politicization of Islam and the creation of the *Reformasi* movement has heightened the dynamics of party politics and the vulnerability of the electoral authoritarian regime.

Ethno-cultural cleavages, especially in electoral authoritarian settings, can prolong undemocratic rule and – in connection with a highly institutionalized party system – stabilize conflict patterns and discourses to the detriment of opposition forces. In contrast, a distributive and socio-cultural cleavage (e.g. *Reformasi* versus status quo) may transform the whole system and open up the way towards democracy.

In the Philippines, the lack of a clear translation of cleavages into the party system has hindered the political representation of large parts of the populace. This has contributed to the elitist form of politics, and, arguably, to the deteriorating quality of democracy. Although the Thai party system was at times characterized by steep cleavages, the institutionalization of the whole party system and of most single parties has been weak, so that cleavage structures were never consistently particized. In general, the fluid party system never allowed for the building of long-lasting linkages between parties and citizens. The weakness of parties has strengthened the old elites of the “bureaucratic polity” and the new businessmen alike, and it accounts for the current deadlock in Thai politics. In such clientelist systems, populist leaders such as Thaksin in Thailand or Estrada in the Philippines have more opportunities to build new parties and elite networks from scratch.
The political trajectories of most Southeast Asian countries have hindered the development of stable party traditions and strong linkages between voters and parties. The “freezing” of cleavages and party system structures thus has been impeded in most countries, but this does not sufficiently explain the differences between the party systems.

Certain institutional factors such as proportional elections and party and electoral laws that support party institutionalization tend to facilitate cleavage translation. In contrast, the presidency, which is strengthened by discretionary funds and single-member districts (both in the Philippines), the lack of rules against party-hopping, etc., have had a negative impact on the translation of social cleavages. Yet, the interplay of these factors is highly complex, and institutional reforms, for example, can have unintended consequences because of a shifting social and party political context. Institutional factors, thus, do not sufficiently explain the difference between the four countries.

How social cleavages are translated into political ones seems to be more important. Translation is conceived of here as primarily the result of mass mobilization and linkage building between political parties (and often mass organization close to these parties) and the electorate. During the first critical juncture (i.e. during the first wave of party formation), the chances to establish rooted parties were good because ideologies such as nationalism, communism and political Islam were so popular and promising that large groups of people could be mobilized. In Europe, this was the time of mass-based parties, and the “end of ideology” was not yet in sight. A translation model has to consider the relation between civil society, political parties, and administrative, military, aristocratic and business elites. In Indonesia, these elites were weak during critical junctures, so civil society and party politicians have been able to determine the rules of the game. In Malaysia, the colonial government transferred political power towards the administrative and aristocratic elite (the
“administocrats”) that used UMNO as their main vehicle. Moreover, the Chinese business elites decided to build the MCA and to cooperate with UMNO in order to stabilize their fragile political position. In the Philippines, the traditional oligarchs captured political parties and the state early on. In Thailand, the elites of the “bureaucratic polity” prevented parties from organizing effectively. It is, thus, crucial that parties are not fractionalized by locally/regionally based strongmen that build powerful groups and undermine these parties via family bonds (Philipines) or as clientelist factions (Thailand).

But it is not only the early mobilization that is decisive for the development of the party system, since at later critical junctures the electorate may also be politicized, such as in Malaysia in the 1970s (by the Islamic revivalist dakwah movement that led to a radicalization of PAS in the early 1980s) and in 1998–99 with the Reformasi movement. Whereas some older ideologies (the anti-colonial nationalism as well as socialism/communism) successively lost their attractiveness, others gained traction (new forms of political Islam in Indonesia and Malaysia, and reform movements in the third wave of democratization). This has entailed new cleavages, but at the same time the commercialization of politics and new forms of voter mobilization seem to erode party structures, particularly in Thailand and Indonesia, where business elites are increasingly trying to build electoral-professional parties without social rooting.83

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