

EDITED BY JULIO C. TEEHANKEE AND CHRISTIAN ECHLE

# RETHINKING PARTIES IN DEMOCRATIZING ASIA



# RETHINKING PARTIES IN DEMOCRATIZING ASIA

Looking at eight case studies of Asian democracies, the contributors to this volume analyze the role of political parties in stabilizing and institutionalizing democracies.

How have democracies such as Indonesia, Sri Lanka, and the Philippines survived against the odds, despite struggling economic performance and highly unequal distribution of income? How have formerly authoritarian regimes in places like South Korea and Taiwan evolved into stable democracies? The contributors to this volume examine these case studies, along with Mongolia, Malaysia, and India, arguing that the common element is the extent to which political parties, including opposition parties, have become institutionalized and act as stabilizers on democracy. They contend that the role of political parties has been significantly underestimated in comparison with structural elements, which are insufficient to explain how these democracies have persisted.

An essential resource for students and scholars of Asian politics, especially those with a focus on comparative politics, political parties, and institutions.

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**Christian Echle** is the Head of Department for Asia and the Pacific, Konrad Adenauer Stiftung, Germany.



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# RETHINKING PARTIES IN DEMOCRATIZING ASIA

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The title of this volume highlights “democratizing” Asia as a verb indicating process and as a noun to describe countries in the region. These countries representing the subregions of Northeast Asia (Mongolia, South Korea, and Taiwan), South Asia (India and Sri Lanka), and Southeast Asia (Indonesia, Malaysia, and the Philippines) have endured the odds despite a myriad of historical, structural, and economic constraints in keeping democracy alive. I would like to express my deepest gratitude to my co-editor Christian Echle for his vision, encouragement and for providing the much-needed funding and logistical support through the Konrad Adenauer Stiftung (KAS) Regional Programme Political Dialogue Asia based in Singapore.

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Julio C. Teehankee

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# 1

## INTRODUCTION

### Taking a Second Look at Asian Political Parties

*Julio C. Teehankee, Rey C. Padit, and Jung Hoon Park*

#### The Puzzle

*What is the role of political parties in democratization? What is the role of political parties in democratizing Asia?* This book seeks to address these two fundamental puzzles. Much of the recent comparative politics literature on Asia has emphasized the various manifestations of democratic decay—from the failure of democratic consolidation to democratic rollbacks and the disturbing trend toward autocratization through the rise of populism, illiberalism, and resurgent nationalism. We refer to democratization here as

the additive process through which a regime changes from an autocracy (where unelected leaders rule) to a democracy (where elected leaders rule and are made accountable through institutions that provide channels for broad citizen participation, on the one hand, and guarantees for freedom of thought, expression, and association, on the other).<sup>1</sup>

*(Bermeo and Yashar 2016, 2)*

The critical role of political parties in the democratization of the region has largely been underemphasized, with most studies opting to focus on pathologies (i.e., patronage, clientelism, and corruption) that ail electoral and party politics in several Asian countries (Aspinall and Sukmajati 2016; Collins 2006; Croissant 2002, 2004; Hale 2015; Hicken, Aspinall, and Weiss 2019; Kenny 2017; Mietzner 2013; Teehankee and Calimbahin 2020, 2022; Teehankee and Kasuya 2020; Tomsa and Ufen 2013; Weiss 2014). Nonetheless, a handful of works have tried to explain the critical role played by political parties in deepening democratic consolidation in the region (Bermeo and Yashar 2016; Fell 2005; Hellmann 2011; Lye and Hofmeister 2011; Stockton 2001).



For the longest time, two economic factors—growth and inequality—have dominated the explanations for the success or failure of democratization in developing countries. Most scholars have long held economic growth as an essential prerequisite for the fruition of democracy (Lipset 1959; Przeworski and Limongi 1993; Nelson and Singh 1998; Kriekhaus 2006; Gerring et al. 2011). On the other hand, economic inequality has been identified as one of the primary hurdles to democratic consolidation (Bermeo 2009; Freeman and Quin 2012; Fukuyama 2008, 2011; Houle 2009; Kapstein and Converse 2008; Midlarsky 1997; Orenstein 2008; Wagle 2009). However, Bermeo and Yashar (2016, 5–6) asserted: “materialist explanations are analytically useful but not universally determinant, especially if we consider democratization in the developing world.”

For example, in Asia-Pacific, countries in the middle range of development (Figure 1.1) sometimes embraced democracy and sometimes adopted autocracy (Figure 1.2).<sup>2</sup> Nevertheless, the most compelling puzzle first identified by Bermeo and Yashar (2016, 6) is the resilience of “poor democracies,” which are “electorally competitive regimes where many or most of the inhabitants are poor and where moderating ‘middling men’ are proportionally few.” These “democracies against the odds” have become or continue to be democratic despite the persistent poverty, gross inequality, and lack of economic opportunity. By eschewing materialist explanations, this volume seeks to move beyond class-based analysis and shift its focus to political mechanisms to understand democratization in the region.

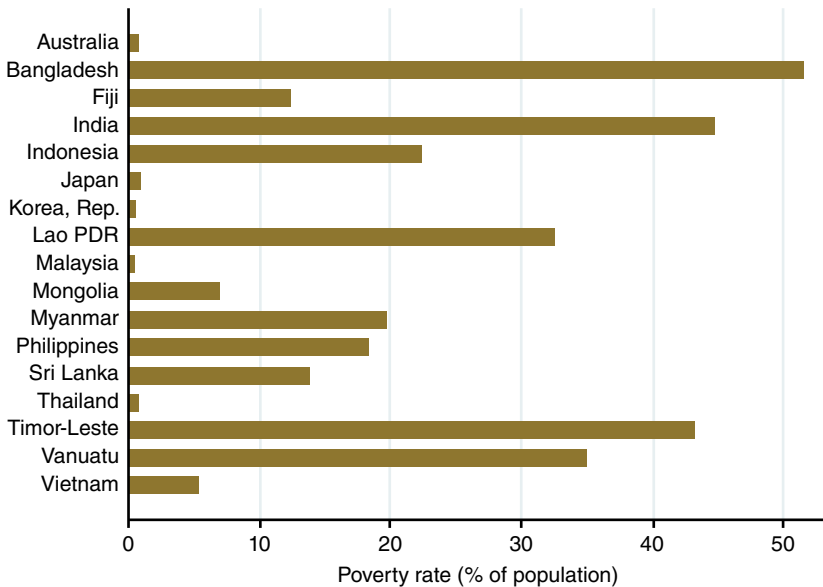
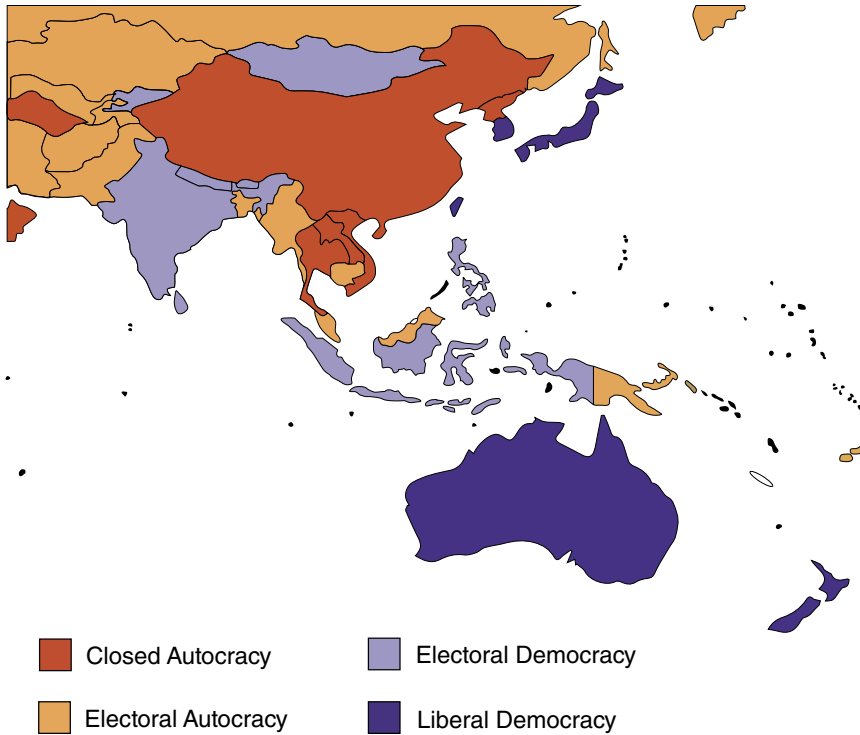


FIGURE 1.1 Percentage of Population Below the Poverty Line in the Asia-Pacific.

Source: World Bank (2020)



**FIGURE 1.2** Regime Types in the Asia-Pacific.

Source: Lührmann, Tannenberg, and Lindberg (2018)

This volume would like to steer away from an overly structuralist-materialist view of the democratization process to a more politico-strategic approach emphasizing the role of parties (and movements) as agents of collective action. It will focus on “democratizing” Asia as a verb indicating process and as a noun referring to countries in the region that have endured the odds despite a myriad of historical, structural, and economic constraints in keeping democracy alive. These countries representing the subregions of Northeast Asia (Mongolia, South Korea, and Taiwan), South Asia (India and Sri Lanka), and Southeast Asia (Indonesia, Malaysia, and the Philippines) have experienced periods of colonialism, nationalism, communism, authoritarianism, and democratization (Hellman 2011; Slater 2010).

### Asian Democracy against the Odds

This volume would like to take on the challenge raised by the pathbreaking *Parties, Movements, and Democracy in the Developing World* edited by Bermeo and Yashar (2016, 12–13) for a “historical turn” to “read history forward”; to assess the role of structural *and* conjunctural factors in the role of political parties in creating democratic institutions, and for a “regional turn” taking a critical view on the

applicability of the European democratic experience beyond Europe since “developing-country democratizers face challenges that cannot simply be inferred from the Western European cases and patterns of capitalist development.” The Asian countries selected as country cases here represent various types of democratic polities at different levels of democratization. The Philippines and India are among the oldest democracies in the region.<sup>3</sup> India and Indonesia are large democracies.<sup>4</sup> Mongolia is a post-communist society that is nurturing its fragile democracy. The Philippines and Indonesia were part of the so-called “Third Wave” of democratization (Huntington 1991) in the region that saw the toppling of long-entrenched dictatorships (Marcos and Suharto) and the restoration of electoral democracy. South Korea and Taiwan have successfully transitioned from authoritarian regimes and achieved high economic growth and development amidst intense party competition. Political parties in India and Sri Lanka initially took the form of mass movements that articulated their people’s democratic and nationalist aspirations. After decades under a period of electoral authoritarianism that propelled economic growth and development, Malaysia, one of the successful Southeast Asian developmentalist (albeit authoritarian) states, has taken incremental (yet precarious) steps towards democratization with the active agitation of democracy activists and civil society organizations.

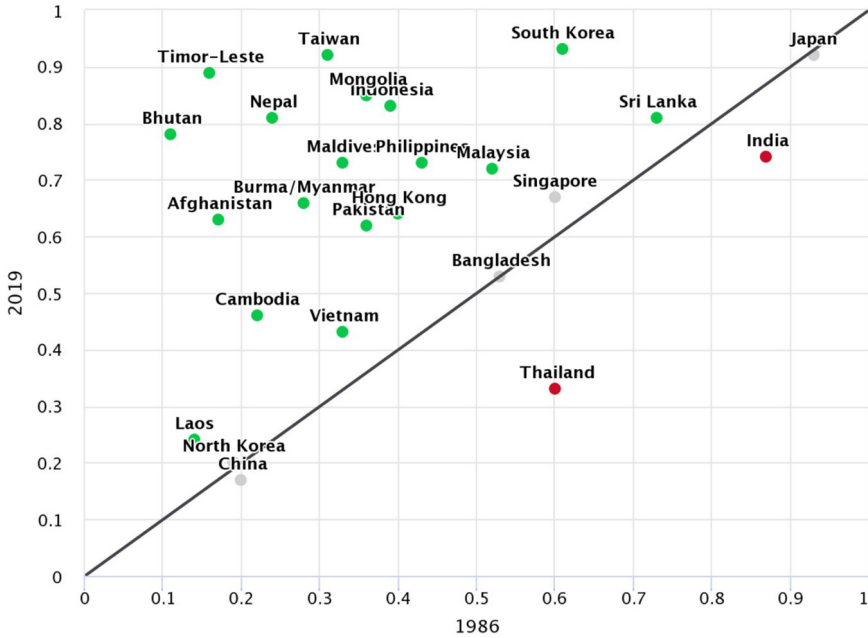
Robert Dahl (1971, 9) introduced the concept of a “polyarchy”

as an alternative to the word democracy ... to maintain the distinction between democracy as an ideal system and the institutional arrangements that have come to be regarded as a kind of imperfect approximation of an ideal, and experience shows.

Figure 1.3 compares the Asian countries rank in the “Additive Polyarchy Index”<sup>5</sup> in 1986 and 2019. The year 1986 is significant since it marked the beginning of the Third Wave of Democratization in Asia with the historic people power uprising in the Philippines that ended the 20-year rule of the dictator Ferdinand Marcos.

As shown in Figure 1.3, most Asian countries have made tremendous strides in their polyarchy scores since 1986. The countries have maintained their democratic credentials despite the tumultuous decades marked by the war on terror, two financial crises, and domestic political unrest. South Korea and Taiwan are noteworthy for their top scores, while India seems to have stagnated. Japan is the only Asian country that has achieved the status of a consolidated liberal democracy. The score of Thailand, one of the Asian Third Wave democratizers, has suffered considerably; as a result, its series of unrests and coups restored military domination of Thai politics. Hence, the countries included in this volume have managed to maintain their democratic credentials against the odds.

Another critical aspect of interrogating the role of parties in democratizing Asia is to assess the level of party institutionalization in the region. The institutionalization of political parties and political party systems has been considered an integral part of the democratization process, especially in the so-called “new democracies”



**FIGURE 1.3** Additive Polyarchy Index in Asia, 1986 and 2019.

Source: Coppedge et al. (2021)

(Diamond 1989; Dix 1992; Harmel and Svåsand 2019; Huntington 1968; Lewis 1994; Mainwaring and Scully 1995; Panebianco 1988; Randall and Svåsand 2002). Party institution refers to “the process of acquiring the properties of a durable [organization] which is valued in its own right and gaining the perceptions of others that it is such” (Harmel and Svåsand 2019, 23).

The Varieties of Democracy (V-Dem) has also developed a “Party Institutionalization Index”—

an additive index that measures the scope and depth of party institutionalization in a country every year. The scope is measured by the proportion of parties that reach a threshold of minimal institutionalization, while the linkages party establish with the masses and the elites define the depth.<sup>6</sup>

(Bizarro, Hicken, and Self 2017, 1)

Figure 1.4 shows the scores of Asian countries in the index. Again, most of the country cases in this volume obtained high index scores: India, South Korea, Taiwan, Malaysia, Mongolia, and Indonesia. Sri Lanka lies on the borderline, and the Philippines is the party institutionalization laggard. Figure 1.5 breaks down the index per subregion from 1986 to 2019. It can be seen that relatively strong parties have been present in the period of democratic transition in the three subregions in

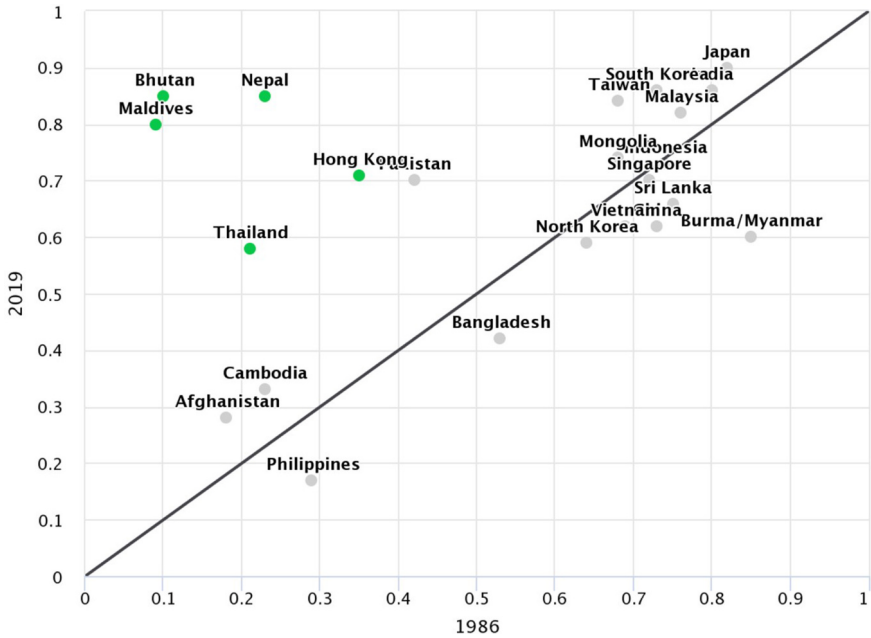


FIGURE 1.4 Party Institutionalization Index in Asia, 1986 and 2019.

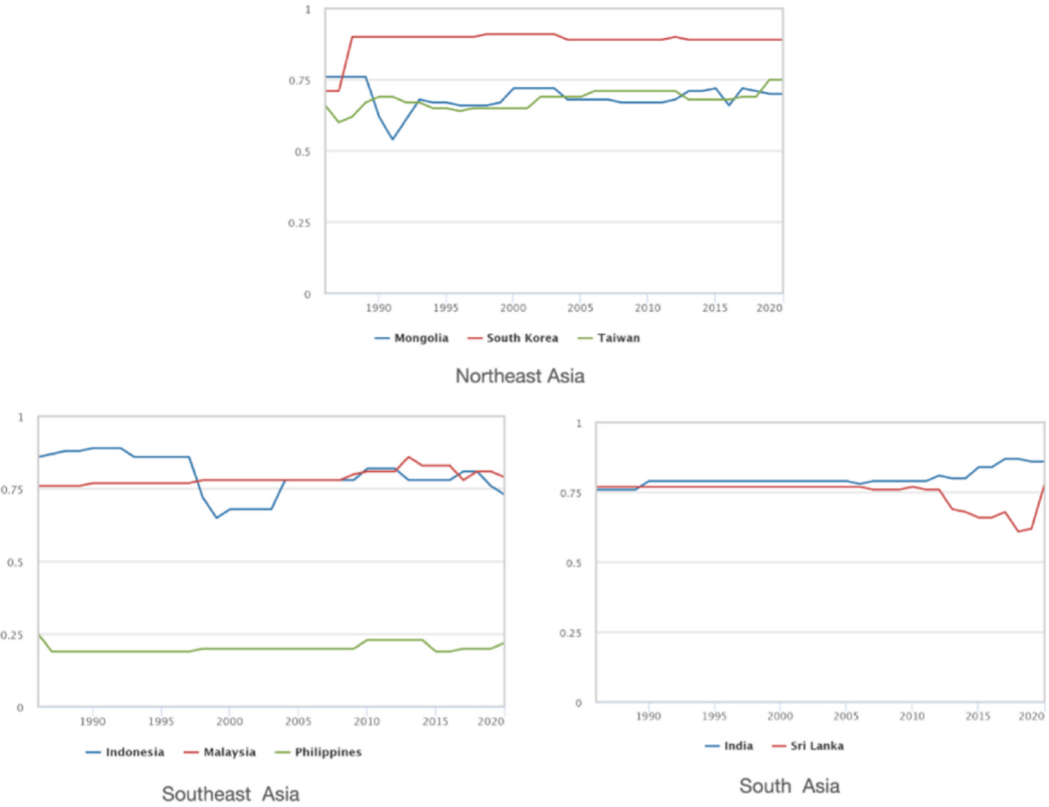
Source: Coppedge et al. (2021)

Asia. Ironically, the Philippines has the longest historical experience in party politics in Southeast Asia, with its first political party founded in 1900.<sup>7</sup> Unfortunately,

formal democracy in the Philippines has performed poorly since its inception and links this to the fact that the leading parties in the Philippines were not the fruit of a successful, broad-based, nationalist movement but an elite accommodation between large landowners and US colonial powers.

*(Bermeo and Yashar 2016, 196)*

This volume seeks to strengthen political parties in support of democracy in Asia by better understanding the nature, practices, and performance of parties in select countries in the region. To this end, it will address the following: (1) identify the major factors that influence the development (success, unsuccessful, survival, death) of political parties and determine how these factors affect democratization; (2) analyze the conditions for the success or failure of political parties in winning elections, running the government, and acting as agents of collective action; (3) compare and contrast how different party systems influence various levels of intra-party democracy; and (4) highlight the role of party-movement dynamics in deepening democracy in Asia. Ultimately, the volume intends to identify potential pathways for parties (and movements) to deepen and advance democratic consolidation in the region.



**FIGURE 1.5** Party Institutionalization Index by Asian Subregion, 1986 and 2019.

Source: Coppedge et al. (2021)

## Bringing Asian Parties Back In

This volume would like to “bring parties back in” to understanding democratic consolidation in Asia (See Table 1.1). Echoing Bermeo and Yashar (2016, 2–4), we view democratization in the region not as a product of class preferences shaped by a particular economic configuration but as a result of institutional bargains obtained by varying coalitions of movements and parties at particular historical junctures. Hence, these competing coalitions are not just molded by economic development and class configurations but, most notably, by historical, cultural, and ideational factors forged by the “institutional legacies of colonial and postcolonial antecedent regimes, the identity and ideational frames adopted by movement and party elites, and the interaction between domestic political concerns and the interests of foreign powers.”

The country cases in this volume will adopt a historical institutional approach to investigate the conjunctural moments which opened the political opportunity structure<sup>8</sup> for political parties to “democratize” politics in Asia. It will also map out path dependencies and investigate how the democratization process impacted the level of party institutionalization in each country. Moreover, it will identify key points of potential policy interventions to strengthen parties and increase their level of institutionalization.

Based on the works of Tilly (2006) and Tilly and Tarrow (2015) on contentious politics, each chapter will adopt a mechanism-process approach<sup>9</sup> and will be structured as follows: (1) describe the initial conditions by which cleavages are organized into competing coalitions of movements and parties within the institutional legacies of colonial and postcolonial antecedent regimes; (2) define the cultural and ideational frames adopted by party elites to mobilize political support; (3) determine the type of parties that emerged and the level of party system attained; (4) delineate the strategic challenges of coordination and competition among these parties; and, (5) trace the interaction between domestic politics and foreign interests.

**TABLE 1.1** Context and Conduct of Asian Political Parties

<i>Context</i>	<i>Conduct</i>
Initial Conditions	colonialism, anti-colonial struggle, postcolonial regimes, civil war and internal conflict, authoritarianism, democratization
Cultural and Ideational Frames	national liberation, freedom, equality, social justice, religious doctrine, reforms, good governance, democracy, the people, etc.
Party Organization	party type; level of party institutionalization intra-party democracy; factions
Strategic Challenges	coordination, competition, bargain
Multilevel Domains	domestic, international

*Source:* Adapted from Tilly and Tarrow 2015; Bermeo and Yashar 2016.

## Parties and Democracy: A Review

In his seminal *Parties and Party Systems*, Sartori (1976 [2005], 56) conceptualizes political parties as political organizations with official labels that have the capabilities to participate in elections with their nominated candidates. With a few exceptions in some dictatorships in the Gulf region, political parties have existed in every modern regime type, from Communist states to liberal democracies (Yanai 2007, 7). Political parties have also been described as the “linchpins of modern democracy” (Hicken and Kuhonta 2014, 1). In all eight Asian countries discussed in this volume, political parties have been entrenched in the modern political system, at least to some extent.

In theory, political parties are considered an indispensable and unique part of a representative regime. They are either “semi-state agencies” (Katz and Mair 1995, 16) or “part of civil society” (Varshney 2001, 378) because of their unique and critical functions that cannot be fulfilled by either government or non-government agencies. On the one hand, in addition to nominating candidates for public office, political parties play key roles in setting public policy on their platforms and mobilizing electoral support to win elections. Thus, notwithstanding the official separation from the state apparatus, only parties can continuously pursue goals directly linked to legitimizing and organizing the state among various organized groups. On the other hand, parties represent and materialize the interests of civil society through the policymaking process. Admittedly, other agents, notably mass movements and non-governmental organizations, have recently challenged this function of interest representation. Nevertheless, due to their inherent trait as principal agents for mobilizing a broader segment of the population to win elections, parties can transform individuals’ or specific groups’ interests into more aggregate and moderate forms of policy goals (Hershey 2006).

Real evidence, however, raises doubts about whether political parties’ essentiality in modern politics has been publicly acknowledged. Many studies have indicated that the growing public distrust of political parties can be found in some advanced democracies and most countries in the developing world (e.g., Carothers 2006, 4; Bovens and Wille 2008; Erber and Lau 1990; Ceka 2012; Lee 2009). More importantly, in the context of Asian politics, parties are discredited not because of some ‘irremediable’ factors, including their poor performance in making and implementing policy and short-term political deadlock caused by inter- or intra-party conflict but because of the collapse of public confidence in party politics per se. Such degradation can also be seen in academic stigmas, such as the term “villains” (Tomsa and Ufen 2013, 3) attached to Asian political parties.

How can we account for the low levels of public trust in political parties in Asia? Why have political parties in Asia’s developing countries not been able to function as effectively as political parties in advanced democracies are perceived to have? Can we find signs that counter the general trends in party politics in the eight Asian countries discussed in this volume? We search for answers to these questions in the following two sections by reviewing the literature on Asian party politics. This task



is useful for highlighting the importance of the primary goal of this volume, which is to gain a better understanding of political parties in Asia and to identify questions that country-specific studies followed by this chapter can address.

### ***Pre-modern Culture in the Shadow of Traditions***

In the last decade of the 20th century, debates on the compatibility of democratic systems with the principal cultural components in Asia, particularly Confucianism and Islam, enjoyed considerable scholarly attention (e.g., Huntington 1993; Zakaria 1994; Bell 2000; Berman 2003). While the debates ended in cautious optimism that preexisting values and cultural attributes in Asia are not inherently hostile to democratic principles (Hefner 2000; Ackerly 2005; Reilly 2007), as demonstrated below, it has been acknowledged that political parties in Asia behave differently from those in advanced democracies, mainly owing to the significant political clout of traditional norms and practices. In Western societies, economic modernization alongside considerable social transformation has produced issues that cut across the traditional social structures and eventually developed as political cleavages (Lipset and Rokkan 1967; Inglehart 1997).<sup>10</sup> However, in most Asian states, the introduction of modern political systems, including party politics, was preceded by, or in conjunction with, socioeconomic modernization (Heo and Stockton 2005; Ufen 2012). Even in economically advanced states such as South Korea and Taiwan, full-fledged cleavage-based political parties have been impeded by ideological conflicts with their Communist counterparts (Hermanns 2009, 214). Asian political parties, in turn, have been primarily driven by pre-modern cultural attributes in their societies.

Indeed, notwithstanding a broad range of social complexity, traditions exert significant degrees of influence on party politics in the eight Asian countries discussed in this volume. For example, in South Korea, where ethnic and cultural homogeneity in the precolonial period met severe limitations on ideological polarization, candidates and party leaders' personal attachments to the electorate in their hometowns or regional bases (i.e., regionalism) had until recently been the primary source of voter mobilization (Kang 2001; Kim, Choi, and Cho 2008). In a similar vein, Taiwanese parties are closely aligned with a division between the native and local culture (the Taiwanese identity) and Mainland Chinese culture (the Chinese identity) (Horowitz 1993, 24; Nachman 2018). In contrast, Indonesia, the epitome of ethnic and cultural diversity in Southeast Asia, parties are forced to serve both small- and large-scale traditional political interests that range from demands for recognition of village customary laws to regional identities caused by a Java/non-Java divide (Tan 2006; Henley and Davidson 2008; Aspinall 2013; Tomsa 2014).

Similar patterns are found in post-Communist countries in Asia. Scholars indicate that understanding clans, defined as organizations "which are informal networks of particularistic ties which can be based on actual or fictive kinship bonds" (Isaacs 2013, 1060), is imperative for analyzing the newly emerged party politics in Central Asia (Sneath 2010; Omelicheva 2015). Radchenko and Jargalsaikhan's

(2017) in-depth case study on the persistent factionalism in Mongolian politics shows that candidates within a party, who share the same family ties and regional roots, are pressured to compete with each other by providing various benefits in exchange for securing votes.

The studies above thus imply that cultural traditions, which are the key sources of informal institutions, exert greater influence on shaping behaviors of formal institutions such as political parties in Asia than those in other regions (Helmke and Levitsky 2004). With a few exceptions, political parties under informal institutions generally tend to become collusive to cope with high degrees of uncertainty (Slater and Simmons 2013). Moreover, as stated in the following section, the parties are often driven by pork-barrel politics based on clientelistic networks in the name of tradition.

### ***Clientelistic Machines and Rent-seeking Activities***

Political clientelism can broadly be defined as the practice of exchanging material benefits and personal favors (money, jobs, essential goods, social services, etc.) for political support (most notably votes and campaign funding) (Hicken 2011). Unlike other types of linkages, which are generally based on long-lasting networks that impersonally bind politicians and voters together, clientelism operates *only* when a supporter actually (or is perceived to) receives benefits that are contingent upon the support that they, in return, give to a politician (Berenschot and Aspinall 2020, 4).

Numerous scholarly works address clientelism's deep historical roots, which remain prevalent in Asian party politics (e.g., Aspinall and Hicken 2020; Berenschot and Aspinall 2020; DeVotta 2014; Nam 1995; Radchenko and Jargalsaikhan 2017; Teehanke 2013; Thachil 2011; Wang and Kurzman 2007). Nevertheless, the contours of clientelism have varied widely in the following two points. First, the extent to which parties rely on clientelistic strategies is uneven across countries and parties within a country. For example, among most political parties in Indonesia and the Philippines, voter mobilization relies heavily on "festivals of gift-giving" or "one-off exchanges of money and community gifts" between candidates and voters that are usually organized by nonpartisan brokers (Aspinall and Hicken 2020, 138, 144). Conversely, in South Korea and Taiwan, where the primary source of political support for authoritarian ruling parties originated from the provision of state resources to electorates, particularly those in rural areas (Hing 1990), an influx of grassroots activists and former pro-democracy movement leaders into both old and new parties weakened the parties' clientelistic networks by drawing support from voters with ideological commitment (Hellmann 2014). Furthermore, as shown by the Indonesian Prosperous Justice Party (PKS) and the Malaysian *Parti Islam Se-Malaysia* (PAS), which successfully built stable support bases through the promotion of Islamic piety with well-organized party programs (Hamayotsu 2013; Ufen 2020), clientelism disproportionately affects political parties within a country.

Second, not all political parties' clientelistic practices effectively mobilize support. In this regard, Berenschot and Aspinall's (2020) comparative study of clientelism

in multiple developing democracies is worth noting. According to them, Asian democracies, where clientelistic politics has been prevalent, can be classified into two types. One type is party-centered patronage democracy, in which parties, especially those in power, are granted access to public resources and distributed to their identified supporters (e.g., India and Malaysia). The other involves community-centered patronage democracy, in which nonparty actors or networks control the resources (e.g., Indonesia and the Philippines). Because of their access to avenues that ensure the clients' obedience, parties in the former type of democracy more effectively mobilize voters than those in the latter, which are forced to rely on one-time (or intermittent) exchanges of goods (Berenschot and Aspinall 2020, 11–12). Similarly, Wang and Kurzman's (2007) analysis of the 1993 Taiwanese county elections finds that simple clientelistic strategies such as vote-buying cannot fully secure the clients' loyalty, as shown when nearly half of voters who "sold" their votes to the then ruling Kuomintang changed their minds on election day.

Admittedly, not all clientelistic practices are detrimental to political development. When parties appear to fill the gap in social security and service provisions left by a lack of state capacity, clientelism plays a vital role in garnering providers' credibility and stable grassroots bases (e.g., Jha, Rao, and Woolcock 2007; Hamayotsu 2011; Thachil 2011). Clientelism, however, generally produces negative consequences for representative politics: a decline in democratic accountability by preventing voters from punishing wealthy politicians for poor performance (Slater 2004; Lupu and Riedl 2012). Furthermore, if clientelistic exchanges emerge exclusively along ethnic or religious lines, as demonstrated by post-independence Sri Lankan politics, parties become a significant source of violent conflict (DeVotta 2014).

### ***Weak Institutionalization and Democratic Commitment***

The last common feature discussed by the literature on Asian political parties is that they have remained weakly institutionalized since the beginning of modern politics. Party institutionalization refers to "the process by which the party becomes established in terms both of integrated patterns of behavior and of attitudes, or culture" (Randall and Svåsand 2002, 12). Based on this definition, Randall and Svåsand suggest a model to measure party institutionalization, consisting of four indicators: systemness, value infusion, decisional autonomy, and reification. A political party, in turn, is weakly institutionalized when it (a) mobilizes political support using personal appeal rather than clear ideological platforms; (b) does not affiliate with a broader social movement; (c) relies on external material and human resources; and (d) does not have effective means of interaction or historical roots (Tomsa 2008, 17–28). Using the indicators mentioned above, many works point to the extent and to which parties across Asian countries are weakly institutionalized, as well as the reasons why (e.g., Slater 2003; Enyedi 2006; Ufen 2008; DeVotta 2014; Fionna and Njoto-Feillard 2015; Shin 2020; Teehankee and Calimbahin 2020).

Alongside the lack of financial autonomy, which triggers clientelism, personalism is the primary factor that negatively affects party institutionalization. Except

for the former British colonies, where the early development of representative politics produced strong and longstanding nationalist parties, such as the Indian National Congress (INC), the United National Party (UNP) in Sri Lanka, and the United Malay National Organization (UMNO) in Malaysia, Asian political parties were originally formed to advance political ambitions of national elites. As a result, as shown by the founding elections in South Korea and Indonesia, in which 48 and 29 parties participated, respectively, Asian countries had polarized and fragmented party systems from the beginning. The role of authoritarian rulers around the region, such as Ferdinand Marcos of the Philippines, Suharto of Indonesia, Chiang Kai-shek of Taiwan, and Park Jung Hee of South Korea, further rendered political parties as mere electoral machines that supported the regime. Such historical legacies of personalism continue to influence post-authoritarian party politics by inducing hierarchical power dynamics, widespread factional conflict, and party-switching (Morris 1996; Hicken 2014; Omelicheva 2015; Yu 2017).

To be sure, variations in the degree of party institutionalization can be seen, especially because some Asian parties have either strong roots in society or affiliations with social organizations. Major parties in India are exemplary. Csaba Nikolényi (2014) shows that they exhibit great longevity and have strong organizational supporters, notably the Bharatiya Janata Party's World Hindu Council and National Volunteer Organization. Similarly, some Indonesian parties, such as Golongan Karya (Golkar) and PKS, are more institutionalized than others because they have either a more extended history (Tomsa 2008) or more professionalized and effective party infrastructures (Tan 2014). Taiwanese political parties also have become institutionalized as they attach themselves to civil society more than personalism (Sheng and Liao 2017).

More broadly, scholarly works suggest that low levels of party institutionalization in Asia imply that parties are generally not fully committed to democracy, internally and externally. On the one hand, they have not fully adopted intra-party democracy or "a wide range of methods for including party members in intra-party deliberation and decision-making" (Scarrow 2005, 3). Intra-party democracy is achieved through an inclusive and decentralized decision-making process, most notably the candidate selection process and membership structure (Croissant and Chambers 2010, 196–97). However, political parties in Asian countries generally fall short of this standard because key party decisions are made behind the scenes or by closed-door bargaining among a small number of cadres (see, e.g., Brass 1994, 141–47; Mietzner 2008; Hermanns 2009, 219; Sneath 2010, 258; Isaacs 2013, 1070–73). On the other hand, especially in plural societies, such as India, Sri Lanka, and Indonesia, scholars have noted that some parties affiliated with specific ethnic or religious groups either act as what Paul Brass (1997) calls "fire tenders" who keep aggravating communal conflicts to mobilize their support or promote intolerance toward minorities (see also DeVotta 2014 and Menchik 2016). The literature thus implies that not all dynamics of party politics contribute to democratic progress.

## Interrogating the Role of Political Parties in “Asian Democracies Against the Odds”

In the following subsection, we develop our framework for understanding the effect of political parties on Asian democracies. The eight Asian countries discussed in this volume are representatives of democracies against the odds. They are plagued by various problems, such as widening socioeconomic gaps, the rise of extremist/separatist groups, and economic decline. These poor performances necessitate some nostalgic sentiments for the “good old days” when authoritarian predecessors achieved “miracles” at the cost of democratic values. Democracy in these countries today has nevertheless taken root, at least institutionally. We thus seek to better understand this puzzling democratic residency in Asia, or Asian democracies against the odds, by drawing close attention to the functions and roles of political parties.

The unit of analysis for each chapter in this volume is individual parties in a single country. In addition, notwithstanding different contexts across countries, key independent variables generally cover three principal dimensions: the capacity to mobilize, organizational coherence, and ideological inclusiveness of political parties. By addressing the dimensions mentioned above, the studies in this project thus aim to explain the significance of political parties in unexpectedly enduring democracies in Asia. The eight countries included in our project vary considerably in terms of levels of democratic experience.

Given the nature of this volume, the analytic framework is mainly based on qualitative case study methods based on the examination of in-depth causal mechanisms (George and Bennett 2005). We attempt to trace certain political events or outcomes of contentious collective actions among actors, which are conditioned by historical and structural factors, including colonial legacies, sociopolitical cleavages, and critical junctures. In addition, we allow the two methodological possibilities: First, as pivotal actors in formal institutions, political parties can contribute to shaping outcomes that affect long-term behavioral patterns of the future (Capoccia and Kelemen 2007, 347). In this regard, Bermeo and Yashar (2016, 23) show that having at least one party capable of coordinating and organizing social movements is indispensable for maintaining democracy in developing countries. Second, political parties are agents that can adapt their strategic actions by responding to environmental changes and external stimuli (Dodd 2018). Including a party’s learning ability in the analytical tool may be useful for understanding interesting recent phenomena that imply a behavioral convergence of political parties within a country and across countries in Asia (e.g., Ufen 2006; Yang 2012).

### The Chapters Ahead

The succeeding chapters will offer country case studies that will delineate the nature, practices, and performance of parties in relation to their role in democratization and in democratizing Asia. In his chapter on the role of pro-democracy parties in the growing democratic resilience in South Korea, Jung Hoon Park argues that a

family of pro-democracy parties that stemmed from the New Korea Democratic Party (NKDP) and has customarily retained the “*minjoo*” (democracy) label plays a vital role in promoting and sustaining contemporary democracy in South Korea. The NKDP’s formation and surprisingly good performance in the 1985 legislative election, which was held amid severe authoritarian repression, provided considerable momentum for building a well-institutionalized anti-government front that ultimately achieved a political opening in 1987. Although factional infighting and splits resulted in the NKDP’s demise, the successor *minjoo* parties have contributed to robust growth in democratic stability by institutionally curtailing authoritarian legacies and enhancing transparency in state agencies’ decision-making. More importantly, as indicated by the recent peaceful power transition following the presidential impeachment in 2016–17, politicians from former and current *minjoo* parties were crucial to preventing the political crisis from becoming a larger threat to the existing democratic system.

Similarly, democracy has proven to be resilient in Taiwan, as reflected in the stability of its political parties and party system, which are remarkably outstanding compared to its democratic counterparts in Northeast Asia, such as South Korea and Japan. Tommy Chung-yin Kwan traces this stability to the “balance of power” of the Kuomintang (Nationalist Party, KMT) and Democratic Progressive Party (DPP). The two largest parties have taken turns winning the presidency every two terms (or eight years) since the 21st century. Besides the two dominating parties, small parties fight for the tiny room left behind by the KMT and DPP. The KMT and DPP represent the major social cleavage in Taiwan, which is the issue of competing for national identities and cross-strait relations. Minor parties also divide themselves along the line. While the “Pan-Blue” camp, led by the KMT, supports reunification with mainland China, the “Pan-Green” camp, led by the DPP, advocates securing an independent Taiwan. Despite the stability of the party system, the continuously growing Taiwanese identity on the Island has not only helped the Pan-Green camp to outperform the Pan-Blue camp but has also posed a serious threat to the Pan-Blue parties, for instance, pushing the KMT to reform and change its party stance in terms of national identity.

Mongolia has been a curious case of democratization as the structural factors identified in the literature to support the adoption of democratic governance have been lacking since the socialist regime fell in the country in 1990. Delgerjargal Uvsh’s chapter examines the evolution of Mongolia’s main political parties in the past three decades and posits that parties have emerged as a key institutional mechanism that played a crucial role in facilitating democratic transition and sustaining consolidation. Parties facilitated democratic transition and consolidation in Mongolia by providing institutional mechanisms to coordinate and aggregate preferences, offer alternative visions and policies to voters, and demand accountability of different institutions, especially in the early years of transition. However, the organizational and normative shortcomings and internal struggles that Mongolia’s political parties, especially its two main parties, have been changing the landscape of political competition and may threaten democracy in the future.

On the other hand, Noory Okthariza's chapter asserts that the party system's stability and institutionalization help maintain Indonesia's status as an electoral democracy, thus saving the country from getting into the deeper abyss of democratic regression. Two decades after its democratization, the party system in Indonesia has been undergoing increasing institutionalization and stability. These can be seen in a number of factors, such as patterns of parties' votes, medium-term stability of votes, electoral volatility, and changes in parties' ideological positions. This institutionalization and stability ensure that regardless of the country, there has been experiencing a declining trend concerning its democratic quality. Drawing from the results of five democratic elections from 1999 to 2019, this article finds that these outcomes have been possible given the specific structuring mechanism played by the electoral rules. While the electoral rules have been consistently raising the standard barriers to entry for new players, the timing of issuance and the expected outcomes of those rules reinforced the current system.

In Malaysia, the historic defeat of the long-ruling UMNO in the 2018 General Election was viewed as an initial step toward democratization. Since its independence, the dominant party has governed Malaysia as an electoral authoritarian state for six decades. However, the fall of the *Pakatan Harapan* (Alliance of Hope, PH) government to a political coup after only 22 months in power has dampened the initial enthusiasm toward the democratizing prospects of Malaysian politics. The conservative faction in the PH orchestrated the coup, which got full support from opposition parties led by UMNO. The new ruling coalition, known as the *Perikatan Nasional* (National Alliance, PN), was heavily dominated by Malay-Muslim leaders, composing 90 percent of overall MPs in the Parliament and its Cabinet.

Nevertheless, PN only has a razor-thin majority in the legislature, which motivated it to use the state apparatuses to cling to power arbitrarily. In the 15th General Elections held in November 19, 2022, PH won the most number of seats with 81, but faced a hung parliament with no coalition gaining a simple majority. Soon after, long-time opposition leader Anwar Ibrahim successfully formed a "unity government" with the UMNO-led Barisan Nasional and newfound allies in Sabah and Sarawak. Muhamad M.N. Nadzri observes in his chapter that despite the apparent setback brought about by the recent democratization events, the party system's institutionalization is progressing reasonably well. Despite the recent party-hopping activities, which only involved less than 14 percent of overall MPs, the current political regrouping in Malaysia – now polarized between PN and PH – has further increased the level of political competition in Malaysia and does not differ much from the 2018 popular vote.

The persistence of democracy in the Philippines despite the obstinate level of economic inequality, weak political institutions, and continuing cycles of legitimization crises highlight the puzzle of poor democracies against the odds in Asia. Since the return of electoral democracy in 1986, party politics has yet to fully consolidate and emerge as a viable democratic practice for social and political change in the Philippines. Through the years, parties have remained weak and persistently dominated by powerful political dynasties. Looking at the Philippine case, Arjan Aguirre seeks to understand how party-movement interactions—their emergence, dynamics, contexts, histories, and outcomes—shaped the trajectory or set the pace

of democratization in the past three decades: from the return of democracy in 1986 up to the populist resurgence in 2016. Using contemporary scholarship on party politics and contentious politics, with the investigation of recent political events and a reading of these occurrences, he argues that this interaction in Philippine politics comes from above—to defend and from below—to deepen the democratic gains.

V. Bijukumar’s chapter highlights the dynamics between ethno-regional and national parties in Northeast India. The country’s diverse regions, ethnic and regional aspirations provide the potential means for political mobilization as parties mobilize people based on language, caste, and ethnic divisions. These cleavages also demand representation in the power structures through parties. The chapter focuses on the growth and decline of the *Asom Gana Parishad* (AGP), an ethno-regional party that emerged from a movement in the state of Assam. For three decades, the party remained the core political force in the state and, on some occasions, in national politics invoking its ideology of ethno-regionalism. While ethno-regional parties such as the AGP open a new avenue for political participation by raising issues ignored by the national parties, the national parties also adapt their platform and strategies to deflect the challenge of ethno-regional parties. Hence, the AGP gradually lost its mass electoral base, initially to the once-dominant Congress Party, then currently to the Hindu nationalist *Bharatiya Janata Party* (BJP).

The fluidity of party competition and its effects on electoral democracy are explored in Pradeep Peiris’ chapter on the recent presidential and parliamentary elections in Sri Lanka. He notes that the election of former defense secretary Gotabaya Rajapaksa to the presidency in 2019 and a number of political outsiders into Parliament in 2020 can be seen as the erosion of the strength of traditional political parties. Since independence, the two main political parties that ruled the country either independently or as parts of coalition governments – the UNP and the Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP) – have almost been decimated in the 2020 Parliamentary election. Meanwhile, the two new political fronts – *Sri Lanka Podujana Peramuna* (SLPP) and *Samagi Jana Balawegaya* (SJB), have emerged as the new formidable political forces in the country. However, whether these party shifts will strengthen or erode democracy remains to be seen. Amidst a burgeoning economic crisis, non-violent protests led to the resignation and exile of President Gotabaya Rajapaksa in 2022.

The country cases presented in this volume offer a second look at Asian political parties. Each chapter demonstrates the contingent link between democratic consolidation and party institutionalization in Asia’s developing democracies. By bringing Asian parties back in, this volume hopes to identify potential pathways to deepening democratization in the region.

## Notes

- 1 Democracy, of course, is a “contested” concept that has elicited intense academic debates on its definition, substance, and form. This volume adopts the multidimensional approach of the Varieties of Democracy (V-dem) project that focus on five key principles or traditions that offer distinctive approaches to defining democracy—electoral, liberal, participatory, deliberative, and egalitarian (Lindberg et al. 2014).



- 2 Lührmann, Tannenbergh, and Lindberg (2018) classifies political regime into a “democracy” where there are *de facto* free and fair, multiparty elections, and Dahl’s institutional prerequisites are minimally fulfilled; and, an “autocracy” where there is no *de facto* free and fair, multiparty elections, or Dahl’s institutional prerequisites are minimally fulfilled. Democracies are further classified into “electoral democracy” where the rule of law, or liberal principles are not satisfied; and, “liberal democracy” where the rule of law, or liberal principles are satisfied. Autocracies are also sub classified into “closed autocracy” where there are no multiparty elections for the chief executive and the legislature; and “electoral autocracy” where there is *de jure* multiparty elections for the chief executive and the legislature. They utilize the Varieties of Democracy (V-Dem) Liberal Democracy Index which captures both liberal and electoral aspects of democracy based 71 indicators that include the Liberal Component Index (LCI) and the Electoral Democracy Index (EDI).
- 3 Both countries became democratic republics after Western colonial rule. The Philippines regained its independence from American colonial rule in 1946, followed by India, which reclaimed its sovereignty from British colonial rule in 1947. While it may seem odd to describe these two countries as democratizing, this is because both countries have undergone cycles of autocratization and democratization. Both countries experienced periods of authoritarian rule with the dictatorship of President Ferdinand Marcos from 1972 to 1986; and the state of emergency that granted Prime Minister Indira Gandhi the power to rule by decree from 1975 to 1977. As Nikolenyi (2014, 189) asserts, “the Indian case shows that the type of authoritarianism and specifically the type of authoritarian party that is in power make an important difference for the future institutionalization of the party system. Similarly, to what we find in the Philippines under the Marcos regime, the Indira Gandhi episode highlights that authoritarian interruption may not promote future party system institutionalization unless it is defined by the incumbency of an institutionally strong authoritarian party.”
- 4 As Tudor and Slater (2016, 28) observed, “India and Indonesia are the two largest and unlikeliest democracies in the postcolonial world. Southern Asia’s two greatest demographic behemoths have both long been riddled with almost every imaginable hypothesized malady for democratic development, such as severe poverty and inequality, extreme ethnic heterogeneity, violent separatist movements, and putatively ‘undemocratic’ dominant religions. Despite these shared handicaps, India has remained a democracy nearly without interruption since independence, while Indonesia has surprisingly emerged as the steadiest and least endangered democracy in Southeast Asia over the last fifteen years.”
- 5 The Additive Polyarchy Index (API) is one of the measures developed by the Varieties of Democracies (V-Dem). V-Dem produces the largest global dataset on democracy with some 27 million data points for 202 countries from 1789 to 2018. Involving over 3,000 scholars and other country experts, V-Dem measures hundreds of different attributes of democracy. The API is derived from the average of the scores for Dahl’s five indices, namely: freedom of association, clean elections, freedom of expression, elected officials, and suffrage. See Teorell et al. 2016.
- 6 The index is composed of the following variables: “Party Organizations” asks how many of the parties in a country have permanent organizations, explicitly mentioning party personnel that carry out party activities outside of elections. “Party Branches” a similar question, focusing on a different type of political organization: local branches. It asks how many of the parties have permanent local branches, additional evidence of the materiality of the party organization. Those two variables are highly correlated with a third, “Distinct platforms”, that asked coders to provide information on how many of the parties in the system have publicly disseminated and distinct platforms. The structure of their answers is similar, varying from “none of the parties” to “all the parties”.
- 7 The first political party to be organized in the Philippines, the Partido Federal (Federal Party), was established in 1900 by Filipino politicians to facilitate clientelistic relations with their American patrons (Teehankee 2020).

- 8 Historical institutionalism aims “to demonstrate the existence and effect of historical legacies in the political processes and institutions of the present [underscoring the view that] history matters; to understand the present is to understand how it has evolved from the past and to trace the legacies of that evolution (Hay 2002, 142–143).” Political opportunity structure refers to “features of regimes and institutions (e.g., splits in the ruling class) that facilitate or inhibit a political actor’s collective action (Tilly and Tarrow 2015, 257).” Hellmann (2011) was among the first to apply historical institutionalism to the understanding the development of political parties in new democracies four East Asian democracies, namely South Korea, Taiwan, Indonesia, and the Philippines. He argues that both structural conditions, such as colonial legacies and socio-economic inequalities and actor-related factors, such as political rivalries among key political leaders, played a key role in defining the main election strategies in Asian societies.
- 9 Tilly and Tarrow (2015, 236) defined “contentious politics” as “interactions in which actors make claims that bear on someone else’s interests, leading to coordinating efforts on behalf of shared interests or programs, in which governments are as targets, the objects of claims, or third parties.” They also distinguished “mechanisms” which pertain to “events that produce the same immediate effects over a wide range of circumstances;” and, “processes” which refer to “combinations and sequences of mechanisms that produce some specified outcome.”
- 10 According to Römmele (1999, 7), cleavage can be defined as a “long-term structural conflict that gives rise to opposing positions that competing political organizations represent.”

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# 2

## IN THE NAME OF *MINJOO*

### Roles of Pro-Democracy Parties in Democratic Transition and Progress in South Korea

*Jung Hoon Park*

#### **Introduction**

Academic evaluation of democratization in South Korea<sup>1</sup> can be characterized as a contention among three sets of theories that have widely different views on the notable progress of democratic institutions. As indicated by the trends of indicators of democracy in Table 2.1, no major democratic setback or backsliding has occurred in post-authoritarian South Korea under the directly elected presidencies. Furthermore, South Korean democracy has proven resilient to external shocks, notably the financial crisis in 1998. This sturdiness has impressed some researchers, as they confidently classify the Korean political system as a consolidated or “miraculous” democracy (for example, C. Hahm 2008; S. D. Hahm, Jung, and Kim 2013). On the opposite end, others argue that South Korean democracy has been malfunctioning from the beginning due to its defects, such as the exclusion of the laboring class from political decision-making and hurdles to expand civil liberties (for example, Choi 2010; Sohn 2011; Haggard and You 2015). Between the two camps, rather than providing clear definitions and judgment, others highlight the unevenness of democratization in South Korea (for example, Heo and Roehrig 2010; S. Kim 2012; J. Kim 2018).

Such difference, however, surprisingly disappears when it comes to expressing dissatisfaction toward political parties’ role in democratic progress in South Korea. Almost all the relevant literature indicates that South Korean political parties have not fully functioned as essential institutional infrastructure for the country’s democratic transition and consolidation. In terms of explaining the democratic transition in South Korea, which generally refers to the process in which President Chun Doo-Hwan’s consent to the popular demands for the constitutional amendment and the resumption of civilian government in 1987, political parties have received little scholarly attention compared to the “exogenous” factors, notably a growing

**TABLE 2.1** Trends in Democratic Indicators of South Korea by Presidency (1972–Present)

	<i>CH</i> <i>Park</i>	<i>DH</i> <i>Chun</i>	<i>TW</i> <i>Roh</i>	<i>YS</i> <i>Kim</i>	<i>DJ</i> <i>Kim</i>	<i>MH</i> <i>Roh</i>	<i>MB</i> <i>Lee</i>	<i>KH</i> <i>Park</i>	<i>JJ</i> <i>Moon</i>
	<i>Indirectly elected</i>		<i>Directly elected</i>						
Freedom House (PR)	4.63	4.57	2	2	2	1.20	1	2	2
Freedom House (CL)	5.50	5.14	3	2	2	2	2	2	2
Polity V (polity2)	-8.13	-4.63	6	6	8	8	8	8	8
Polity V (polcomp)	1.88	2.86	8	8	9	9	9	9	9
V-Dem (Electoral Democracy)	0.23	0.28	0.67	0.75	0.86	0.86	0.77	0.71	0.85
V-Dem (Liberal Democracy)	0.11	0.14	0.51	0.64	0.78	0.78	0.66	0.60	0.78

Sources: Freedom House (2020); Marshall and Gurr (2020); Coppedge et al. (2020).

middle class alongside economic modernization and vibrant mobilization of civil society. These exogenous theories have also emphasized the negative implications of party politics for Korean democracy by indicating the persistence of low institutionalization of the party system plagued by elitism and clientelism until the present day. Indeed, regardless of views on Korean politics, most observers have regarded the country's political parties as a “major obstacle to democratic consolidation” (Im 2000, 32) (Table 2.1).

This chapter proposes a new framework for a better understanding of the roles of political parties in the democratic trajectory of South Korea under the assumption that the existing works built on a critique of formal institutions may lead to an overestimation of the influence of nonpolitical factors on democratic change and progress. At the beginning of the democratic transition, political parties are “the key agents that can mobilize salient regime preferences across elite and mass lines and focus them in a democratic direction” (Bermeo and Yashar 2016, 20). Their significance becomes more visible when elections are set and represent a further step toward the country's democratization (Howard and Roessler 2006). As discussed in greater detail below, the South Korean experience was not exceptional: in the 1985 legislative election, the newly formed New Korea Democratic Party (*Sinhan Minjoo-dang*, NKDP), which campaigned for ending Chun's authoritarian rule, surprisingly emerged as the second largest party by winning about 30 percent of the vote. The NKDP's good performance decisively motivated civil society activists and the party cadres to mobilize themselves as a united front against the government. After the transition, the successor parties of NKDP, which had usually included the

word *minjoo* (democracy or democratic in Korean), also played a role in solidifying democratic principles through reform policies.

The chapter also argues that the *minjoo* parties' contribution is limited to the specific component of democratic consolidation and falls short of moving Korean politics beyond the level of electoral democracy. These parties have effectively prevented the democratic rules of the game or contestation from the reactionaries' maneuverings or the "democratic crises." The successful impeachment of President Park Geun-Hye in 2016, whose governance was primarily driven by her unelected confidantes, is exemplary. However, they have not been more capable than other parties in overcoming the chronic problems of the Korean party system, namely low levels of institutionalization caused by rampant party switching, party mergers, and party splits. Indeed, these conditions render Korean politicians far less accountable than those in advanced democracies, impeding further democratic development.

The remainder of this chapter proceeds as follows. In the next section, a brief review of the literature on political parties in emerging democracies, including South Korea, will lay out an analytic framework that allows us to assess the role and limit of the *minjoo* parties in the country's democratic transition and completion. The following three sections are mainly based on applying the framework to major political events in the three periods of contemporary Korea since the formation of the NKDP. The final section presents the chapter's findings and discusses their general implications for political parties and emerging democracies.

## **Political Parties as a Key Agent of "Democracies against the Odds": Theoretical Considerations**

At best, political parties are usually given secondary importance in understanding democratic transitions and consolidations. Regarding democratic transitions, which begin with splits within authoritarian ruling elites, considerable scholarly attention has been paid to explore whether and how civil society represented by social movements and civil associations mobilizes popular demands and pressures for change of the status quo. In contrast, political parties are assumed to "play a minor role in such mobilizations and pressures" because they are "frequently in too great a disarray, too divided, or too busy choosing their leadership, to accomplish such a task" (O'Donnell and Schmitter 1986, 57). Convoking (founding) elections, in which regime elites and their oppositions compete with each other for votes, thus, is virtually the only way to make political parties visible in the process of democratic transition (Mainwaring 1989). Similarly, alongside the rise of skepticism about their utility to represent popular political interests in polities (e.g., Whiteley 2011), political parties have been estimated to be less influential on stability and consolidation of democracy than other factors, notably socioeconomic conditions (Svolik 2008; Alemán and Yang 2011). Such a lack of relevance of political parties to democratic development is more salient in the "third-wave" democracies, where parties are less capable of building strong roots in society than those in the earlier cases of democratization (Mainwaring and Zoco 2007).

Since the democratic transformation of the South Korean political system in 1987, parties have rarely been described as protagonists in the country's democratic transition and consolidation. For example, Choi Jang-Jip (2010, 118) defines South Korea's experience as a "democratization by movement" based mainly on the student- and labor-led struggles against the authoritarian regime in the field. On the contrary, according to him, the "loyal" opposition parties to the country's authoritarian rulers could not challenge the regime, hence were functionally replaced by the campus (Choi 2010, 119–20). Furthermore, in the light of institutionalization, which can be generally referred to as "the process by which organizations and procedures acquire value and stability" (Huntington 1968, 12), numerous studies have criticized parties and party systems for their uninstitutionalized features and role as impediments in consolidating democracy in South Korea (e.g., Hermanns 2009; Hellmann 2011, chap. 2; K. Y. Shin 2012; J. Kim 2018). In this regard, Heo and Stockton (2005, 686) claim as follows:

Democratization has in fact altered electoral performance and the party system in Korea in many ways, but up to now it appears often to have done so to the detriment of system stability. ... Parties have exhibited slightly shorter lifespans compared to the old order, and personalism continues to retard the institutionalization of parties. One key aspect that has not changed, related to personalism, is the distribution of votes amongst the three main parties in multiparty elections. Regional voting patterns have remained mostly dominated by the home personality.

However, the conventional explanations of political parties and democratic transition and progress in developing democracies, including South Korea, are too simplistic to consider the multiple functions of political parties. As an essential part of "political society" (Linz and Stepan 1996, 8), political parties are key mobilization agents cooperating with a social movement. Regarding this point, Bermeo and Yashar (2016, 22–23) classify the following three main functions of parties in the democratic transition: translating political interests into actions for authoritarian regime change, participating in elections, and building continued public support for democratic procedures. In this vein, several studies have shown that opposition forces produced a breakthrough not by mobilizing the pro-democracy movement but by organizing powerful electoral coalitions or simply participating in authoritarian elections (Howard and Roessler 2006; Morgenbesser and Pepinsky 2019). Furthermore, parties in post-transition democracies are essential to fulfill several primary conditions to make democracy stable and thrive (Randall and Svåsand 2002). In turn, vibrant party politics has been regarded as a good explanation of the rise of "democracies against the odds," representing developing countries where their democratic systems have been unexpectedly stable, albeit with low socio-economic performances (Bermeo and Yashar 2016, 4–9).

It should be noted that capacities for exercising the abovementioned party functions vary highly across parties and democratization timespan. First, not all political

parties in authoritarian and post-authoritarian regimes are equally committed to mobilizing the public to promote democratic principles. For example, as per the ARENA/PDS (1971–85) in Brazil, the Golkar (1964–present) in Indonesia, and the Democratic Justice Party in South Korea (1981–90), parties created to either support the current authoritarian regimes or inherit authoritarian legacies, as such, are expected to be far less capable of promoting the country’s democracy than other parties. Conversely, anti-system parties, such as radical leftists and Islamists, which support neither authoritarianism nor democracy, hardly contribute to legitimizing and consolidating the democratic system even if they participate in elections. We can thus assume that parties of democratizers, who were usually moderates in the political opposition to authoritarian rule, are more capable of exercising functions necessary to democratic progress than other types of parties (Bermeo and Yashar 2016, 17).

Second, not all beneficial functions can be exercised simultaneously. As Randall and Svåsand (2002, 4) indicate, there is a range of levels among parties’ potential functions for democracy. Compared to others, functions like representation and aggregation of political demands of individuals or groups through developing platforms and programs, which are relevant to building stable patterns of democratic contestation or, in other words, “the only game in town,” can be achieved within a relatively short period. In contrast, some other functions improving democratic accountability, including building stable voter alignments propelled by strong partisan attachments and controlling over administration through policymaking, require at least several election cycles to be accomplished. In turn, even being formed by enthusiastic democratizers, a party tends not to fulfill the functions of democratic accountability if it is exposed to the high likelihood of party merger, split, and relabeling.

Based on these theoretical discussions, this chapter now takes a slightly different approach to understanding the role of political parties in democracy in South Korea. Previous studies tacitly assume that levels of party institutionalization in South Korea have remained low since democratization. However, as indicated by 2.2, at least on the dimension of interparty competition manifested in the effective number of parties (ENP), and volatility, South Korean political parties have been under an increasingly institutionalized party system. Especially in addition to the downward trend, electoral volatility in post-authoritarian South Korea is on average 25.5, which is higher than developed democracies (10.7), but lower than Eastern Europe (43.6), Latin America (26.4), and Asia (25.6) (Mainwaring, Gervasoni, and

**TABLE 2.2** Effective Number of Parties and Electoral Volatility in South Korea (1992–2020)

	1992	1996	2000	2004	2008	2012	2016	2020	Average
ENP(V)	3.6	4.2	3.3	3.2	3.8	3.0	3.6	3.1	3.5
ENP(S)	2.7	3.1	2.4	2.4	2.9	2.3	2.9	2.1	2.6
Volatility	35.1	31.3	20.3	49.0	19.6	11.1	16.1	21.6	25.5

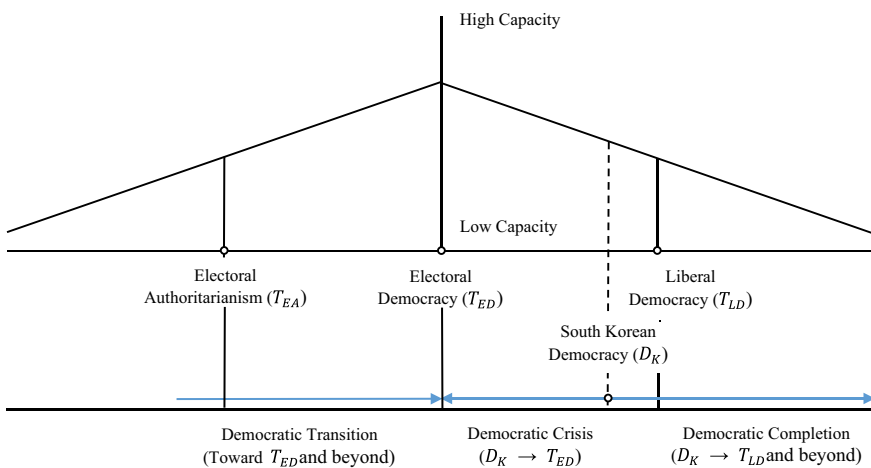
Source: Author’s own calculations using data from National Election Committee and Roh and Lee (2019, 22).

Note: ENP(V) and ENP(S) refer to the effective number of parties in votes and seats.

España-Nájera 2017). Considering that party and party system institutionalization are mutually reinforcing (Ufen 2008), it can be argued that parties in South Korea have institutionalized in the sense of the functions of democratic competition or the way of competing with each other through the electoral process.

Nevertheless, regarding the functions of democratic accountability, or the way of electorally punishing and rewarding parties (and politicians) according to their performance, South Korean parties remained inchoate and far less committed to being accountable and responsive to citizens than those in developed and even some other developing democracies. Parties are frequently formed, dissolved, and relabeled by electoral calculations, they count on leaders' personal appeal and regional sentiment for mobilizing votes, and their policy programs are mere collections of populist solutions to salient issues during elections. Thus, voters have difficulty identifying who deserves blame or credit for particular policy outcomes in the elections. Such a lack of accountability plays a vital role in the growing deep-seated public distrust of parties: the proportion of Koreans expressing trust in political parties plummeted from 39 percent in 1996 to 9.4 percent in 2011 (Yun 2018, 56).

This chapter assumes that Korean parties have experienced “commitment discrepancy,” which refers to the gap between commitment to democratic contestation and accountability. In particular, this gap becomes large when grouped here into a *minjoo* (democracy or democratic in Korean) party family. As discussed in great detail below, the *minjoo* parties have successfully translated their strong commitment to democratic contestation, notably free and fair elections, into capacities to build and protect institutional settings. Their capacity, thus, is high when the country experiences either transition to electoral democracy, the first stage of democratization, or regression to the minimum threshold of electoral democracy ( $T_{ED}$  in Figure 2.1), which I refer to as a democratic crisis. However, due to their lack



**FIGURE 2.1** Schematic Representation of the Role of *Minjoo* Parties in Democratic Progress in Korea.

of capacity to exercise functions related to democratic accountability, the role of the *minjoo* parties in South Korea's democratic completion, which refers to further democratic progress toward liberal democracy and beyond, is greatly limited. Figure 2.1 illustrates the analytic framework for the varying capacities of the *minjoo* parties to exercise their functions following the stages of South Korean democracy.

In the following sections, with attention to the historical details, the chapter seeks to uncover the roles and limits of the *minjoo* parties primarily originated from the New Korean Democratic Party (see Appendix B) on the democratic transition and progress in South Korea.

## The NKDP and Its Role in Democratic Transition

### *Party System Reshaping under Chun's Authoritarian Rule: Historical Background*

The autocratic *Yushin* regime led by President Park Chung-Hee, who seized power in 1961 through a military coup, was surprisingly ended by Park's assassination in October 1979.

Shortly after the unexpected end of the Park dictatorship, the oppositional forces consisted of Kim Young-Sam (YS)'s New Democratic Party (*Shinmin-dang*, NDP) and the leaders of the extra-institutional pro-democracy movement (*Chaeya*), notably Kim Dae-Jung (DJ), began to set plans for transforming the power vacuum into an opportunity to build a democratic government under a new constitution. No solid progress, however, had been made until early 1980 due to the personal rivalry between YS and DJ and a disagreement over the extent of constitutional drafting (Y. C. Kim 2015, 296). Meanwhile, a military faction called *Hanahoe* ("One Group" in Korean), formed by General Chun Doo-Hwan and his military academy classmates, took control over both the military and intelligence services in December 1979 and secretly moved toward establishing its regime. After all, with an excuse for defending national security, Chun declared martial law and forbade all political activities in May 1980. Subsequently, hundreds of anti-military protesters in Kwangju were killed by army troops; many political figures and *Chaeya* activists, including YS and DJ, were either imprisoned or house arrested; and the press was controlled by tight censorship and guidelines. It took only three months to dismantle all possible barriers in forming a new military regime. In August 1980, Chun became president by winning 99.4 percent of the electoral college vote in the indirect presidential election.

Following his inauguration, Chun and military elites revised the constitution and passed legislation on elections and political parties to reshape the political landscape. It is interesting to note that based on the assumption that a multiparty system is more advantageous than a two-party system in terms of binding potential challengers (J. T. Han 2016a, 331), they not only created their own ruling party—Democratic Justice Party (*Minjoo Jungui-dang*, DJP)—but were also directly involved in forming several satellite parties to "act" as opposition parties. To do so, the military pardoned

some politicians who held a compromising stance toward the regime and assisted new faces in establishing their own parties. Alongside the new general election law that stipulated considerable advantage for the largest party,<sup>2</sup> the regime's political engineering of building a multiparty system guaranteed the DJP's hegemony. In the 1981 legislative election, the DJP secured 35.6 percent of the vote and 55 percent of the total seats of the National Assembly, while the Democratic Korea Party (*Minjoo Hankook-dang*, DKP), founded by former NDP's moderates, came second with 21.6 percent of the vote followed by the Korean National Party (*Hankook Kookmin-dang*, KNP), founded by old regime holdovers, third with 13.3 percent of the vote. Thus, owing to Chun's political engineering, the DJP easily acquired hegemonic status in the new party system (Loxton 2015, 158).

The Chun regime also implemented various authoritarian measures to suppress its opponents. The primary target was college students who began to mobilize violent anti-government protests after the Kwangju massacre in 1980. In the first three years of Chun's presidency, the number of prosecution cases for participation in student protests was about 1,400, which was far larger than those during the entire *Yushin* regime (Y. M. Lee 2015, 61). Furthermore, illegal monitoring, imprisonment, and state violence were repeatedly imposed on opposition figures: DJ was forced into exile in the United States after being sentenced to death by the military court, and YS spent many years under house arrest. As indicated in Table 2.3, hundreds of opponents were under direct political pressure from the state. Thus, democratic progress through party politics was virtually impossible in such harsh authoritarian circumstances.

### ***The NKDP's Unlikely Formation and Liberalizing Electoral Outcome in 1985***

The apparent presence of unfavorable political conditions for mobilizing democratic forces began eroding in early 1984 when Chun took a step toward electoral authoritarianism by implementing a so-called "appeasement policy." Assisted by continued economic growth, the ruling elites became increasingly confident in their governance and calculated that conciliatory gestures toward the regime's opponents would be advantageous to broaden their support base. Furthermore, in preparation for hosting multiple international sports events, particularly the Olympic Games in 1988, the regime needed to improve its authoritarian image by showing a commitment to democratic procedures (Choe and Kim 2012). After all, the ban on political

**TABLE 2.3** Number of Political Offenders during Chun's Presidency

	<i>Nov. 1982</i>	<i>Nov. 1983</i>	<i>Nov. 1984</i>	<i>Nov. 1985</i>
Number of Political Offenders	413	457	109	704

Source: Yun (1999, p. 119).



activities of 540 out of 555 former politicians was gradually lifted until November 1984. The tight state control over college students, such as stationing police on the campuses, was also largely removed.

Opposition leaders and *Chaeya* activists took advantage of the appeasement policy and sought to form a pro-democracy movement. Interestingly, since the YS's 23-day hunger strike calling for political liberalization in May 1983, anti-regime camps had shared feelings of solidarity based on a single mobilization network (Lee 2015, 63). Indeed, on May 18, 1984, the Council of Promotion for Democracy (*Minjuhwa Choojin Hyeopuihoi*, CPD) was formed by YS, DJ, and several moderate *Chaeya* figures. Based on a well-functioning organizational structure, the CPD functioned as a quasi-party that offered its policy agendas, including the introduction of a direct presidential election through a constitutional amendment, opposition to the military's political involvement, and institutional reforms for protecting human rights and non-violent political action (S. Lee 1987, 138).

As the legislative election drew near, the CPD decided to establish a political party to legislate its agendas. It, however, soon faced hostile reactions from Chun, who wanted to foster a division within the opposition. Thus, despite an increasingly international and domestic demand, he did not approve of recovering the political rights of 15 key figures, including YS and DJ, until the election held in February 1985. Especially the regime officially warned DJ, who was still in exile, not to return to Korea before the election.<sup>3</sup> In addition, compared to previous years, a much larger amount of state funding was provided to the DKP and the KNP in 1984. Nevertheless, on December 20, 1984, CPD members and former NDP hardliners agreed to form the New Korean Democratic Party (*Shinhan Minjoo-dang*, NKDP) and have Lee Min-Woo, a senior politician of the NDP, as the party's first chairman. The NKDP, however, was virtually under the dual leadership of the "two Kims."

The NKDP's electoral performance was surprising. As indicated in Table 2.4, it became the second largest party with 29.3 percent of the vote and 67 seats. The party particularly performed well in mobilizing urban voters: it won the largest vote shares in Seoul and three other metropolitan cities than other parties, including the ruling DJP. In contrast, the DKP and the DNP, which were criticized as "government-made opposition parties" by NKDP candidates during the campaign, secured only 19.7 percent and 9.2 percent of the vote, respectively. Regarding the NKDP's electoral upsurge, scholars have presented the following three explanations. First and foremost, the party's commitment to democratization through a constitutional amendment resonated well with the public, who demanded greater freedom. Second, the NKDP also benefited from the personal reputations of YS and DJ, who also had regional strongholds. Third, the party was also assisted by college student activists who voluntarily participated in the election as grassroots campaigners (Koh 1985).

Profound political changes took place in the immediate aftermath of the 1985 election. Realizing that state oppression against the opposition's political activities could not deter voters from supporting the NKDP, Chun finally lifted the ban on

**TABLE 2.4** Results of the 1985 Legislative Election per Administrative Unit

	<i>DJP</i>		<i>NKDP</i>		<i>DKP</i>		<i>KNP</i>		<i>Others/Independent</i>		<i>Total (Seats)</i>
	<i>S</i>	<i>V</i>	<i>S</i>	<i>V</i>	<i>S</i>	<i>V</i>	<i>S</i>	<i>V</i>	<i>S</i>	<i>V</i>	
	Metropolitan City										
<i>Seoul</i>	13	27.0	14	42.6	1	19.8	0	2.3	0	8.4	28
<i>Busan</i>	3	27.6	6	36.5	2	23.3	1	10.3	0	2.3	12
<i>Daegu</i>	3	27.9	2	31.8	1	18.3	1	15.4	0	6.4	6
<i>Incheon</i>	2	36.4	2	36.8	0	21.7	0	3.4	0	0	4
Province											
<i>Gyeonggi</i>	10	33.7	4	27.6	3	20.3	3	13.4	0	4.9	20
<i>Gangwon</i>	6	45.5	0	11.1	1	17.6	4	17.4	1	8.4	12
<i>Chungnam</i>	8	38.8	4	21.5	4	20.3	0	10.5	0	8.9	16
<i>Chungbuk</i>	4	55.8	2	18.0	1	15.6	1	8.4	0	2.3	8
<i>Jeonnam</i>	11	35.1	5	23.7	5	17.8	0	10.0	1	13.4	22
<i>Jeonbuk</i>	7	36.2	2	26.0	1	18.6	3	11.6	1	7.6	14
<i>Gyeongbuk</i>	10	44.1	4	15.5	3	16.7	1	12.2	2	11.5	20
<i>Gyeongnam</i>	10	39.4	5	21.3	4	19.7	1	10.7	0	9.0	20
<i>Jeju</i>	1	31.4	0	5.9	0	16.8	0	0	1	45.9	2
National District	61	35.2	17	29.3	9	19.7	5	9.2	0	0.6	92
<b>Total (Seats)</b>	<b>148</b>		<b>67</b>		<b>35</b>		<b>20</b>		<b>6</b>		<b>276</b>

Source: National Election Committee.

Note: S (Seat), V (Vote Share).

the political rights of the remaining 15 figures in March 1985. Soon after being politically free, the two Kims jointly called upon the integration of opposition parties into the NKDP and confirmed the CPD's role in leading the democracy movement outside formal politics in cooperation with *Chaeya* and civil society groups. As a result, a two-party system was instituted, as 36 parliamentarians, mostly from the DKP, joined the NKDP until April 1985. Most importantly, the NKDP's electoral success symbolized that the party's simple but clear objective of democratizing Korea through a constitutional amendment was publicly recognized as a more feasible and acceptable alternative to the authoritarian status quo than others that promoted structural changes to the country's system as a whole (Kang 2015, 28). Thus, as discussed in greater detail below, the NKDP and the CPD were increasingly capable of mobilizing the general public, particularly the urban middle-class, for a transition to electoral democracy.

### ***Electoral Democracy Achieved***

The 1985 legislative election also provided momentum for reviving *Chaeya* and civil society activism. College students, laborers, farmers, and religious figures inspired

by a broad spectrum of radicalism—from traditional Marxism-Leninism to ultra-nationalist anti-imperialism—began organizing themselves to operate anti-government actions through demonstrations and demonstration strikes. Especially student activists, who were better organized due to their well-functioning student bodies in colleges, took a leading role in publicizing their democratization agenda in the form of mass rallies, occupation protests of the American Cultural Centers across the country, and even sabotage (Seo 2015, 148–52). Alongside senior *Chaeya* activists, they also contributed to establishing the United People’s Movement for Democracy and Unification (*Minju Tongil Minjung Undong Yeonhap*, UPMDU), an organizational network of anti-government movements outside formal politics.

The CPD and the NKDP generally supported the UPMDU, especially when the latter struggled against the regime over democratic values. The protest against the regime’s legislative proposal for “campus stabilization” is an exemplary case. As student demonstrations had rapidly grown in number and strength in situations of the appeasement policy, in July 1985, the Chun government proposed the bill whereby student activists were to be detained by the police without warrants and to have “reeducation programs” for a prolonged period in camps. This proposal intending to eradicate student activism soon backfired, and the CPD and the UPMDU jointly organized public meetings and popular protests while the NKDP also campaigned for the annulment in the National Assembly with dialogues with the government and the ruling DJP. Ultimately, Chun, also pressured by the Reagan administration, decided to postpone and finally withdrew the legislation (Dong 1987, 235).

A tacit tension, however, could exist within the pro-democracy movement between moderates and hardliners, and the former, represented by the CPD and the NKDP, did not lose an initiative in setting the movement’s goals and ideological orientations. Since the 1985 election, the two Kims and their followers have prioritized an introduction to direct presidential elections by amending the constitution over other tasks (Han 2016a, 375). Such a goal focused on democratic procedures contrasted with the UPMDU and other radical activists aiming to build an anti-imperialist and non-capitalist state after the transition. The hardliners’ agendas, however, could not have a strong backing since a large proportion of the population who were already aligned to the CPD (and NKDP) and harbored strongly anti-communist sentiments. Furthermore, the CPD leaders effectively prevented the possible ideological schisms between the two sides by admitting several requests from *Chaeya*, such as the protection of labor rights, promotion of a people-friendly reunification policy, and restoration of the rural economy, to its manifesto for the constitutional amendment (Council of Promotion for Democracy 1986).

In response to the growing voice for the constitutional amendment, in April 1986, Chun allowed an intra-parliamentary negotiation between his ruling DJP and the NKDP. However, as the negotiation resulted in a year-long stalemate due to the DJP’s intransigence over the parliamentary system and the NKDP’s in-fighting and split,<sup>4</sup> he made a declaration in a press conference on April 13, 1987, that the existing constitutional procedures would select the next president. For the general Korean population, Chun’s decision was understood as nothing more

than a willingness to the undemocratic transfer of power to his military academy classmate Roh Tae-Woo, the DJP's chief secretary. Such dissatisfaction was soon transformed into widespread public resentment against the regime by disclosures of the torture-death of a college student Park Jong-Chul in May of the same year (S.-J. Han 1988). Soon, both political and civil society, including the CPD, the newly formed Reunification and Democracy Party (*Tongil Minjoo-dang*, RDP) by the two Kims, and the UPMDU, jointly established the National Movement Headquarters for Democratic Constitution (*Kukmin Undong Ponbu*, NMHDC) for mobilizing anti-government mass demonstrations. On 10, 18, and 26 June 1987, millions of Koreans joined the NMHDC's public assemblies to protest Chun's April decision and the regime's brutality. The ordinary citizens' participation in the anti-government and pro-democracy movements was crucial to discourage Chun's willingness to protect the status quo through military force.<sup>5</sup> On June 29, 1987, the DJP's Roh Tae-Woo finally agreed to the constitutional amendment for introducing direct, free, and fair presidential elections. After a series of negotiations between the DJP and the RDP cadres, a draft of a new constitution, mainly based on the CPD's demands, passed the National Assembly and was finally adopted by the referendum in October 1987.

Overall, pro-democracy parties, the NKDP and the RDP, had a profound effect on the process of the democratic transition in South Korea. Alongside party leaders' personal appeals, their simple but strong voice to introduce direct presidential elections resonated well with a large proportion of the population who also participated in the 1987 mass demonstrations. Under the leaderships of YS and DJ, pro-democracy parties were also capable of maintaining close ties with social movements and had inclusive approaches towards progressive (but not radical, to be sure) agendas from outside formal politics. Thus, despite the criticisms, which mainly come from their hastiness and exclusion of civil society in terms of drafting the new constitution (Choi 2010, 138–42), the *minjoo* parties deserve a role in the initial stage of democratization, that is, to establish democracy as “the only game in town.”

## **The *Minjoo* Party Family after Democratization: Growing Commitment Discrepancy (1987–2007)**

### ***Division in Political Opposition and Unexpected Outcomes***

After Roh Tae Woo declared political reform and constitutional amendment, there was a surge of demands from civil society. The mobilization of workers, who suffered low levels of income redistribution and severe state controls, was particularly visible. From July to September 1987, more than 1.2 million workers participated in the “Great Workers’ Struggle,” about 3,500 nationwide strikes for a wage increase and to protect their rights (B.-K. Kim and Lim 2000, 113). Political parties responded by revising the labor law for freedom of collective action. Nevertheless, as political parties increasingly focused on candidate selection for the first presidential election under the new constitution, the voices of civil society could not be

effectively carried out by the parliament. Especially for the opposition RDP, the party of the two Kims who had decades-long journeys to the presidency, candidate selection was equally important in the electoral competition with Roh.

The RDP, however, could not solve the leadership problem involving the long-standing personal rivalry between YS and DJ. The two factions were in discord about how and when the party's presidential candidate would be selected. While Kim Young-Sam, who had a grip on the party apparatus, insisted on early selection by existing senior party cadres, Kim Dae-Jung, whose support base was outside the party, particularly the CPD, persisted in delaying the presidential convention until all the branches' heads will be filled (Han 2016a, 343). Despite several closed meetings and congressional caucuses, the RDP failed to produce a compromise between the two Kims, and as a result DJ and his supporters defected from the RDP and formed the Peace and Democracy Party (*Pyunghwa Minjoo-dang*, PDP) on October 1987. In addition, a few days later, Kim Jong-Pil, one of the 1961 coup leaders and a strongman of Park Chung-Hee's authoritarian rule, declared his participation in the presidential election by establishing the New Democratic Republican Party (*Shinminjoo Gonghwa-dang*, NDRP). The first presidential election after democratization was thus based on the competition of "one-Roh, three-Kims."

As indicated in 2.5, the 1987 presidential election resulted in the DJP's Roh Tae-Woo winning 36.6 percent of the vote. The majority could not expect such an outcome if the population aspired to resume the civilian government. As Bedeski (1994, 70) indicates, Roh's victory was virtually nothing more than a product of YS and DJ's failure to cooperate. The candidates' heavy reliance on their personal appeals rooted in regional sentiments during the campaign was more worrisome. Owing to their similar ideological orientations toward political liberalism based on anti-communism (Park 1990, 1156), Kim Young-Sam and Kim Dae-Jung could not provide voters with clear and distinct platforms that persuade electoral mandates. Instead, using the language of local pride and regional ties, the key but primordial components of Korean political identity (Kim 2000a, 65), they attempted to draw support from their loyal regional constituency—YS's Busan and Gyeongnam and DJ's Honam (Kwangju, Jeonnam, and Jeonbuk).

Other major candidates, Roh Tae-Woo and Kim Jong-Pil, whose birthplaces were Daegu (Gyeongbuk) and Chungnam, respectively, used similar tactics to provoke frustration and animosity among the public of their home bases (Han 1988, 56). Table 2.5 shows that their personalistic voter mobilization strategies worked: all candidates won far higher vote shares in their regional power bases than the rest of Korea. As will be explained later, this pattern of the regional vote based on the party leaders' personal backgrounds, or regionalism, has been one of the determining factors of the commitment discrepancy of political parties until the present day.

Given that most of DJP's ruling elites, including Roh, were military personnel who were actively involved in building Chun's authoritarian rule, there had been a growing public apprehension about the new government's democratic commitment. In the legislative election held in April 1988, the electorate thus created the first-ever divided government since 1954 (Park 1990, 1155). Even though the DJP

**TABLE 2.5** Results of the 1987 Presidential Election per Administrative Unit

	<i>Roh Tae-Woo</i> (DJP)	<i>Kim Young-Sam</i> (RDP)	<i>Kim Dae-Jung</i> (PDP)	<i>Kim Jong-Pil</i> (NDRP)
City				
<i>Seoul</i>	30.0	29.1	32.6	8.2
<i>Busan</i>	32.1	56.0	9.1	2.6
<i>Daegu</i>	70.7	24.3	2.6	2.1
<i>Incheon</i>	39.4	30.0	21.3	9.2
<i>Kwangju</i>	4.8	0.5	94.4	0.2
Province				
<i>Gyeonggi</i>	41.4	27.5	22.3	8.5
<i>Gangwon</i>	59.3	26.1	8.8	5.4
<i>Chungnam</i>	26.2	16.1	12.4	45.0
<i>Chungbuk</i>	46.9	28.2	11.0	13.5
<i>Jeonnam</i>	8.2	1.2	90.3	0.3
<i>Jeonbuk</i>	14.1	1.5	83.5	0.8
<i>Gyeongbuk</i>	66.4	28.2	2.4	2.6
<i>Gyeongnam</i>	41.2	51.3	4.5	2.7
<i>Jeju</i>	49.8	26.8	18.6	4.5
<b>National</b>	<b>36.6</b>	<b>28.0</b>	<b>27.0</b>	<b>8.1</b>

Source: National Election Committee.

remained the largest party, it only secured 34 percent of the vote, winning 125 of 299 seats (41.8 percent) in the National Assembly.<sup>6</sup> Kim Dae-Jung's PDP came second with 19.3 percent of the vote and 70 seats, followed by Kim Young-Sam's RDP with 23.8 percent of the vote and 59 seats. Kim Jong-Pil's NDRP came next, winning 15.6 percent of the vote and 35 seats. Regarding the results, two points are worth noting. First, based on overwhelming support from voters in Honam and the pro-democracy educated middle-class in Seoul, the PDP took the initiative to prevail in the political opposition by winning a competition against the RDP. Second, like in the 1987 presidential election, regionalism became the dominant factor in voter choice. Table 2.6 shows that all four parties obtained an absolute majority of seats in their leaders' regional power base.

**TABLE 2.6** Seat Proportion of Political Parties' Regional Bases in the 1988 Legislative Election

<i>Party</i>	<i>DJP</i>	<i>PDP</i>	<i>RDP</i>	<i>NDRP</i>
Regional Base	Daegu, Gyeongbuk	Kwangju, Jeonnam, Jeonbuk	Busan, Gyeongnam	Chungnam
Seat Proportion	86.2% (25/29)	97.3% (36/37)	62.2% (23/37)	72.2% (13/18)

Source: National Election Committee.

Under the condition of a divided government, the PDP and the RDP had limited but significant momentum in pursuing democratic reforms. In cooperation with the NDRP and Roh's acceptance of moderate-level political changes, four meaningful institutional changes that minimized the threat of authoritarian resurgence were introduced. First, several undemocratic laws enacted by the Chun's military junta in 1980, including the Basic Press Law and the Social Security Law, were abolished. Second, the judiciary was granted its independence from the administration by recovering its right to appoint judges from the president and by establishing the Constitutional Court. Third, the devolution of power began as the elections selected local assemblymen. Last but not most important, for the "eradication of the Fifth Republic legacies," several committees in the National Assembly investigated several human rights cases of abuse during the Chun's authoritarian rule, particularly the Kwangju massacre, and forced Chun to self-exile in a remote temple near Mount Sorak.

However, the nature of Roh's presidency rendered the reform period short-lived. The military, especially the army's top brass, was still filled by the members of *Hanahoe*. The state repression against radical activism remained strong, as manifested in the creation of the so-called "security atmosphere" (*gongan junguk*), indicating mass arrests of student and *Chaeya* activists in 1989. Under such conditions, the surprising party merger of the DJP, the RDP, and the NDRP to form the Democratic Liberal Party (*Minjoo Jayu-dang*, DLP) in February 1990 was a serious blow to the aspiration for democratic reform. The merger primarily resulted from the three-party leaders' personal interests, particularly Kim Young-Sam's necessity to make a breakthrough to defeating Kim Dae-Jung in the upcoming presidential election (H. Kim 1997). Indeed, the opportunistic 1990 party merger created interparty hostility and stalemate between the PDP, the sole opposition party, and the DLP; hence progressive development of South Korea's electoral democracy was interrupted.

### ***Kim Young-Sam's Conservative Democratic Institutional Reforms***

Despite the presence of candidacies, the 1992 presidential election was mainly a rematch between Kim Young-Sam and Kim Dae-Jung. YS, who overcame an internal power struggle by using his well-known charismatic leadership, easily won the DLP candidacy. Similarly, the Democratic Party (*Minjoo-dang*, DP), established by integrating the PDP with former YS supporters who opposed the DLP merger, nominated DJ as its presidential candidate. The election resulted in the victory of Kim Young-Sam, who obtained 42 percent of the vote. Except for the Honam region, where about 90 percent of voters supported DJ, YS prevailed in most other cities and provinces. In contrast, DJ took an inclusive approach to secure centrist and conservative voters and obtained only 34 percent of the vote. Conceding his defeat, Kim Dae-Jung declared his retirement from politics and began staying in the United Kingdom (H. Y. Lee 1993).

Kim Young-Sam's election has profound implications for understanding the democratic consolidation in South Korea. As the first civilian president since 1961,

YS successfully drew considerable support from his DLP and broad segments of the population for his reform policies that enforced and stabilized democratic institutions. His first target of reform was the military. Ten days after his inauguration, YS immediately discharged the Army Chief of Staff and the Defense Security Commander, who were members of *Hanahoe*, and replaced them with non-*Hanahoe* personnel. By July 1993, dozens of senior positions in the military and the defense ministry were replaced by those not directly connected with the country's authoritarian rulers (Cho 2008, 142). The purge of *Hanahoe* from the military was decisive not only for removing the possibility of a military takeover but also for completing the unfinished task of eradicating authoritarian legacies.

Regarding this, the opposition DP's role should also be noted. In October 1995, Park Kye-Dong, a DP member of the National Assembly, revealed Roh's secret fund with an amount of about 500 billion won (then approximately \$650 million). His disclosure instantly aroused public resentment and became YS's justifiable cause for the investigation of Chun and Roh, who were ultimately indicted for treason with their military colleagues by the Prosecutor's Office (B. C. Koh 1996, 54–55).<sup>7</sup>

The YS government and the ruling DLP also made a series of additional institutional achievements in deepening electoral democracy. In March 1993, Kim Young-Sam began opening the personal wealth of high-ranking state officials and their families, including himself. This unprecedented event had bipartisan support, as the National Assembly legalized the mandatory opening of high-ranking officials in executive, legislative, and judiciary bodies in May 1993. The effort to increase transparency in political business reached its climax with the presidential decree on the "real-name financial accounting system" in August 1993, which was aimed to prevent politicians from creating illegal slush funds and making "donations" from businessmen (Jin 2018, 292–93). In early 1994, the DLP and the DP jointly passed three bills for political reform: the omnibus election law, the revision of the political financing law, and the revision of the local autonomy law. As Steinberg (2000, 210; 222) indicates, the promulgation of these three laws proved a considerable step forward in holding freer and fairer elections under stringent regulations. In turn, electoral democracy in South Korea became consolidated during Kim Young Sam's presidency (B.-K. Kim 2000a; Y.-M. Kim 2016).

However, Kim Young-Sam's democratic reforms could not take a step toward liberal democracy due to their lack of accountability and conservative nature. Like his predecessors, YS remained repressive towards civil society activism, particularly labor and student movements. As a result, dozens of labor and student activists committed suicide for protesting against poor working conditions and the government's anti-leftist attitude.<sup>8</sup> His intransigent governing style also had trouble with his rivals in the ruling elite, particularly Kim Jong-Pil, who defected from the DLP and established his own United Liberal Democrats (*Jayu Minjoo Yeonhap*, ULD). A series of corruption scandals involving Kim Hyun-Chul, YS's second son, also harmed the government's image and credibility. Most importantly, YS's drive for economic liberalization ended in the government's filing for national bankruptcy and seeking a bailout from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) in late 1997 was the final



blow to YS, whose approval rating plummeted to 6 percent. Kim Young-Sam's presidency, in turn, exemplifies the commitment discrepancy between well-functioning electoral contestation and lack of electoral accountability.

Kim Young Sam's growing commitment discrepancy thus provided an opportunity for the political opposition, particularly the DP. In the first-ever direct elections for local executive and legislative branches in 1995, the DP secured four mayors/governorships (out of 15), 84 ward headships (out of 230), and 355 local legislative council seats (out of 875). Especially in Seoul, the party dominated 23 out of 25 ward headships and 122 council seats out of 133.<sup>9</sup> Soon afterward, Kim Dae-Jung made a comeback from his retirement and established the National Congress for New Politics (*Sae Jungchee Kukmin Hoiui*, NCNP) with the DP's majority faction in September 1995. In dealing with Kim Young-Sam's conservative reform projects, the NCNP positioned itself as a centrist catch-all party by recruiting public figures from diverse backgrounds, including human rights lawyers, environmentalists, former army generals, and journalists (Hellmann 2011, 41–42). Although the strategy was not immediately effective in mobilizing voters, as manifested in the 1996 National Assembly election in which the party secured only 73 out of 299 seats, the newly recruited members, such as Chun Jung-Bae, Shin Ki-Nam, and Roh Moo-Hyun, later played a key role in building a stable support base by using not clientelistic networks or regionalism, but distinct platforms.

### ***Peaceful Transition of Power and Progress toward Liberal Democracy***

The presidential election held in December 1997 resulted in the triumph of Kim Dae-Jung, who obtained 40.3 percent of the vote, against former prime minister Lee Hoi-Chang, who was nominated by the New Korea Party (*Shin Hankook-dang*, NKP), a successor party to the DLP. The DJ's election brought two meaningful changes in democracy in South Korea. First, it represents the first transition of power transition through a peaceful and democratic way, which was rare in emerging Asian democracies (Steinberg 2000, 211). Second, unlike his predecessors, whose power bases were deeply related to the political mainstream, that is, state bureaucracy, business conglomerates, and Youngnam region based on Busan and Daegu, Kim Dae-Jung was the first president supported by Honam region and the socioeconomically unprivileged. DJ's political background thus rendered him relatively easy to implement the reform policies introduced below (Y.-M. Kim 2016, 413–14).

Soon after his inauguration, Kim Dae-Jung and the ruling NCNP pursued simultaneous political and economic reforms under the theory of a “parallel development of democracy and a market economy” (S. Kim 2000b). Among the many reform agendas in the economic realm, *chaebol* reform was most visible. Based on the assumption that one of the main reasons of the national bankruptcy was the “the octopus-like overexpansion of the big business conglomerates,” the Kim Dae-Jung government implemented a range of policies that aimed to reduce outstanding debts, transform ownership structure, and to liquidate and consolidate subsidiaries. The primary example of *chaebol* reform was the liquidation of Daewoo, one of the

four biggest chaebols, but it could not solve the enormous accumulation of bad debt. Although criticism can be drawn from scholars who indicate *chaebol's* ongoing dominance of the Korean economy and financial clout in policymaking (e.g., H.C. Sohn 2011), DJ's *chaebol* reform shows that the government can control chaebol's political interests. In turn, with other measures of economic restructuring, the Kim Dae-Jung government officially overcame the financial crisis by fully repaying the IMF bailout in 2000.

Compared to economic reform, achievements of political reform were less significant. In July 1998, the NCNP formed the Special Committee for Political Reform to propose reform policies in the three arenas of political institutions: political parties, elections, and the National Assembly.<sup>10</sup> As other parties agreed with the necessity of political reform in principle, official interparty dialogues began operating soon. Nevertheless, owing to the widely different political interests across parties, no meaningful progress had made until late 1999. For example, the opposition Grand National Party (*Hannara-dang*, GNP), NKP's successor, strongly opposed the NCNP's proposal for introducing a mixed-member system and reducing the number of regional districts because it had benefited from the single-member plurality voting by dominating (rural) districts in Youngnam region.<sup>11</sup> The opposition parties also refused to remove sub-provincial party branches that were largely clientelistic by nature. As a result, the interparty consensus was only made to reduce the number of seats in the National Assembly from 299 to 273.

Growing commitment discrepancy was also a threat to the NCNP's sustainability. Admittedly, compared to previous ruling parties, the NCNP was more active in promoting some components of liberal democracies, particularly human rights protection, and civil liberties. After having a years-long discussion with the government, the Millennium Democratic Party (*Sae Chunnyun Minjoo-dang*, MDP), a successor party to the NCNP, passed legislation on establishing the National Human Rights Commission. This independent governmental organization aims to protect all individuals from possible human rights violations and to promote basic democratic values in South Korea. The party also contributed to the diversity of the ideological spectrum in the political arena by supporting the government's dovish programs toward North Korea, notably the "Sunshine Policy," which aimed at building a way of peaceful reunification "through the dismantling of the cold-war structure" (Moon 2001, 178).

Nevertheless, regardless of its commitment to democratic contestation, the NCNP and the MDP became less capable of managing intraparty democracy due to chronic factional infightings and leadership struggles. The internal management problem became more visible as Kim Dae-Jung restructured the NCNP as the MDP through the influx of recruits from diverse ideological backgrounds. Although the MDP became more "catch-all" and "national," no mechanism virtually existed to control conflicts between DJ's old supporters based on the Honam region and reformists allied with new party members. In turn, the intraparty conflict became irresolvable as Kim Dae-Jung gradually lost his leadership and legitimacy due to corruption scandals involving his three sons (Hellmann 2011, 42).

Meanwhile, Roh Moo-Hyun, a reform-minded politician from Busan, won the MDP's primary for the 2002 presidential election. Since Roh was an outsider candidate whose main support base was grassroots and internet activism (Min 2003), his victory became another source of intraparty conflict. Indeed, as Roh's popular support had remained far lower than the NKP presidential candidate Lee Hoi-Chang, the MDP mainstream forced Roh to unify his candidacy with Jung Mong-Jun, an independent business tycoon. However, thanks to mobilizing solid support from the younger generation and the urban middle class, Roh became the opposition's unified candidate and eventually defeated Lee in the election. His election meaningfully implies that the main source of voter choice in South Korea had shifted from regionalism to intergenerational differences in political preference. More specifically, as Table 2.7 indicates, while Roh obtained overwhelming support from younger generations, Lee was more likely to be supported by older voters. Suppose that a generational effect on voter choice is closely related to the rise of ideological cleavages (H. Kim, Choi, and Cho 2008), the 2002 presidential election was a meaningful starting point for emerging pluralistic electoral dynamics in South Korea.

Following Kim Dae-Jung, Roh Moo-Hyun also chose political reform as one of the primary objectives of his presidency.<sup>12</sup> He especially focused on devising institutional settings that facilitate ordinary citizens' participation in political parties' decision-making processes to overcome regionalism (Jin 2018, 274–75). His agenda soon sparked friction between pro-Roh reformists and the Honam-based party leadership within the MDP. As a result, following Roh's defection from the MDP, 47 members of the National Assembly, civil society activists, and grassroots supporters formed the *Yeolin Woori-dang* (Open Our Party, Woori Party) to pursue a bottom-up and participatory democracy in November 2003. With backing from civil society for political reform, the Woori Party revised the election law by introducing several meaningful improvements, notably a two-vote system and stipulating that more than half of the candidates on the party list should be female. By revising the party law, the abolishment of party branches at the sub-provincial level was also accomplished. According to Sohn (2016, 443, 447), these institutional achievements brought “a sea change in the history of South Korean party politics” by “significantly improving the representativeness of the National Assembly.”

**TABLE 2.7** Results of the 2002 Presidential Election by Generation

	19–29	30–39	40–49	Above the 50s	Actual Result
Roh Moo-Hyun (MDP)	62.1	59.3	47.4	39.8	48.9
Lee Hoi-Chang (GNP)	31.7	33.9	48.7	58.3	46.6
Others	6.2	6.8	3.9	1.9	4.5
Vote Share Difference (Roh – Lee)	30.4	25.4	–1.3	–18.5	2.3

Source: Yun (2018, 219); National Election Committee.

Nevertheless, the Woori Party's minority position in the National Assembly became a major obstacle to Roh, and the majority opposition led by the GNP and the MDP took it as an opportunity to create his political predicament. In March 2004, the opposition parties voted to impeach Roh on his constitutional violation of presidential political impartiality. Roh's impeachment, however, soon backfired as citizens and civil society groups mobilized to denounce the vote nationwide (H. Kim, Choi, and Cho 2008, 141). The growing public resentment against the opposition parties was manifested in the National Assembly election in April 2004, in which the Woori Party won the majority of seats (152 out of 299) with 38.3 percent of the vote. In contrast, the number of seats of the GNP and the MDP shrank from 145 to 121 and 57 to 9, respectively. The 2004 election also implies the end of the "three-Kims" politics, as the ULD's Kim Jong-Pil failed to secure his seat and retired from politics.

After the election, the Woori Party attempted to materialize Roh's reform agenda by legislating so-called "four reform bills," that is, abrogation of the national security law; the law on transnational justice for the truth and reconciliation; revision of the private school law; and the press-overseeing law. However, there had been fierce opposition from not only the "conservative" opposition parties led by the GNP but also the party's moderates who tried to slow down the pace of reform.<sup>13</sup> The polarized political atmosphere developed as a years-long stalemate and infighting among various factions within the Woori Party. As his party lost the momentum for reforms, Roh instead built a close partnership with civil society by establishing many government committees, whereby pro-reform activists prevailed (Yun 2018, 81–82).

Like its *minjoo* predecessors, the Woori Party could not overcome the commitment discrepancy. Despite the strong commitment to democratic institutions and securing a majority of seats in the National Assembly, the party was not accountable to its mandates for the democratic reform initiated by Roh Moo-Hyun. Frequent changes in the party leadership—eight times in 45 months—caused by factional infightings also aggregated the accountability problem (see Appendix A). Indeed, the life of the Woori Party, a self-proclaimed "party lasting for a century," ended in August 2007, several months before the end of Roh's presidency.

## **Role of the *Minjoo* Parties in Recovery from the Democratic Crisis (2007–2017)**

### ***Deeping Democratic Crisis by Reactionary Presidencies***

The local elections in May 2006 resulted in the Woori Party's dismal defeat. Among the 16 posts of mayor/governorships, the Woori party won only one province, against 12 obtained by the GNP. As it became unlikely to improve the prospects for the next presidential election in 2007, moderates defected from the Woori Party and grouped together to create a unified pro-democracy party. In July 2007, Woori party defectors and MDP cadres jointly established United New Democratic Party

(*Dae Tonghap Minjoo Shin-dang*, UNDP). After absorbing the Woori Party in August 2007, the UNDP nominated Chung Dong-Young, a former TV anchorman and a former reunification minister under Roh Moo-Hyun's presidency. However, as shown in Table 2.8, Chung was defeated in a landslide by the GNP's Lee Myung-Bak, a former CEO of Hyundai Construction and a mayor of Seoul. Despite an attempt to overcome such a shocking defeat through a party reformation as the Integrated Democratic Party (*Tonghap Minjoo-dang*, IDP), the party's electoral misfortune continued to the subsequent National Assembly election in April 2008, in which it only secured 81 seats out of 299. In contrast, thanks to holding the election during the Lee Myung-Bak's honeymoon period, the GNP had a majority of seats (see Table 2.8).

Lee's rise to the presidency meant that large segments of the electorate prioritized (state-led) economic development over democratic progress. During the GNP's presidential primary campaign, Park Geun-Hye, daughter of the late president Park Chung-Hee and another influential primary candidate, repeatedly attacked Lee's alleged involvement in corruption, including illicit real estate purchases, tax fraud, and stock price manipulation (Heo and Roehrig 2010, 68–69). Instead of directly countering the growing suspicion of his morality, Lee persuaded voters using his “747 pledge,” that is, “to achieve an annual growth rate of seven percent, increase per capita income to US\$ 40,000, and transform the nation into the world's seventh largest economy” through mega infrastructure projects (S. D. Hahm and Choi 2009, 616). Lee's inattention to democratic development also manifested in his view on the era of two presidential predecessors as “lost ten years” and inauguration speech that “civil society has prioritized demands and claims rather than embracing a sense of responsibility, despite its quantitative development” (Yun 2018, 84). Thus, given its position as an opposition party with far smaller political clout than previously, the IDP, which was renamed the Democrat Party (*Minjoo-dang*, DP) in June 2008, focused on checking the reactionary tendencies of Lee's presidency

**TABLE 2.8** Results of the 2007 Presidential and 2008 National Assembly Elections

<i>Presidential Election (2007. 12)</i>		<i>National Assembly Election (2008. 4)</i>		
Candidate	Vote (%)	Party	Seat	Vote (party list, %)
Lee Myung-Bak (GNP)	48.7	GNP	153	37.5
Chung Dong-Young (UNDP)	26.1	IDP	81	25.2
Lee Hoi-Chang (Independent)	15.1	LFP	18	6.8
Others	10.1	Pro-Park Alliance	14	13.2
		DLP	5	5.7
		Other Parties/ Independents	28	11.6

Source: National Election Committee.

Notes: LFP (Liberty Forward Party); DLP (Democratic Liberal Party).

toward democratic values rather than attempting to further improve the quality of institutional settings.

The lack of compatibility of Lee Myung-Bak's governance with democratic principles emerged at the beginning of his presidency. Opposition parties and civil society groups widely criticized the first appointment for cabinet members and the Blue House secretaries because most of the nominees belonged to Lee's personal cliques based on his college alumni, members of the Church where he went, and those born in Youngnam region (Heo and Roehrig 2010, 71). Growing criticism was soon transformed into public anger by Lee's hasty decision to resume US beef imports. The imports had been suspended in 2003 due to the possible threat of spreading mad cow disease, including the IDP, and immediate reaction from opposition parties and civil society groups for retracting his decision resulting in closed-door bargaining. Subsequently, since early May, hundreds of thousands of individuals have joined the candlelight demonstrations across the country.<sup>14</sup> Indeed, after meeting with the IDP leader Sohn Hak-Kyu, Lee held a press conference on May 22 and apologized for his government's "lacking in efforts to sound out public opinion and try to seek people's understanding."<sup>15</sup> He apologized again a month later, with discharges from several key secretarial positions in the Blue House.

The National Intelligence Service's (NIS) electoral involvement in 2012 through so-called "internet comments maneuverings" is another primary example of the democratic crisis in Lee Myung-Bak's presidency. With an assumption that the internet had been dominated by "pro-North leftists," Won Se-Hun, a member of Lee's inner circle and appointed as the chief of NIS in February 2009, initially created a group for "psychological operation in the cyberspace" (S. Han 2016b, 114). Although the operation started in the 2010 local elections, the NIC became more active in involved in politics from 2012 when growing income disparities and failure to achieve the 747 pledge in Lee's government rendered the ruling Saenuri Party, the GNP's successor, less promising in the upcoming legislative and presidential elections. More concretely, using multiple fake usernames in the country's biggest portals and social networking services, about 70 agents in the NIS uploaded numerous postings and wrote comments that were either supportive of the Saemuri Party or slanderous toward opposition parties, particularly the Democratic United Party (*Minjoo Tonghap-dang*, DUP), a party that was formed by the IDP and civil society activists in 2011. The NIS's secret violation of political impartiality was disclosed by the DUP campaigners only eight days before the election, in which Saenuri's Park Geun-Hye and the DUP's Moon Jae-In competed seriously with each other. As the election resulted in the Park's victory by only a 3.6 percent margin of the vote, NIS's political involvement became the main source of the opposition's challenge to the democratic legitimacy of the Park's government.

After a year-long stalemate, in December 2013, the Saenuri Party and the DUP agreed to create the Special Committee for NIS Reform in the National Assembly to prohibit the NSI's political activities. The committee drafted a new version of the National Intelligence Service law by revising the following points. First, the revision stipulates a ban on any NIS political involvement and imposes less than

seven-year imprisonment in case of the infringement of the ban. Second, it severely restricts the NIS's intelligence operations against civilians, the press, and state organizations. Last, the National Assembly has the right to supervise and participate in the NIS budgetary process (B. K. Sohn 2016, 468–70). Given that the conservative Saenuri initially opposed the NIS reform with an excuse for concerns about internal security,<sup>16</sup> the revision represents the DUP's commitment to free and fair elections, the minimum requirement of electoral democracy.

It should be noted that Park Geun-Hye's democratic commitment also proved worrisome from the beginning of her administration. Her style of governance was deeply influenced by her father, the former president Park Chung-Hee, who sacrificed democratic institutions and the rule of law for economic development during his authoritarian rule. She not only suppressed intraparty democracy within the Saenuri by stigmatizing opposition to her as "betrayal" but avoided having direct communication via mass media by holding far fewer press conferences than her predecessors (S. D. Hahm and Heo 2018, 652). Alongside her veiled personal life, such a lack of public communication had infused great suspicion about Park's ability to govern since the tragic Sewol ferry sank on April 16, 2014, in which 304 civilians, most of them were high school students, were killed by the government's belated and inaccurate rescue response. More importantly, as a consequence of the growing restriction on press freedom and official censorship of online content, the quality of democratic institutions protecting political rights significantly deteriorated during Park's presidency (Haggard and You 2015; see also Table 2.1 of this chapter). As discussed in the next section, the evident signs of a democratic crisis in Park Geun-Hye's presidency became the major source of the opposition's action of her impeachment.

### ***Impeachment of Park Geun-Hye and Early Presidential Election***

The 2016 National Assembly election was a turning point in the fate of Park Geun-Hye's presidency. Despite the abovementioned controversies, public support for her and the Saenuri Party remained high in the first three years of her presidency, primarily owing to the older generation's nostalgic sentiment for Park Chung-Hee's "old good days." The division within the political opposition between Moon Jae-In's Democratic Party of Korea (*Deobuleo Minjoo-dang*, DPK) and the newly formed the People's Party (*Kookmineui-dang*) by Ahn Chul-Soo, a medical doctor and software company founder, was seemingly advantageous to the Saenuri Party.<sup>17</sup> However, the prediction of the Saenuri's overwhelming victory proved wrong in the actual outcome: the DPK secured 123 seats and became the largest party in the National Assembly, one seat ahead of the ruling Saenuri. Furthermore, Park Geun-Hye had to deal with the unexpected creation of a divided government since most of the remaining seats were filled by other opposition parties, notably the People's Party (38 seats) and the leftist Justice Party (six seats). The post-election analyses indicate that it was the electorate's negative evaluation of the president's job performance and undemocratic governing style, particularly her last-minute involvement

in the thorough exclusion of “non-Park” Saenuri politicians from candidate nomination, that mainly affected the Saenuri’s electoral misfortunes (e.g., Jang 2016).

As Park Geun-Hye gradually lost her grip on power, unimaginable rumors about her secret confidante Choi Soon-Sil’s abuse of power began spreading around the country. Rumors soon proved to be true when media outlets reported in October 2016 that Choi was an unelected power-holder who personally influenced a wide range of Park Geun-Hye and her government’s affairs, including editing presidential speeches, policy makings, and even appointments of presidential secretaries (S. O. Shin 2020, 170–72). Furthermore, it was revealed that Choi freely visited the Blue House to hold regular meetings with presidential staff and obtain confidential documents, mostly about government projects. The South Korean population was stunned at the dark side of Park Geun-Hye’s presidency and began mobilizing nationwide candlelight vigils calling for her resignation. Meanwhile, Park’s approval rating had plummeted to 4 percent until early November.<sup>18</sup> The DUP and other opposition parties also started to discuss an impeachment motion, as Park finally refused their demands for either resigning from the presidency or creating a “neutral cabinet” led by the National Assembly. Consequently, on December 9, the impeachment was passed with support from 234 lawmakers. After four months of the constitutional trial, Park Geun-Hye was officially removed from office on the charge of constitutional violation caused by abuse of power and corruption with Choi Soon-Sil.

It should be noted that former and current *minjoo* parties’ politicians in the National Assembly played an important role in protecting South Korean politics from a more critical democratic crisis through a smooth and well-organized transition to the next presidency. Given that the minimum number of parliamentary votes for passing an impeachment motion was 200, the DUP and other opposition parties necessitated at least dozens of the Saenuri lawmakers’ support. Interestingly, some senior Saenuri politicians who started their political careers as pro-democracy activists in the mid-1980s played a key role in organizing pro-impeachment sentiment within the party. For example, Kim Moo-Sung, a former CDP cadre and Kim Young-Sam loyalist, initially raised an inevitability of impeaching Park Geun-Hye because of her incompatibility with democratic principles.<sup>19</sup> The impeachment motion was overwhelmingly passed only five days after its official introduction in the National Assembly. Retrospectively, such a quick decision without having an interparty deadlock was crucial not only to significantly reduce possible political risks caused by a greater polarization between pro- and anti-impeachment mobilizations within the Korean population, but also to withdraw pro-Park military personnels’ anachronistic plot of quelling the candlelight vigils by deploying army troops in case of an impeachment rejection in the National Assembly.<sup>20</sup> Based on these politicians’ commitment to the democratic rules of the game, almost all parties had been prepared for the unscheduled early presidential election during the sixth-month post-impeachment interregnum without the disorder.

The presidential election held on May 10, 2017, as predicted, resulted in the landslide victory of the DUP’s frontrunner Moon Jae-In, who won 41.1 percent of the vote, over other candidates, including the Saenuri’s Hong Jun-Pyo with



24 percent and the People's Party's Ahn Chul-Soo with 21.4 percent of the vote. The election results indicate some meaningful implications for the country's democracy. First, the violation of the democratic institutions by reactionary political elites was punished by votes and a peaceful transition of power (G. W. Shin and Moon 2017). Second, the post-impeachment politics in South Korea were reshaped by the prevalence of pro-democracy forces since a party formed by former pro-Park Saenuri defectors secured only 0.13 percent of the vote.

## Conclusion

This chapter, using historical evidence from contemporary politics in South Korea, presents the roles of pro-democracy or *minjoo* parties in the country's democratic transition and progress until the present day. Many scholarly works have stigmatized Korean political parties (and party system) as the key obstacle to the country's deepening democracy, mainly because of their low levels of institutionalization. However, it is puzzling to hold how the quantitative improvements in party and party system institutionalization negatively affect one of the most stable developing democracies. Thus, the chapter takes a slightly different view by developing a framework that examines the varying degrees of party capacity according to stages of democratization. More concretely, the chapter claims that the *minjoo* parties have been capable of building and sustaining democratic contestation, the minimum requirement of electoral democracy. Their capabilities were particularly visible when the country's politics dynamically either proceeded or regressed to a threshold of electoral democracy, as shown in the cases of the democratic transition in the mid-1980s and the sudden collapse of Park Geun-Hye's presidency in 2016–17. In contrast, like other parties in South Korea, the contribution of the *minjoo* parties to the further democratization towards liberal democracy, which should be based on democratic accountability, is limited and insufficient since they have been incapable of building strong, coherent, and longstanding linkages with voters and other political actors. This chapter defines such *minjoo* parties' capabilities gap between democratic contestation and accountability as a commitment discrepancy.

Commitment discrepancy is still a useful tool for understanding South Korean party politics and democratization in the present day. The danger of a democratic crisis was removed by the rise of Moon Jae-In's presidency, yet the ruling DPK has not made meaningful progress toward more mature democracies by increasing its accountability. Its so-called "settlement of deep-rooted evils" (*jeogpye-chungsan*) agenda for sociopolitical reform has already degenerated into a longstanding source of polarization between pro-Moon and anti-Moon factions in the whole Korean society (Jung 2018). Furthermore, unlike its counterparts, DPK's intraparty democracy levels remained low, meaning that virtually no intraparty challenges to the Moon's government policies were allowed. In turn, the growing commitment discrepancy within the DPK rendered the party less accountable and appealing to the public. In the presidential and regional elections, which were held consecutively in March and June 2022, the DPK lost to the People Power Party, Saenuri's successor.

The analysis of the *minjoo* parties in this chapter thus has implications for developing a bigger role of Korean political parties in the country's democratic progress: to overcome the commitment discrepancy by increasing democratic accountability. As shown above, the success and failure of the *minjoo* parties have been heavily dependent upon whether their party leaders' (are able to) secure executive power through elections. Such a dependence is detrimental to the parties' accountability because it weakens the functions of political parties as primary organizations of aggregating interests through policymaking and significantly reduces their sustainability over multiple presidential elections. Thus, having more stable and stronger roots in the society with institutionalized recruitment and training of party membership is required. In addition, opportunistic maneuverings, including party mergers, relabeling, and leadership change caused by factional infighting, which is the main reason for creating a credibility problem among the population, should be avoided.

## Appendix 2.1 List of Minjoo Party Family since 1980s

<i>Party Label</i>	<i>Date of Formation</i>	<i>Date of Demise</i>	<i>Party Chairman/Chief Secretary (Term)</i>
Democratic Korea Party ( <i>Minjoo Hankook-dang</i> , DKP)	1981.1.1	1988.4.26	Yu Chi-Song (1981.1–1988.4)
New Korea Democratic Party ( <i>Shinhan Minjoo-dang</i> , NKDP)	1985.1.18	1988.4.26	Lee Min-Woo (1985.1–1987.11) Shin Do-Hwan (1988.1–1988.4)
Reunification and Democracy Party ( <i>Tongil Minjoo-dang</i> , RDP)	1987.5.1	1990.1.22	Kim Young-Sam (1987.5–1990.1)
Peace and Democracy Party ( <i>Pyunghwa Minjoo-dang</i> , PDP)	1987.11.12	1991.9.14	Kim Dae-Jung (1987.11–1991.9)
Democratic Party ( <i>Minjoo-dang</i> , DP)	1990.6.15	1991.9.16	Lee Ki-Taek (1990.6–1991.9)
Democratic Party ( <i>Minjoo-dang</i> , DP)	1991.9.16	1995.12.21	Kim Dae-Jung (1991.9–1992.12) Lee Ki-Taek (1991.9–1995. 8) Hong Young-Ki (1995. 8–1995. 12) Park Il (1995.8–1995. 12)
National Congress for New Politics ( <i>Sae Jungchee Kukmin Hoiui</i> , NCNP)	1995.9.11	2000.1.20	Kim Dae-Jung (1995.9–2000. 1)

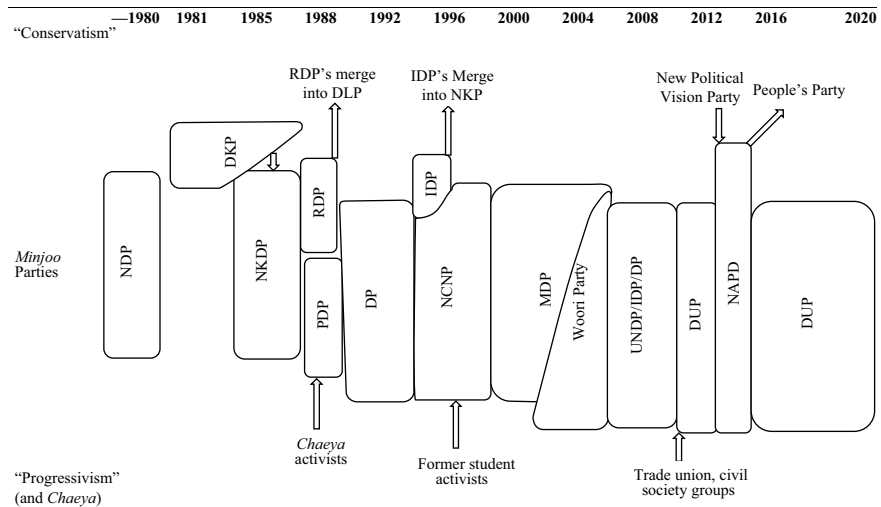
(Continued)

<i>Party Label</i>	<i>Date of Formation</i>	<i>Date of Demise</i>	<i>Party Chairman/Chief Secretary (Term)</i>
Integrated Democratic Party ( <i>Tonghap Minjoo-dang</i> , IDP)	1995.12.21	1997.12.24	Park Il (1995.12–1996.6) Chang Eul-Byung (1995.12–1996.6) Lee Ki-Taek (1996.6.–1997. 9) Cho Soon (1997.9–1997. 11)
Millennium Democratic Party ( <i>Sae Chunnyun Minjoo-dang</i> , MDP)	2000.1.20	2007.6.27	Kim Dae-Jung (2000.1–2001. 11) Han Hwa-Gap (2002.4–2003. 2) Chung Dae-Chul (2003.2–2003.9) Park Sang-Chun (2003.2–2003.11) Cho Soon-Hyung (2003.11–2004.4) Han Hwa-Gap (2004.4–2006.12) Chang Sang (2006.6–2007.4) Park Sang-Chun (2007.4–2007.6)
Open Our Party ( <i>Yeollin Uri-dang</i> , Uri Party)	2003.11.11	2007.8.20	Kim Won-Ki (2003.10–2004. 1) Chung Dong-Young (2004.1–2004.5) Shin Ki-Nam (2004.5–2004.8) Lee Bu-Young (2004.8–2005.1) Moon Hee-Sang (2005.4–2005.10) Chung Dong-Young (2006.2–2006.6) Kim Keun-Tae (2006.6–2007.2) Chung Se-Kyun (2007.2–2007.8)
United New Democratic Party ( <i>Dae Tonghap Minjoo Shin-dang</i> , UNDP)	2007.8.5	2008.2.17	Oh Choong-Il (2007.8–2008.1) Sohn Hak-Kyu (2008.1–2008.2)
Integrated Democratic Party ( <i>Tonghap Minjoo-dang</i> , IDP)	2008.2.17	2008.7.6	Sohn Hak-Kyu (2008.2–2008.7) Park Sang-Chun (2008.2–2008.7)

(Continued)

Party Label	Date of Formation	Date of Demise	Party Chairman/Chief Secretary (Term)
Democratic Party ( <i>Minjoo-dang</i> , DP)	2008.7.6	2011.11.23	Chung Se-Kyun (2008.7–2010.8) Yoo Ui-Dong (2010.10–2011.12)
Democratic United Party ( <i>Minjoo Tonghap-dang</i> , DUP)	2011.12.16	2014.3.26	Han Myung-Sook (2012.1–2012.4) Lee Hae-Chan (2012.6–2012.11) Kim Han-Gil (2013.5–2014.3)
New Politics Alliance for Democracy ( <i>Sae Jungchee</i> <i>Minjoo Yonhap</i> , NPAD)	2014.3.26	2015.12.28	Kim Han-Gil (2014.3–2014.7) Ahn Chul-Soo (2014.3–2014.7) Moon Jae-In (2015.2–2015.12)
Democratic Party of Korea ( <i>Deobuleo Minjoo-dang</i> , DPK)	2015.12.28		Moon Jae-In (2015.12–2016.1) Choo Mi-Ae (2016.8–2018.8) Lee Hae-Chan (2018.8–2020.8)

## Appendix 2.2 Pedigree of Minjoo Parties (1980–Present)



Note: The volume and location of each figure broadly represent electoral performance and ideological representation of the *minjoo* party family, respectively.

## Notes

- 1 In this chapter, South Korea and South Korean politics are used interchangeably with Korea and Korean politics, representatively. This usage resonates with the previous relevant literature.
- 2 For example, at least 61 seats out of 276 were unconditionally awarded to the largest party. See Koh (1985) for details on the legislative election laws during the Chun's presidency.
- 3 "'Gimdaejungssi Sinbyeongchiryo Ggetnaego Guigukgyeongu Beopeddara Pilyojochi'—Beopmubu ['Legal Measures Will Be Accordingly Followed by Mr. Kim Dae-Jung's Return']—Ministry of Justice," *Kyunghyang Shinmun*, September 21, 1984.
- 4 In December 1986, the NKDP chairman Lee Min-Woo proposed to accept the parliamentary system in exchange for his own policy package of political liberalization. Soon after the proposal the majority faction led by YS and DJ defected from the NKDP and established the Reunification and Democracy Party (*Tongil Minjoo-dang*, RDP). The NKDP was dissolved in 1988 by failure to win a single seat in the National Assembly. For more details, see Harrison, Selig S. 1987. "Dateline South Korea: A Divided Seoul." *Foreign Policy* 67: 154–75.
- 5 The recent investigation of the declassified documents shows that Chun actually had a plan to declare a martial law and deploy army troops to suppress the nationwide protests. He, however, soon faced strong opposition from the White House, which gave a strong warning to his plan, and eventually changed his mind. For further information, see Tokala, Mark, "The Case of South Korea," *Asan Special Forum*, April 24, 2017, <http://www.theasanforum.org/the-case-of-south-korea/> (accessed 1 October, 2020).
- 6 Owing to the revision of election law following the constitutional amendment, 224 seats in the National Assembly were selected by a single-member plurality electoral system. Half of the remaining 75 "national district" seats were secured by the largest party, and the other half was distributed by a proportional representation scheme (Bedeski 1994, 71).
- 7 In 1996, the court sentenced Chun Doo-Hwan to death and Roh Tae-Woo to imprisonment for 22 years and 6 months. However, they were pardoned in late 1997 by an agreement between the two Kims.
- 8 For example, see "Daewoo Josun Nodongja Bunsinjasal A labor of Daewoo Shipbuilding Committed Suicide by Fire," *Hankyoreh Shinmun*, June 22, 1995; "Siwi Silmyung Daehaksaeng Bunsinjasal [A College Student Lost Eyesight by Police Protest Repression Committed Suicide by Fire], April 20, 1996.
- 9 "Minjoo, Seoulsi Uihoido Seokkweon [DP also swept over the Seoul's local Assembly]," *Kyunghyang Shinmun*, June 29, 1995.
- 10 "Kukmin Hoiwi Jungchi Gaehyuk Teukwi Pojin Wanryo [Members of NCNP's Special Committee for Political Reform Finalized]," *Hankyoreh Shinmun*, July 1, 1998.
- 11 "Jungchi Gaehyuk Dongsang Imong [Political Reform: Same Goals Different Thoughts]," *Kyunghyang Shinmun*, September 30, 1999.
- 12 "Roh Dangseonja Ilmunildap [Question and Answer with the President Elect Roh]," *MoneyToday*, February 23, 2003.
- 13 "*Uwangjawang Yeodang, Galpangjilpang Gaehyuk* [Government Party Running Pell-Mell, Confused Reform]," *Hankyoreh* 21, December 24, 2004.
- 14 "An Anger in Korea Over More Than Beef," *The New York Times*, June 12, 2008.
- 15 "S. Korea leader 'baffled' by mad cow fears," *CNN.Com*, May 22, 2008.
- 16 "Gukjeongwon Jachegaehyuk 'Yongdusami' Wooryo [Concerns about NIS's Self-Reform]," *Naeil Shinmun*, September 4, 2013.
- 17 In March 2014, the DUP renamed the New Politics Alliance for Democracy (*Sae Jungchee Minjoo Yonhap*, NPAD) by merging with Ahn Chul-Soo's New Political Vision Party. The coexistence, however, did not last long as a bitter power struggle between pro-Moon and pro-Ahn factions erupted. Consequently, Ahn and several senior Honam politicians vetoed by Moon defected from the NPAD and established the People's Party in February 2016. Meanwhile, the NPAD renamed the DPK to solidify the Moon's leadership.

- 18 “Ruling party imploding on impeachment,” *The Korea Times*, November 25, 2016.
- 19 “Kim Moo-Sung, ‘Nuga Jinjja Baeshinjainga?’ [Kim Moo-Sung, ‘Who is a Real Traitor?’],” *Minaehankook*, June 24, 2020.
- 20 “2 Ex-Defense Ministers under Coup Probe,” *The Korea Times*, October 19, 2018.

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# 3

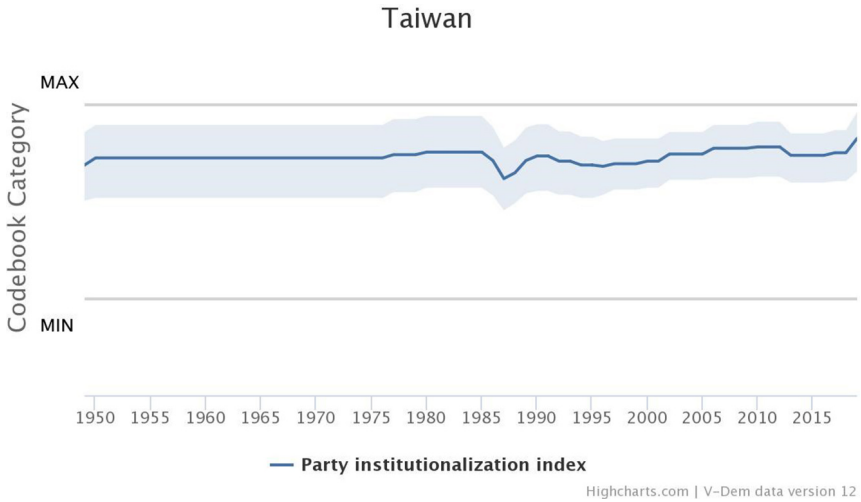
## THE EFFECTS OF THE CHANGING NATIONAL IDENTITY OF THE TAIWANESE PEOPLE ON THE PARTY POLITICS OF TAIWAN

*Tommy Chung-yin Kwan*

### Introduction

Although Taiwan's political status is often precariously under the shadow of the People's Republic of China, the political regime on the island is a *de facto* democracy. It underwent a democratic transition after the 38-year-long martial law enforced by the authoritarian party, *Kuomintang* (KMT), from 1949 to 1987. In 1992, an election was held for the parliament (Legislative Yuan), the first since the KMT retreated to Taiwan in 1949. The first presidential election followed this in 1996. The first transfer of power came about in 2000 when the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP), comprised of former democratic activists, narrowly won the presidential election against a factionally divided KMT.<sup>1</sup> The alternation between the KMT and DPP also repeated peacefully in 2008 and 2016 amid the constant threats from the PRC across the strait.<sup>2</sup> The successful democratization of Taiwan is, in fact, a narrative that the Taiwanese government is so proud of and is subsequently becoming a source of soft power for diplomatic-isolated Taiwan (Wang and Lu 2008). The Freedom House, one of the parameters of democracy, denotes Taiwan as "free" and states that "Taiwan's vibrant and competitive democratic system has allowed three peaceful transfers of power between rival parties since 2000, and protections for civil liberties are generally robust" (Freedom-House 2020). The Polity IV project has also been given ten marks and labeled Taiwan as a "full democracy" since 2006 (Marshall 2018). At the same time, the party institutionalization index carried out by the Varieties of Democracy has also reflected the degree of democratic consolidation in Taiwan as the score has increased steadily since the late 1980s and just culminated in 2019, the latest result released by the organization (V-Dem 2019) (see Figure 3.1).

While the transition from an authoritarian regime to democracy in Taiwan is usually understood as a synthetic process<sup>3</sup> (Fell 2012, 36; Huntington 1991), this



**FIGURE 3.1** V-Dem Party Institutionalization Index of Taiwan from 1949 to 2019.

Source: Coppedge et al., 2020

chapter focuses on the political party’s role in democratizing and consolidating democracy on the island. As suggested by Bermeo and Yashar, a strong political party is “consistently the key actor(s) that successfully mobilized for democracy” (Bermeo and Yashar 2016, 195). In Taiwan, the stability of both political parties and the party system is remarkably outstanding, compared to its democratic counterparts in Asia; for instance, South Korea, which had a very fragmented party system (Park, in this volume). The stable parties (and the party system they compose) of Taiwan are rare in Asia: the KMT and DPP have dominated the party system in Taiwan since the democratic transition. At the same time, other smaller parties “come and go” in the party system. Even in Japan, which receives a slightly higher score (96/100 compared to Taiwan’s 93/100) than Taiwan in the Freedom House ranking, the party system has been dominated by the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) for decades; opposition parties have always been volatile. They lack the cutting edge to compete with the LDP. Therefore, what makes the party system in Taiwan extremely stable remains the biggest question in assessing democracy in Taiwan.

This chapter argues that the development of political parties in Taiwan heavily depends on the largest cleavage in society—competing national identities (Fell 2012, 133–150). The division of the Chinese identity versus Taiwanese identity remains the major cleavage in Taiwan; it could also be argued that the two camps more or less maintain a balance of power. Nonetheless, the preference for national identities in Taiwan has changed gradually in recent years, and particularly in the aftermath of the Sunflower Movement in 2014, the cleavage was highlighted.

The change has different impacts on the two major parties respectively. To the DPP, which suffered heavily from a series of setbacks, including the dismal electoral

results in 2008, the changing preferential national identity in Taiwan played a significant role in the revival of the DPP that made it the ruling party since 2016. Despite the disappointing performance of the DPP in office from 2000 to 2008 and the corruption scandals which led to its downfall, the party still captured a significant number of votes in the 2008 elections as it was the only viable option representing the local Taiwanese identity in the party system. When Taiwanese identity became increasingly dominant in politics, the DPP first reaped the benefit. The result of the 2016 elections, after the rise of the 2014 Sunflower Movement, was the best example of how the Taiwanese identity rejuvenated the DPP.

Conversely, the KMT had a different fate in the face of the new trend of Taiwanese people's preference on national identity. Since the KMT represents the Chinese identity with its mainland roots, the falling popularity of the Chinese identity in Taiwan negatively impacted the support for KMT. The KMT imminently needed change and reform to adjust to the new balance of national identities.

Political parties in Taiwan, formed alongside the competing Taiwanese and Chinese identities, fulfill the needs of Taiwanese people for as long as the question of "unification with the mainland or the independence of Taiwan" remains unsolved, yet generally considered with utmost importance by the public. In understanding the relationship between political party and democracy, a stable party system is, on the one hand, a factor for democratic consolidation; on the other hand, it is also reciprocally the result of a healthy democracy. The stable party system in Taiwan has benefited from the relatively stable balance of national identities. When the balance was disturbed, the respective political parties' power would also change.

In the following sections, the chapter will first discuss the role of political parties in Taiwan's democratic transition from the late 1980s to the early 1990s, as parties in Taiwan played a significant role in both the "top-down" and "bottom-up" explanations of democratization. An overview of the role of political parties after the democratic transition in Taiwan will follow. Changes in Taiwanese people's Taiwanese/Chinese identity will also be outlined. It will then explain how the alignment of Taiwanese parties with national identities strengthened the DPP and helped the it to overcome several challenges since 2008. Finally, the last section will assess the impact of changing the national identity of the Taiwanese people on the KMT. In the research for this chapter, electoral data and survey results were used to identify the development of political parties in Taiwan. Further, semi-structured interviews with politicians and social movement activists were conducted, while official party documents, including the press release from political parties in Taiwan, were also analyzed.

## **The Role of Parties during the Democratic Transition by the End of the 20th Century**

In explaining Taiwan's democratic transition in the late 1980s and early 1990s, the different schools of thought could be divided into two main categories – "top-down" and "bottom-up" approaches. While the two approaches represent

completely opposite explanations, the two share a commonality regarding the role of political parties. The “top-down” approach is always emphasized in studies of Taiwan’s democracy and democratization, treating the transition as peaceful and seamless. This approach focuses on elite politics, concluding that the democratization in Taiwan was only made possible by the role of the authoritarian government – an authoritarian-led democratization (Riedl et al. 2020). The decentralization of power by the KMT was described as “the strength to concede” (Slater and Wong 2013). In the 1980s, KMT underwent a process of localization by recruiting more local Taiwanese,<sup>4</sup> which included Lee Teng-hui, who succeeded Chiang Ching-kuo in becoming the president of Taiwan in 1988 (Dickson 1996). The party also gradually changed its ideology after the diplomatic setback in the 1970s (Hao 1996). The KMT-initiated democratic transition saw the former authoritarian party remaining in power after the first presidential election in 1996 when Lee Teng-hui won by a landslide. As Daniel Ziblatt emphasized in his book *Conservative Parties and the Birth of Democracy*, keeping the former authoritarian party, usually conservative, in power could effectively stabilize the democratization process (Ziblatt 2017). Therefore, the KMT played a significant role in the democratic transition of Taiwan as it did not only delegate power to the people but also stuck to the rules, especially after they fell from power.

In the “bottom-up” approach, the role of civil society was highlighted. There were different agents from the limited civil society during the martial law period in Taiwan, for instance, the Presbyterian Church<sup>5</sup> as well as the quasi-party structure, the *Danwai* (literally means outside the party), which was made up of several democratic movement activists (Rigger 2001). Since the formation of organizations, including political parties, was barred during the martial law period, the *Danwai* (黨外) was an illegal association. The relentless efforts from the *Danwai* members exerted enormous pressure constantly on the Chiang’s regime despite several crackdowns from the authority. After several leaders from the *Danwai* movement were prosecuted in December 1979 in the “Kaohsiung Incident,”<sup>6</sup> spouses and family members of the arrested activists took up the positions that were being left behind and continued the democratic movement. According to the “bottom-up” approach, the stubborn efforts of the *Danwai* movement were the key to pushing democratic reform in Taiwan (Hu 2020; Wu 2020). In this bottom-up approach, the role of the political party should not be overlooked as the *Danwai* was, in fact, the precursor of the DPP, which was later formed in September 1986 (DPP 2020) by almost the same group of activists.

Besides the two major streams in explaining the democratization in Taiwan, Shelley Rigger offered a third way to account for the regime transition. She suggested that the limited elections in Taiwan during the marital law period served as the independent variable for democratic transition as the election *per se* could educate voters to get used to democratic elections; while democratic activists could also have the chance to spread their ideas in the electoral campaign and made their presence felt by the KMT (Rigger 1999). The active participation from the *Danwai*, and later the DPP, was essential in turning these limited elections from a source

of legitimacy for the authoritarian regime to a factor in pushing for democracy in Taiwan (*ibid*). In this brief review of three streams of explanations, the role of a political party was crucial in the “multi-causal, multi-dimensional” (Fell 2012, 39) regime transition in Taiwan, whether it was the KMT or the DPP (*Danwai*) that took the stage.

### **The Domination and Development of the KMT and DPP in Taiwan Politics after Democratization**

It should not be surprising that the role of both KMT and DPP did not diminish after the democratic transition. They have gone from strength to strength and have dominated the party system in every election since the first Legislative Yuan election in 1992 (see Table 3.1). Both parties constantly gain more than 70% of the vote in parliamentary elections, not to mention their absolute domination in the purely first-past-the-post presidential election. The KMT continued thriving in elections until 2016, after the former authoritarian party had conceded power and introduced universal suffrage to the Taiwanese people in the 1990s. While DPP's candidate Chen Shui-bian won the presidential elections twice in 2000 and 2004, the KMT (together with its allies, the People First Party) still enjoyed a majority in the Legislative Yuan. The divided government during Chen's era also exposed the president's weakness constitutionally (Rigger 2002), and constitutional reforms were raised in the agenda. It is also noteworthy that during this period, while the KMT and DPP dominated the party system of Taiwan, smaller parties were also presented. For instance, the PFP was a KMT ally, and the Taiwan Solidarity Union (TSU) was a DPP ally. These smaller parties were “purifier parties” (Lucardie 2000) that were “new parties claimed to defend and ‘purify’ the original ideology of their reference party” (*ibid*. 177), mainly made up of rebel candidates from KMT and DPP respectively (Fell 2006). In 2008, the KMT scored its biggest victory as the party not only won in the presidential election with Ma Ying-jeou but also got 81 out of the total 113 seats in the Legislative Yuan under the new electoral system. On the other side of the political aisle, the resurgence of the KMT came at the expense of the DPP as Chen Shui-bian's corruption scandal badly hit them.<sup>7</sup> After the party's successive landslide defeats in 2008 (i.e., the Legislative Yuan election in January and the presidential election in March), the DPP needed to address many challenges to regain momentum. At this time, the DPP only held a dismal 27 out of 113 seats in the legislature after 2008.

Consequently, social movements were revived after the KMT returned to power in 2008 (Ho 2014; Fell 2017b). The number of social movements initially declined under the DPP since many activists were allied with the then-ruling party. While the DPP attempted to accommodate and recruit activists, the minority government could not implement their policies due to the opposition they faced in the Legislative Yuan. The most notable example was the confrontation over Chen's government decision to halt the construction of Taiwan's fourth nuclear power plant (Ho 2010; Rigger 2002). At the same time, the DPP revealed its inclination

**TABLE 3.1** Summary of National Election Results in Taiwan from 1992 to 2020

Year	Type of Election	% of vote			Winner	Turnout
		KMT	DPP	Combined		
1992	Legislative Yuan	53.0	31.0	84.1	KMT	72.0
1995	Legislative Yuan	46.1	33.2	79.3	KMT	67.8
1996	Presidential	54.0	21.1	75.1	KMT	76.0
1998	Legislative Yuan	46.4	29.6	76.0	KMT	68.0
2000	Presidential	23.1	39.3	62.4 <sup>a</sup>	DPP	82.7
2001	Legislative Yuan	31.3	36.6	67.9	KMT	66.2
2004	Presidential	49.9	50.1	100	DPP	80.3
2004	Legislative Yuan	32.8	35.7	68.5	KMT <sup>b</sup>	59.2
2008	Legislative Yuan <sup>c</sup>	51.2	36.9	88.1	KMT	58.3
2008	Presidential	58.5	41.6	100	KMT	76.3
2012	Legislative Yuan	44.6	34.6	79.2	KMT	74.4
2012	Presidential	51.6	45.6	97.2	KMT	74.4
2016	Legislative Yuan	26.9	44.1	71.0	DPP	66.3
2016	Presidential	31.0	56.1	87.1	DPP	66.3
2020	Legislative Yuan	38.6	39.4	95.7	DPP	74.9
2020	Presidential	38.6	57.1	78.0	DPP	74.9

Source: Central-Election-Commission 2020.

<sup>a</sup> A rebel candidate of the KMT, James Soong, ran the election along with the DPP candidate Chen Shui-bian and KMT candidate Lien Chan. Chen won 39.3% of vote, while James and Lien received 36.8% and 23.1% of vote respectively (Commission 2016).

<sup>b</sup> In both the 2001 and 2004 Legislative Yuan elections, although the KMT received a lesser vote than the DPP, there was a third party, the People's First Party (PFP), led by the KMT-rebel James Soong. PFP received 36.8% and 20.3% in the 2001 and 2004 Legislative Yuan elections respectively. Thus, the Pan-Blue camp still controlled the majority in the parliament.

<sup>c</sup> From 2008 onwards, the Legislative Yuan election adopted a new electoral system. The figure (% of vote) shown in the table is the % of votes in the proportional representation election.

towards the interests of business corporations on several occasions which led to the rise of a few land preservation movements. The limited results achieved by the DPP government disenchanted social movement activists and eroded the once harmonious relationship between the DPP and social movements (Ho 2014). Not long after Ma Ying-jeou assumed the presidency, the student-led Wild Strawberry Movement broke out, followed by a series of movements, including the Anti-Media Monopoly Movement in 2012 (Hsiao 2017). The movement politics in Taiwan culminated in 2014 with the emergence of the Sunflower Movement. Student activists broke into the chamber of the legislature and occupied it for 23 days, protesting the passage of the Cross-Strait Service Trade Agreement (CSSTA), an agreement that would foster economic integration with mainland China. Thousands of citizens gathered around the Legislative Yuan to show their support. Ultimately, the student occupation successfully stopped the passage of the CSSTA (Rowen 2015).

The rise of the Sunflower Movement was a turning point in Taiwan politics. The KMT era ended in 2016 when Ma stepped down from the presidency, and the

party lost control of the Legislative Yuan for the first time. The DPP, led by Tsai Ing-wen, reaped the benefit of the Sunflower Movement and successfully won in both presidential and parliamentary elections in 2016. Besides, some activists from the Sunflower Movement, including its leader Huang Kuo-chang, formed the New Power Party (NPP) in the aftermath of the movement and participated in the 2016 Legislative Yuan election. The NPP won five seats in the election and replaced PFP and TSU to become the third-largest party in the legislature. Although the NPP did cooperate with the DPP in the elections, the movement background of the party steered it away from the label of “purifier” (Kwan and Fell 2020). In 2020, DPP continued its control of both presidency and parliament. KMT suffered another electoral blow amid social unrest in Hong Kong, as KMT was labeled as supporting reunification with China, and the “One Country, Two Systems” would result from reunification. In addition, in the 2020 election, another new party, the Taiwan People’s Party (TPP), formed by Taipei mayor Ko Wen-je, was established and became the third largest party (while NPP ranked fourth in the election). Apart from the stable and dominating electoral results of the KMT and DPP, the voting turnout in Taiwan elections (national level) has been remarkable as it has constantly reached over 70%. This was almost unthinkable in matured Western democracies (Central Election Commission 2020).

## The Alignment of Political Parties in Taiwan and the Changing National Identity

Unlike western democracies that divide political parties into left or right in terms of social and economic policies, in Taiwan, parties are divided by the spectrum of nationalities, namely the “Pan-Blue Coalition” and the “Pan-Green Coalition,” or the “independence versus unification (*tongdu*)” spectrum (Fell 2005; Rigger 2006). The so-called “coalition” is an informal naming to divide a party’s stance regarding preferential national identity. The Pan-Blue Coalition represents the preference for Chinese identity over Taiwanese identity, and it also inclines to more cooperation and integration with the Peoples’ Republic of China (PRC) across the strait. Although the Pan-Blue Coalition does not necessarily support unification with mainland China, it opposes Taiwan’s independence. The color blue is the party color of the KMT, as the pan-blue coalition is mainly made up of the KMT, PFP, and New Party (NP). In opposition to the Pan-Blue camp, the Pan-Green camp, which is made up of the DPP and TSU, represents preference for Taiwanese identity over Chinese identity. It supports Taiwan’s independence. Likewise, the color green is the party color of the leading party in the coalition, the DPP. In fact, as the first local party established in Taiwan, the DPP added the ultimate goal of Taiwan’s independence to the party’s official position in 1991 (DPP 1986).

The national identity of the Taiwanese people has always been the utmost important issue in Taiwan politics (Hsieh 2002; Fell 2018, 150). The alignment of political parties with national identities, on the one hand, represents the needs and interests of the Taiwanese people. On the other hand, it also gives political parties



resilience in facing crises, as long as the party sticks with its preferential national identity. The Election Study Center of the National Chengchi University (NCCU) has conducted surveys on (i) changes in the national identity of Taiwanese people, (ii) changes in unification or independence stances of Taiwanese people, and (iii) political party identifications constantly since 1992. These surveys, particularly (i) and (ii), reveal the trend of the most important issue in Taiwan, and the two questions are heavily related to each other. The national identity of the Taiwanese people would undoubtedly affect their choice of stance in supporting unification with China or Taiwan's independence in the survey.

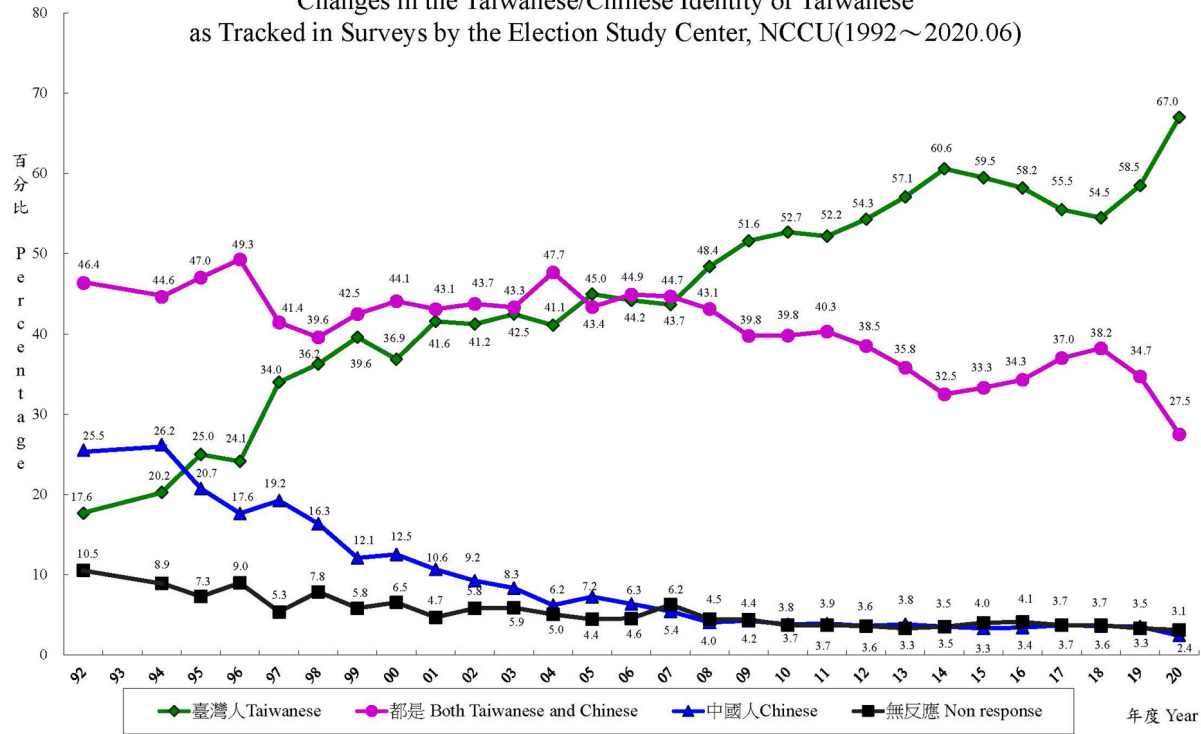
Finally, survey (iii), which measures the party identifications, provides another dimension in reflecting the change of power and popularity of parties in Taiwan in addition to election results. As shown in Figure 3.2, the rise and fall of the Taiwanese identity and the Chinese identity (and both Taiwanese and Chinese) accordingly have been very much stable (NCCU 2020a). Taiwanese identity has grown steadily in the survey, while an opposite trend A similar diverging trend could also be found in the changes of the unification/independence stance, as “maintain status quo, move towards independence” and “maintain status quo, move towards unification” in Figure 3.3 (NCCU 2020b).

### ***The Revival of DPP***

Several key events in Taiwan's political development after democratization, highlighted in the earlier section, were turning points in Taiwan's party politics. These events included the corruption scandal and the electoral reform in 2008, the 2014 Sunflower Movement, and the third alternation of ruling parties in 2016. They posed serious threats to the survival of parties in Taiwan. Nevertheless, the DPP was resilient enough to overcome the crises. The adherence to their preferential national identity has strengthened them to withstand the challenges. This section will show how the DPP recovered from the trough in 2008 and has remained at its peak since 2016.

In 2008, the DPP suffered its second consecutive defeat in the national elections. To reflect the desperate need to turn things around for the DPP, a suggestion of abandoning the name, Democratic Progressive Party, the label that had been used for 32 years, was raised (DPP 2008e; Jian 2008). Rumors suggested that the DPP should be renamed “Social Democratic Party” to distance itself from the past and start a new page as a party. While the newly elected chairwoman Tsai Ing-wen openly expressed her agreement to breaking the limits brought by the DPP label, renaming the party would be a very big decision (News 2008). Although renaming the party did not materialize, it did reflect the determination of DPP for a complete overhaul. Tsai Ing-wen, the former vice premier and former chairperson of the Mainland Affairs Council during Chen Shui-bian's era, was not a traditional DPP politician. Despite receiving factional support (from the New Tide faction) during the election for party leadership, Tsai did not have a factional background (Fell 2012, 98).<sup>8</sup> She was initially an academic and, later, a technocrat in Chen's

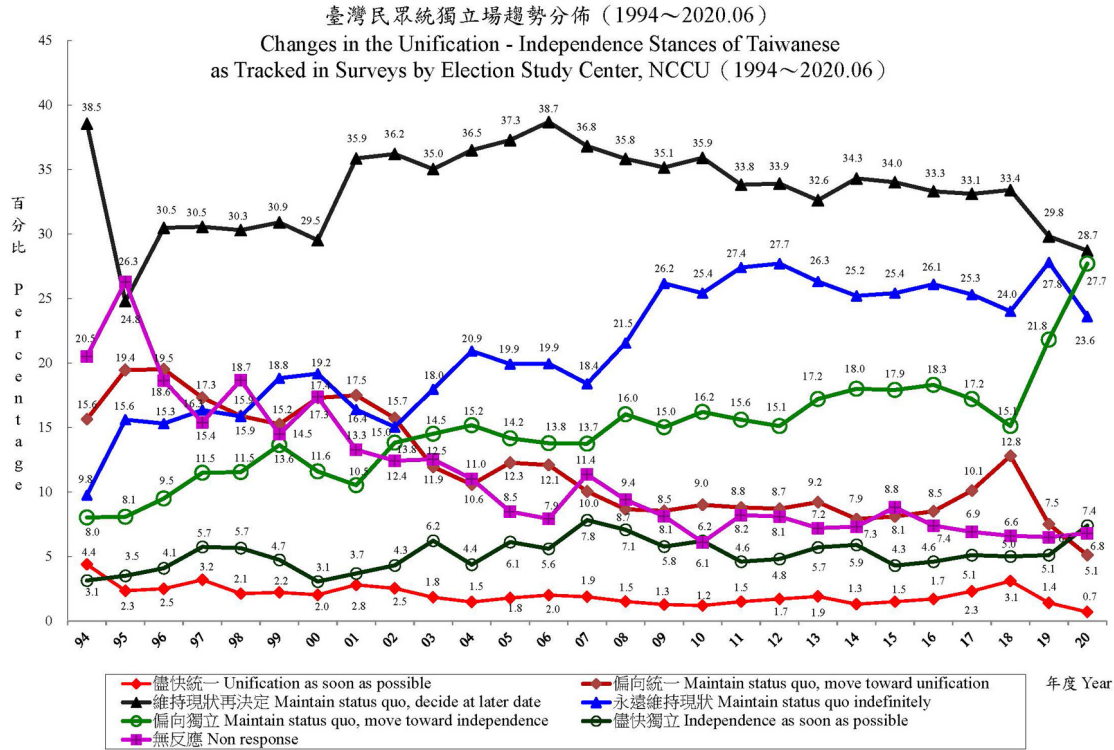
臺灣民眾臺灣人／中國人認同趨勢分佈 (1992~2020.06)  
 Changes in the Taiwanese/Chinese Identity of Taiwanese  
 as Tracked in Surveys by the Election Study Center, NCCU(1992~2020.06)



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FIGURE 3.2 Changes in the Taiwanese/Chinese Identity of Taiwan People from 1992 to 2020.

Source: NCCU 2020a.



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FIGURE 3.3 Changes in the Unification/Independence Stances of Taiwan People from 1992 to 2020.

Source: NCCU 2020b.

government. The atypical background of Tsai fit the DPP perfectly after a series of corruption scandals related to the traditional party figures, including then President Chen Shui-bian, as the party desperately needed to escape this haze; Tsai represented the new era of the DPP.

There were numerous attempts by the DPP to change and reform immediately under Tsai's leadership in 2008: one of the key themes of change was to emphasize its relationship with social movements by improving the DPP's relation with movements. Notions like "working with (跟人民站在一起)," "communicating (充份溝通)," "initiating (主辦)," "uniting (團結人民的力量)," or "necessary to lead (採取必要的抗爭手段)" social movements were mentioned repeatedly in Tsai's speeches on different occasions (DPP 2008a, 2008c, 2008d, 2008f). However, the effect of these attempts remained doubtful, if not futile, as shown in the Wild Strawberry Movement, the first large-scale student movement in Taiwan since the Wild Lily Movement in 1990. In the Wild Strawberry Movement, student activists intentionally distanced themselves from the DPP.<sup>9</sup> The student activist Chen Wei-ting said:

When we were sitting in outside the Executive Yuan on the first night, the first decision we had to make, was to decide whether we (student activists) should accept sleeping bags offered by the DPP. Right at the beginning of the movement, Li Ming-cong, one of the leaders in the movement and the then teacher at the Department of Sociology of the National University of Taiwan, picked up a phone call from the DPP. The DPP tried to offer some material support to the students. It sounded very nitty gritty and did no harm to the movement if we had accepted the sleeping bags. Nevertheless, we decided not to accept any help from the DPP. I think that this is a very clear message sent out from the activists.<sup>10</sup>

The poor electoral results in the 2008 national elections, as well as the broken DPP-movement relations, represented the miserable situation faced by the DPP. Another activist leader, Wang Shou-da, summed up the situation: "[I]n the time of the Wild Strawberry Movement (in 2008), it was also the time when the DPP lost the government. It represented the demise of the 'pro-independent' power and the revival of the KMT. Both the DPP and civil society were too weak at that time. We had no hope towards the future, no hope in ourselves, and no hope in the DPP."<sup>11</sup> Yet, the imbalance between vote and seat shares in the Legislative Yuan and the exaggerated seat deficit under the new electoral formula sunk the DPP to the bottom (Fell 2010). It should be pointed out that the DPP still managed to get 36.9% of the vote in the Legislative Yuan election in 2008, an even higher percentage of votes compared to the 2004 election. In the predominately two-party system of Taiwan, DPP was the only party representing the "local Taiwanese." It also means that the people who identified themselves as Taiwanese had a relatively limited option but to vote for the DPP despite its poor performance.

While Tsai Ing-wen's effort in re-energizing the DPP was not regarded as effective from the activists' perspective, the DPP recovered from a miserable situation

gradually with the continual rise of Taiwanese identity among the people (refer to Figure 3.1). At the same time, the KMT government led by Ma ignored the trend and went in the opposite direction by promoting more integration with mainland China. The signing of the CSSTA culminated Ma's effort, which finally led to the outbreak of the Sunflower Movement in 2014. While the DPP only dominated elections again in 2016, the survey of party identification of the Taiwanese people reflected how the Sunflower Movement was a turning point in Taiwan's party politics. Although the Sunflower Movement had multiple themes (Fell, 2017a) and was described as "a culmination of a long series of contentions and a confluence of diverse streams of many CSOs in the past few years" (Hsu 2017), rejecting further integration with China (also known as the "China factor") was the most important theme of the movement. The Taiwanese identity as the preference of the Taiwanese people reached its peak in 1992 (later being superseded in 2020) (NCCU 2020a). In 2014, for the first time, the Pan-Green Coalition gained a higher percentage than the Pan-Blue Coalition in the survey since 1992 (see Figure 3.4). The DPP also replaced the KMT to become the most popular party in the survey (NCCU 2020c).

In the aftermath of the Sunflower Movement, which was arguably one of the largest social movements in Taiwan's history, political parties in Taiwan, especially the DPP, successfully captured and maintained the momentum left behind by the movement's activism. Student activist, Wei Yang, said in an interview:

a lot of young activists entered the DPP, some of them worked in the party central committee, some of them became advisors, some of them went into the legislators' office to work as an assistant. The DPP represented a clear career pathway for activists to continue their political career.<sup>12</sup>

As a result, the DPP successfully became one of the buffers for social movement activists to continue their political participation after the end of the Sunflower movement. The other buffer for activists was the formation of the NPP in 2015 (NPP 2015). As a "movement party" (Ho and Huang 2017; Kwan and Fell 2020), the NPP was seen as a product of the Sunflower Movement. Its emergence represented an underlying change in the party system in Taiwan as it replaced the likes of PFP and TSU to become the third party. The former party secretary of the NPP, Chen Wei-min, said in an interview that the NPP was not a "green party" but a local party like the DPP. She further said that in the long term, parties of local origin would become the norm in the Taiwan party system. In other words, the KMT with Chinese roots would fade out.<sup>13</sup>

### ***The Sinking KMT***

In 2016, the KMT (including the Pan-Blue Coalition) historically lost its majority in the Legislative Yuan; at the same time, it lost the presidential election. It was by far the lowest number of votes the Pan-Blue Coalition had received in a presidential

臺灣民眾政黨偏好分佈 (1992~2020.06)  
 Changes in the Party Identification of Taiwanese  
 as Tracked in Surveys by the Election Study Center, NCCU(1992~2020.06)

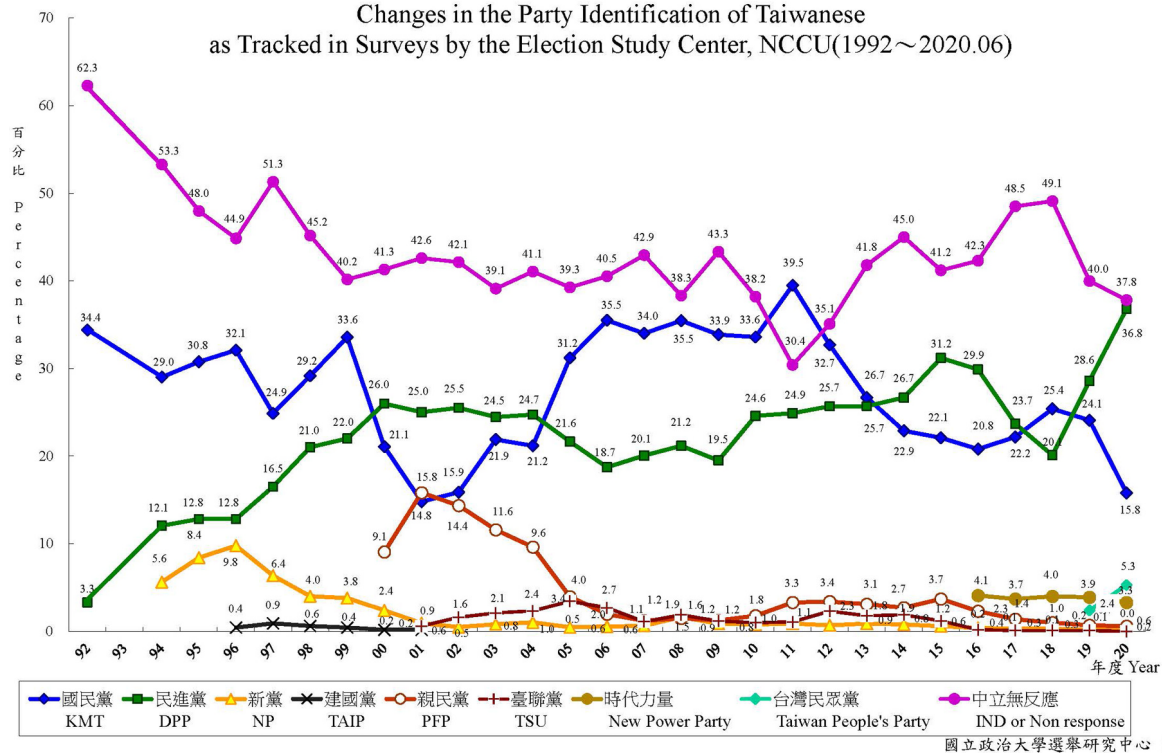


FIGURE 3.4 Changes in the Party Identification of Taiwanese from 1992 to 2020.

Source: NCCU 2020c.

election (i.e., 43.8%, KMT, and PFP combined). The predicament of the KMT in 2016 was comparable to the 2008 DPP, if not more miserable. While the decline of the Chinese identity as the Taiwanese people's preference was felt in the Sunflower Movement and the 2016 elections, the KMT did not help themselves in meeting voters' expectations. When Ma Ying-jeou was still in power, he arranged the "meeting of the century" with Xi Jing-ping, the president of the PRC, at the end of his second term in November 2015 (BBC 2015). While Ma hailed his effort in the cross-strait relations, his effort was not translated to the ballot box two months later. In fact, during the 2016 election, the KMT made their situation go from bad to worse in the "candidate saga." Originally, the veteran politician Hung Hsiu-chu was nominated as the KMT presidential candidate as she had won in the KMT primary. Despite the ongoing electoral campaign, the KMT decided to change its candidate and "advised" Hung resolutely to withdraw her candidacy less than three months before election day (Hsiao 2015). KMT president, Eric Chu, was substituted for Hung to run in the presidential election. Nevertheless, he failed to turn the party's fortune around. It could be argued that the KMT was in a state of chaos, internally and externally.

When the DPP regained power after 2016, the Tsai government immediately faced a series of challenges around the issues of labor and pension reforms (Chin and Su 2018; Hsiao 2016). In November 2018, there was the so-called "9-in-1" local election in which local officials, including the mayor, city council, and village chief, were elected. The DPP suffered a major electoral setback in the election as it was the first time the DPP had lost the Kaohsiung mayoral seat since 1994. Kaohsiung was generally regarded as the base of DPP, yet the KMT candidate Han Kuo-yu turned out to be the most popular figure in Kaohsiung. Han's populist appeal made him stand out from the traditional KMT politicians who were dull. His grassroots image was the key to rejuvenating KMT supporters' passion for politics. The popularity of Han was described as the "Han Wave," and it swept through the whole of Taiwan (Aspinwall 2019). Han was a veteran KMT member. Nevertheless, he was never considered a leader of the party. His unexpected victory in Kaohsiung turned him from a peripheral figure into the star of KMT. He and the "Han Wave" showed a glimpse of hope for the KMT to recover from the 2016 mess.

Before being nominated as the KMT candidate in the 2020 presidential election, Han visited Hong Kong in early 2019. During his visit, he not only met the chief executive of Hong Kong, Carrie Lam, but he also went to the Beijing Liaison Office and met Wang Zhi-min, then Liaison Office chief, in Hong Kong. It was for the first time a Taiwan-elected politician entered the Chinese Communist Party office in Hong Kong (Cheung 2019; Lum 2019). In June 2019, Han declared his intention to participate in the party primary for the 2020 presidential election, less than a year after being elected as the Kaohsiung mayor. Han subsequently won the primary and became the KMT candidate.

Nevertheless, the "Han wave" was short-lived and failed to transform the party's optimism for victory in 2020. Again, the unique social cleavage in Taiwan (i.e., the competing nationalities) influenced the result of the elections. In Hong Kong,

the Anti-Extradition Law Amendment Bill Movement took place, and protests happened continuously in the Special Administrative Region. The “anti-China” sentiment was high in Hong Kong and spread to Taiwan as well. Although Han made it clear that he opposed applying the “One Country, Two Systems” in Taiwan (Ge 2019), the memory of Han entering the Beijing Liaison Office was still fresh in voters’ memories. Concurrently, the DPP used the “Hong Kong” issue to highlight their emphasis on protecting Taiwan’s sovereignty throughout the whole campaign (DPP 2008b).

As shown in Figure 3.1, Taiwanese identity reached its historic peak in 2020 (67.0%), while Chinese (and both Chinese and Taiwanese) identity reached its lowest point since the survey was conducted. The trend was translated in the electoral results in 2020. Tsai Ing-wen won the highest number and percentage of the vote in Taiwan’s history; the DPP also held the majority in the Legislative Yuan. Conversely, the Pan-Blue Coalition further dipped from their 2016 record and it received only 42.9% of the vote (KMT and PFP combined) in the 2020 presidential election. The identification of the Pan-Blue Coalition also reached a bottom low in the survey. In short, while the change in national identity handed a lifeline to the DPP after 2008, it added plight to the KMT crisis after 2014 (i.e., Sunflower Movement). Like the DPP in 2008, rumors of name-changing for KMT surfaced (Hsiao, 2020). Even if it did not materialize, it revealed the desperation for reform by the KMT. Another similar attempt at KMT party change after the 2016 election defeat was in their relationship with social movements. Although the KMT was generally understood as conservative in the party spectrum, KMT leaders urged rebuilding the connection with social movements to resemble its history. Unlike the DPP, who traced their social movement root in the 1980s to the 2000s, the KMT referred back to the Republican period a century ago when Sun Yat-sen led the revolution that overthrew the Qing Dynasty (Kuomintang 2017) and, therefore, it should not be a surprise that this attempt at change was fruitless.

In 2020, the KMT faced a crossroads in its future. Johnny Chiang was elected as the president of KMT in March 2020, edging out the old party member Hau Lung-bin in the KMT chairman by-election (Shih, Yun, and Chung 2020). Whether the KMT could change its pro-China image would be the key to its revival in the future; Chiang at least represented the next generation of the KMT (ibid.). Young KMT members urged the KMT to return to its roots, which were pro-China instead of pro-Chinese Communist (Wei 2020). While the difference between pro-China and pro-Chinese communists was unclear, the stance of KMT on national identity and the relationship with the PRC<sup>14</sup> would determine their fate in the future.

Nevertheless, if Johnny Chiang represented hope of a change in the KMT, this hope proved to be short-lived. Eric Chu, the former KMT chairman and the party’s candidate for the 2016 presidential election, was elected as the new KMT chairman in 2021, beating Johnny Chiang in the party chair election. A KMT reform is less likely to happen under Eric Chu’s leadership.



## Conclusion

This chapter outlined the development of Taiwan's two major parties – KMT and DPP. Both parties have dominated the party system since the democratic transition in the 1990s and have contributed stability to the regime. The main cleavage in Taiwan's society, that of national identity, has been captured and represented by the above two dominating parties. As a result, the two parties have shown great strength and resilience throughout. The DPP and KMT faced a crisis in 2008 and 2014, respectively. In 2008 the DPP suffered heavily from electoral results and corruption scandals. Despite numerous attempts to reform, the growing Taiwanese identity of Taiwanese people saved the DPP and directly affected the popularity of the KMT. The increasingly dominating Taiwanese identity in Taiwan has transformed the party system and favored the development of the DPP. While the future of KMT is hazy, it would be more pessimistic if the party failed to eradicate the label "pro-Chinese communist." All in all, the dominating political parties in Taiwan, the DPP and the KMT, have always served as stabilizing agents for Taiwan's democratic transition and consolidation. The consistency shown in Taiwan's democracy should be attributed to the political party's strength.

## Notes

- 1 A rebel candidate of the KMT, James Soong, ran in the election along with the DPP candidate Chen Shui-bian and KMT candidate Lien Chan. Chen won 39.3% of vote, while James and Lien received 36.8% and 23.1% of vote respectively (Commission 2016).
- 2 Currently, Tsai Ing-wen from the DPP is in her second term as president and the DPP also enjoys the majority in the Legislative Yuan.
- 3 Different factors, for instance the bottom-up approach which stressed the role of civil society, or a top-down approach which emphasized the decentralization of authoritarian leader(s), have been identified to explain the successful democratic transition in Taiwan.
- 4 The local Taiwanese is in comparison with the mainlander who followed the KMT and retreated to Taiwan after 1949.
- 5 Murray Rubinstein stresses that the Presbyterian Church was the "agent of social and political change" in Taiwan (Rubinstein 2001, 65).
- 6 Eight key leaders from the democratic movement were arrested in Kaohsiung after the crackdown of a demonstration that happened on 10 December 1979, Human Rights Day. Among these eight activists, Annette Lu was elected as the Vice President from 2000 to 2008, while Chen Chu is now the President of the Control Yuan, after serving as the Secretary-General to the President and the Mayor of Kaohsiung.
- 7 On 14 August 2008, Chen Shui-bian called a press conference and openly admitted to misstating election finance expenses.
- 8 The DPP has been made up of different factions, similar to the Liberal Democratic Party in Japan. Politicians always come from a factional background. Therefore, Tsai is labeled as a "non-traditional" DPP politician.
- 9 In 2008, students went to the streets to protest against the visit of People's Republic of China's official, Chen Yun-lin, and students faced brutal police action in suppressing the movement. The young generation in Taiwan are often called the generation of "Wild Strawberries," meaning that these youngsters were not resistant to pressure and challenges. The Wild Strawberry Movement was to protest against Taiwan's Parade and Assembly Act and called for reform.
- 10 Interview with Chen Wei-ting, August 11, 2018.

- 11 Interview with Wang Shou-da, June 5, 2018.
- 12 Interview with Wei Yang, July 26, 2018.
- 13 Interview with Chen Wei-min, August 15, 2018.
- 14 It includes the “1992 consensus” which is about “One China Different Interpretation,” as well as KMT’s stance, “One Country, Two Systems.”

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# 4

## PARTY POLITICS, UNEXPECTED DEMOCRATIZATION, AND HOPEFUL CONSOLIDATION IN MONGOLIA

*Delgerjargal Uvsh*

### Introduction

Mongolia's transition to democracy in the 1990s following the fall of the Soviet Union and its consolidation of democratic norms and institutions have been considered unexpected, given that it lacked the structural factors that tend to support democratization. Although Mongolia was officially an independent state during the Soviet times, almost all aspects of politics, economy, and the society were fully Sovietized. Economic forces also would have pushed against the tide of democratization—at the time of the transition Mongolia was a lower-middle-income country that depended on production of primary goods, such as agriculture and natural resource extraction, as well as on its economic relationship with other Soviet economies. Mongolia's democratization could not benefit from proximity to Western democracies and their influence, as it has been surrounded by authoritarian neighbors, Russia and China. The singularity of Mongolia's democratic choice led it to be called an “oasis of democracy,” in the words of the former U.S. Secretary of State, John Kerry.<sup>1</sup>

Mongolia's democracy is not without its challenges, but its democratic status was confirmed most recently in the 2017 and 2021 presidential and 2016 and 2020 parliamentary elections. These elections were generally characterized as free and fair and led to peaceful transfers of power. The Mongolian People's Party (MPP), a remnant of the Mongolian People's Revolutionary Party (MPRP), won the parliamentary majority in a landslide in 2016, overthrowing a coalition led by the Democratic Party (DP), and succeeded in continuing its dominance in the legislative branch in the 2020 election. The presidential election in 2017 featured intense competition among three candidates and brought in a new president, Battulga Khaltmaa, from the DP in place of the previous president, Elbegdorj Tsahia, from

the same party. Khurelsukh Ukhnaa from the MPP replaced Battulga in the 2021 presidential election.

Mongolia's considerable success in establishing and sustaining itself as a democratic polity is particularly noteworthy (Fish 1998; Fritz 2008) in the current political climate around the world. Democracy has regressed in many countries that were previously considered established democracies. Some deem the leader of the free world, the U.S., to be in the process of renouncing its democratic ideals. Three of the developing world's largest democracies, India, Brazil, and the Philippines, are governed by politicians with authoritarian tendencies. Countries that embodied the democratic possibilities after a long-standing totalitarian influence of the Soviet Union similar to Mongolia—Poland and Hungary—have relapsed into partial to full dictatorship.

Mongolia's unanticipated shift and adherence to democratic governance despite structural challenges suggest that social scientists ought to look beyond structural factors to explain variations in democratization around the world. The recent fluctuations in the democratic commitments of formerly democratic polities, despite the relative stability of structural conditions in these countries, highlight the urgency and importance of agency-based theories in the study of democracies. Scholars have already started to take notable steps in this direction, as exemplified in the works of Rustow (1970) and O'Donnell and Schmitter (1986) and more recently Bermeo and Yashar (2016).

This chapter builds on the scholarship that emphasizes agency-based analytical approaches and argues that the choices made by political elites and the opposition over time have played an important role in Mongolia's transition to and consolidation of democracy. The main goal of this chapter is to lay out how political parties emerged as the main institution to facilitate democratic competition and argue that this facilitation is one of the factors that made unlikely democracy possible in a landlocked country. In order to achieve this goal, this chapter draws on data from statistical sources, interviews, and secondary documents and argues that political parties emerged as an indispensable institutional mechanism to coordinate actions and policies of the actors that facilitated democratic transition and consolidation. Specifically, political parties have served three main functions. First, they provided organizational avenues, through which to coordinate different preferences. Second, parties allowed political contestants to present policy options to voters coherently. Third, parties became a mechanism to hold those in power accountable. Nonetheless, party competition in Mongolia faces programmatic and organizational challenges that may threaten the quality of democracy.

The next section provides a general overview of political parties in Mongolia and their characterizations and analyzes the ways in which political parties have promoted democratic practices. The third section discusses the challenges political parties, particularly the MPP and the DP, ought to address. The fourth section discusses the policy implications and provides some concluding thoughts.

## Political Parties and Democracy in Mongolia

Political parties are endemic to democratization and democratic polities. However, Stokes (1999) notes that constitutions of most democracies do not specify their role and that they are not part of theoretical definitions of democracies. Scholarship on the emergence of parties in democratic politics broadly takes two approaches in explaining the emergence of parties. The first approach emphasizes the necessity created by features of a democratic legislature to translate multi-dimensional issues to decisions under majority rule (Aldrich 1995; Schattschneider 1942). Political parties may also facilitate more effective negotiations between pro-democracy reformers and authoritarian leaders during democratic transitions. This approach can be characterized as a top-to-bottom approach, as it highlights the ways in which members of parliament solve problems and organically develop parties to make decision-making easier and to attract support from the population to elevate their position within parliament. The second manner of analysis takes a bottom-up approach, as it concentrates on the natural advantage that parties bring to electoral competition—they may make candidate recognition easier for voters and smoothen the challenge of coordinating resources required for elections.

### *Historical Roles of Parties and Democratic Transition in Mongolia*

The emergence of political parties as the main institutional mechanism of political competition in Mongolia during and after the democratic transition is in some ways not surprising. As nomads, Mongolians lived scattered across a large land, close to that of all of western Europe, and often moved around based on availability of pasture for their stocks even during the Soviet times. The main institution that was prominent in Mongolians' lives for the 70 years as a Soviet satellite state was its communist political party, the Mongolian People's Revolutionary Party (MPRP). Prominent social organization units, such as the herder collectives (*negdels*), professional unions, and youth organizations, were under the direct control of the MPRP and their membership did not result from individuals' genuine will for association up to 1990. Therefore, as Soviet social and political structure disintegrated in 1990, alternative means of association, preference aggregation, and state-society relations to parties were notably absent in the socio-political space in Mongolia.

In this context, parties were the natural institutional choice to organize political preferences and competition around in Mongolia at and since the time of its democratic transition. As Mongolia adopted and consolidated a democratic form of governance, political parties played three notable roles. First, it provided organizational avenues, through which to coordinate different preferences. Second, parties allowed political contestants to present policy options to voters coherently. Third, parties became a mechanism to hold those in power accountable.

The transition process itself evolved around the organization of political parties, as preferences for open politics started to manifest within the society in the late

1980s and early 1990s. The communist ruling party, MPRP, adapted to these preferences and started to discuss the need to change their approach as early as the mid-1980s. In 1984, the long-standing leader of the MPRP, Tsedenbal Yumjaa, who ruled since 1952, was deposed. The new leader, Batmunkh Jamba, was an arguably “less entrenched and more pragmatic” (Fritz 2008, 769) personality. Batmunkh tried to imitate the “openness” and “restructuring” reforms of the Soviet ruler Mihael Gorbachev after 1986 (Atwood 2004). Although Batmunkh was clearly a member of the old communist party and follower of the communist doctrine, he had to be more open-minded for the prospect of democratic Mongolia than he perhaps would have been if he had not tried to follow Russia’s attempts to open up. As a result, criticism from within the MPRP of Mongolia’s communist history and leadership of Tsedenbal, which would have been an offense worthy of expulsion from the Party before the mid-1980s, became acceptable and commonplace. Reformists, such as the Deputy Premier Byambasuren Dash,<sup>2</sup> began to dominate the internal debates and structures of the MPRP and challenge the existing structure of the party in the following years.

The pro-democracy opposition, which consisted of various groups led by academics, also eventually organized themselves into parties realizing that adjusting to this form of organization would allow them to be competent challengers to incumbents. The early pro-democracy movements formed into three groups—Mongolian Democratic Association (MDA), Democratic Socialist Association (MSA), and the New Progressive Association (NPA). In March 1990, these associations officially became parties, the Mongolian Democratic Party (MDP), the Social Democratic Party (SDP), and the National Progress Party (NPP), respectively. The new parties immediately demanded from the MPRP that party and the government be officially separated as soon as possible. In addition to these main pro-democracy movements, public organizations that focus on specific issues started to register as political parties, reflecting the realization that political parties are necessary means to participate in political competition and represent social issues and preferences. For example, the Women’s Association and the Mongolian Revolutionary Youth League registered as political parties (Atwood 2004). Single-issue parties, such as the Mongolian Green Party, also emerged on the political scene.

The legislative elections in 1990 and 1992 crystallized the need for further cohesion among the pro-democracy forces. The main three pro-democracy parties participated in the 1990 election as three separate parties and lost the majority to MPRP—the former communist party won 358 seats in the upper chamber of the parliament whereas the MDP, SDP, and NPP only received 17, 4, and 6 seats, respectively. MDP and NPP joined forces in the 1992 election as Mongolian National Democratic Party (MNDP),<sup>3</sup> but with similarly dismal results, as they won 4 combined seats against the MPRP’s 70 out of 76 parliamentary seats. They went into the 1996 election with a decidedly different strategy. They coalesced further as the Democratic Union Coalition (DUC) and invested a significant amount of time and resources into expanding their parties. They established branches outside of the capital city in the provinces and coordinated their nominations in various electoral



districts (Fish 1998). Compared to the earlier two elections, they had more organizational capital, as western entities that promote democracy, such as Germany's Konrad Adenauer Foundation and the U.S. International Republican Institute, provided indirect support to the opposition leaders (Rossabi 2017). Consequently, the DUC was generously rewarded in the election, as they won 50 out of 76 seats in the parliament.

These initial developments suggest that the processes of transforming social preferences into decisions and of political competition were organized based on political parties as institutions. Instead of remaining as an inflexible and staunch guardian of dictatorship, the MPRP reformed and evolved into a party able to participate in democratic political competition. The liberal opposition also arranged their views and resources around a party platform. In addition, parties provided electorates of the new democracy with visible and distinct policy choices that corresponded to different political and social preferences. Two policy areas from the 1990s are noteworthy.

First, the coalition of pro-democracy reformers offered voters an alternative vision of the nation on the ballot. The antitraditional nature of the Soviet regime gave the democrats an advantage that they took on successfully in the early years of transition. During the decades of socialism, the MPRP aimed to forcibly convert a Buddhist and nomadic society into a secular and industrial one. Choibalsan Khorloo, often said to be Mongolia's Stalin, exterminated the Buddhist clergy in a country-wide purge. In 1954, Choibalsan's successor, Tsedenbal Yumjaa, banned the celebration of one of the largest traditional holidays, the Lunar New Year. In 1962, he carried out a purge of his rivals who he accused of nationalism in what became known as the "Chinggis Khan controversy." Despite the efforts of the communist party and its leaders, however, traditional ideas and practices persisted in the lives of most Mongolians. At the time of Mongolia's democratic transition, over two-thirds of Mongolians lived outside of Ulaanbaatar and roughly two-thirds of them made their living as pastoral nomads in a way that predates installment of communism in Mongolia (National Statistical Office of Mongolia 2019). Non-urban Mongolians sustained their customs and kept the symbols of the Mongolian nation alive in oral histories. In the countryside and the city alike, many still practiced Buddhism in private (Topping 1981).

From the first set of demonstrations that demanded democracy in 1989 and 1990, the democrats highlighted that the MPRP attempted to undermine Mongolia's history and heritage for decades and successfully linked the establishment of democracy with protecting the Mongol identity and Mongolia's independence. Symbolic and discursive references to Mongolia's history, particularly the Mongol Empire period, shamanistic and Buddhist religious practices, and traditional Mongolian script, were as noticeably present in the democrats' words and actions as discussions of freedom, human rights, and rule of law.

The democrats officially put the national identity issue on the ballot, as they promised to get restitution for the wrongs done by the MPRP. When mass graves of Buddhist monks purged in the early Soviet period were unearthed in 1995, the

democrats jumped on the case, using a documentary on the findings extensively in their 1996 electoral campaign. Many members of the coalition credited the documentary for their subsequent win at the polls (Buyandelger 2013).

Another policy issue that the democrats used to distinguish themselves from the MPRP in the early days of democratization is economic reforms. While realizing the need for change in Mongolia's economic model, the MPRP took a statist approach towards the economy in the 1990s. In contrast, democrats pushed for economic liberalism and free markets in their election programs. In 1996, the DUC promised to further push the privatization agenda forward, invest in integrating Mongolia's economy with regional and the world economy better, and establish additional state bodies to handle liberalization efforts. These were welcome promises to the population, who viewed the progress made in the early 1990s by the MPRP as too slow and ambivalent.

Parties also have been used to ensure vertical accountability in Mongolian politics and governance. Vertical accountability refers to the ability of a country's population to hold its government accountable and parties play a critical role in it (Lührmann, Marquardt, and Mechkova 2020). Vertical accountability is facilitated through laws, notably constitutions, but the extent of its implementation rests in the hands of citizens and officeholders. In Mongolia, parties served as the main tool to ensure vertical accountability. The most vivid example of this is the fact that the electorate awarded the office of president and the majority in the parliament to the two major parties in a balanced manner over the past 30 years. In other words, Mongolians tended to choose a president from a party that occupies the role of minority/opposition party in the incumbent parliament. This is an implication of a semi-presidential system that is facilitated by strong and institutionalized parties. In the first presidential election, Ochirbat Punsalmaa, a former member of the MPRP who switched to run with the democratic bloc, emerged victorious. Ochirbat initially intended to run from the MPRP, but his pro-reform rhetoric and inclination led the MPRP to reject him as a potential candidate and put forward a hardliner, Tudev Lodon, instead. It is possible that the MPRP incorrectly inferred from its own overwhelming victory in the 1992 parliamentary election that the majority of voters aligned with a conservative approach to social and economic problems. Ochirbat's win in 1993 resulted in "a de facto balance of power between a parliament controlled by Mongolia's dominant party, and a president who stood in moderate opposition to this party" (Fritz 2008, 777). The legislative election of 1996 and the presidential election of 1997 reversed the roles of the parties—the democratic coalition won in the former while the MPRP's candidate, Bagabandi Natsag, dominated in the latter. However, the de facto balance of power continued until the end of the 1990s.

The elections in the early 2000s changed this pattern of balance of power, as the MPRP once again won in a landslide in the 2000 parliamentary election and Bagabandi kept the president's office in the 2001 presidential election. The subsequent elections in 2004 and 2005 maintained the status quo with the MPRP barely winning a majority again in the former and its candidate Enkhbayar Nambar

succeeding in the latter. However, at this point democracy has already been established as the “only game in town” and the indispensability of parties to democratic governance (O’Donnell 1998) had become apparent to politicians and citizens alike. The MPRP adapted to this reality and observers came to characterize the MPRP as a “disciplined, center-left party committed to parliamentary democracy” (Tkacik 2005). While observing the election at the end of the MPRP reign, a *New York Times* reporter noted that, despite allegations of election fraud and contestation of results, “no one talks of an authoritarian option” (Brooke 2004). The tradition of party alternations in the legislative branch and executive head of the state continued on in the 2008/9 and 2016/7 elections—the MPP won a slight majority again in 2008, though it built a coalition government with the Democratic Party (DP),<sup>4</sup> and a candidate of the DP and one of the initial democrats, Elbegdorj Tsahia, became the president in 2009. In the 2016 parliamentary election, the MPP once again won in a landslide, 65 out of 76 seats. The leader of the MPP, Enkhbold Miyegombo, ran for the presidency in 2017, but lost to the DP’s candidate, Battulga Khaltmaa. The 2021 presidential election, in which the MPP chairman Khurelsukh Ukhnaa won, manifested a change in this pattern, as currently the MPP holds power in both branches of government.

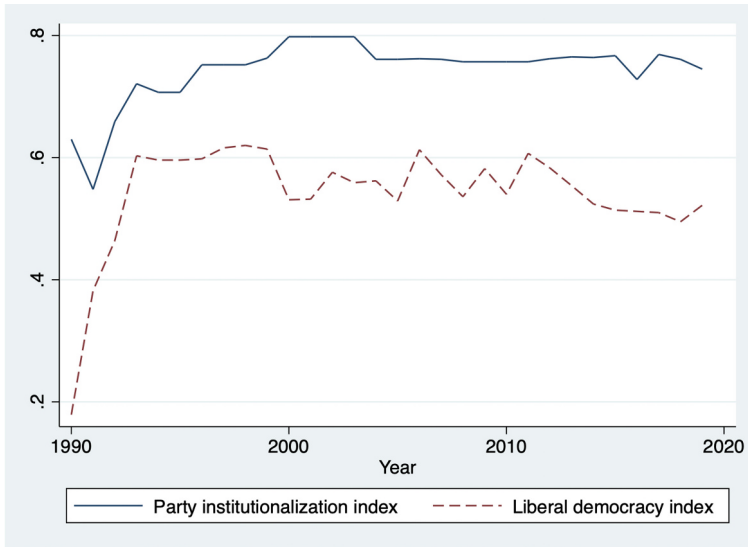
This critical role that parties played for Mongolia’s democratic transitions led some to conclude that political parties practically drove Mongolia’s democratization. Fish (1998) writes that

Mongolia’s transition demonstrates the enormous potential of political parties to advance democratization ... [S]trong parties in Mongolia have been a crucial cause, rather than a mere effect, of regime change. Mongolia’s experience highlights the usefulness of sometimes treating parties and party systems as explanatory factors whose strength, magnitude, inclusiveness, and differentiation may crucially shape political outcomes. In this sense, the Mongolian case suggests the value of returning to and building upon some of the classic literature on political development that treated parties as prime movers rather than as effects.

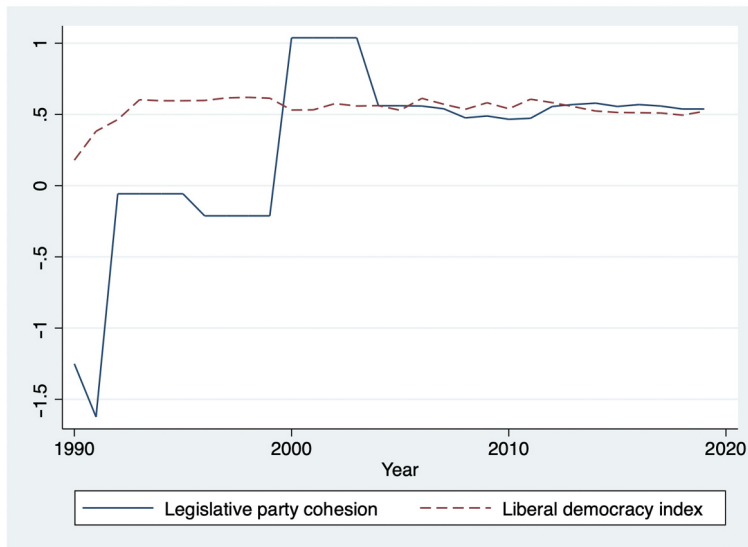
(Fish 1998, 139–140)

### ***The Political Party System and Its Features during Consolidation***

Since the first decade of democratic transition, parties remained a key political body in Mongolia. The importance of parties for political decisions grew as well as the level of institutionalization of parties. Figure 4.1 depicts Party Institutionalization Index (PII) and Legislative Party Cohesion (LPC) index against the measure of Liberal Democracy Index (LDI), which measures the extent to which various ideals of liberal democracy have been achieved in a country in a given year. All measures come from the Varieties of Democracy (V-Dem) dataset. The PII gauges the extent to which parties have established themselves as institutions, whereas the LPC approximates the extent to which members of the Parliament vote with the party.



(a)



(b)

**FIGURE 4.1** Measures of Party Institutionalization and Legislative Party Cohesion Indices against the Liberal Democracy Index in Mongolia Since 1990.

Source: Coppedge et al. 2020

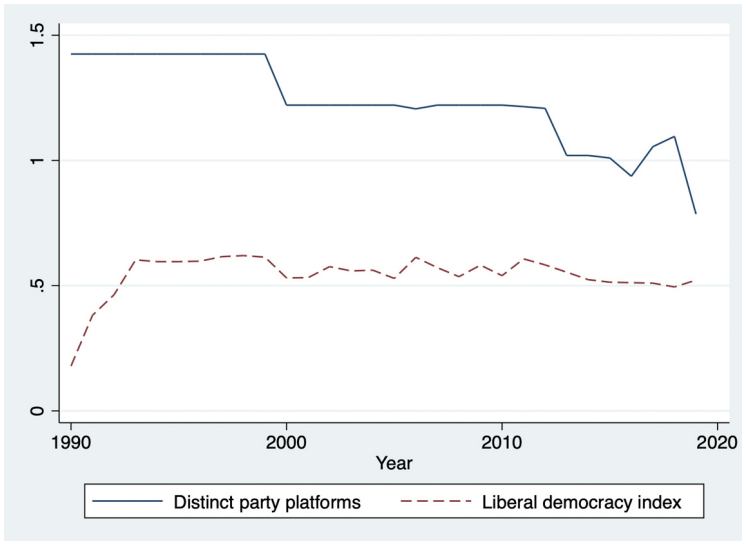
The first image shows that the overall level of party institutionalization in Mongolia during the early years of transition was mediocre, but it has improved since 2000, reaching its highest point from 2000 through 2003 when the MPRP controlled both the presidency and the parliament. Institutionalization declined slightly in the following years, but generally remained high in the 2000s and 2010s. The measure of LPC was particularly low between 1990 and 1992, reflecting the chaotic years in which both the MPRP and the democrats were trying to figure out their positions and alignment with various political forces. After the election in 1992, LPC continued to go up, again reaching its peak in 2000. After the 2004 legislative election, which ended up in a practically hung parliament, the level of party-focused voting went down and has remained steady. Overall, Figure 4.1 suggests that parties as institutions have been strong and steady in democratic Mongolia.

Figure 4.2 shows similar depictions of Distinct Party Platforms (DPP) and National Party Control (NPC) over time. The former measures the number of established political parties with distinguishable party platforms and the latter the extent of party diversity in power and control over the national government. Both measures were rather high in the first half of the period in which Mongolia has been a democracy. The overall conclusion is that the party platforms became more similar over time and that the national government has been increasingly controlled by diverse parties when we consider diversity across the legislative and executive branches.

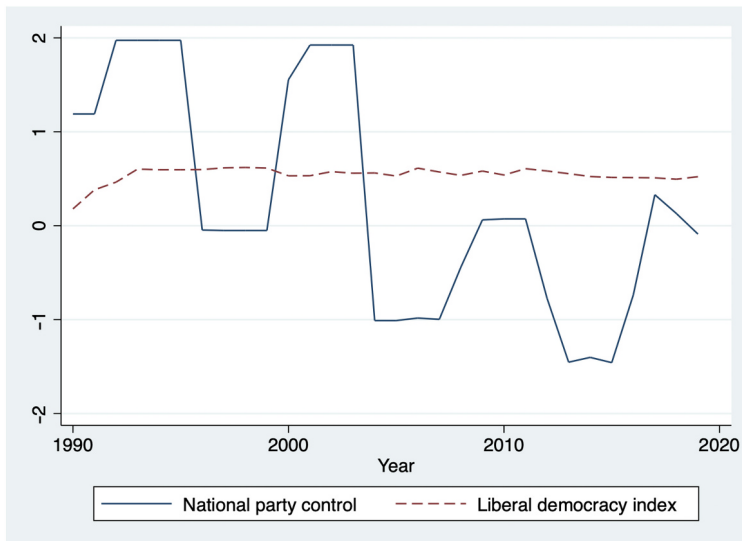
Last, Figure 4.3 shows two additional measures—Barriers to Parties (BP) and Party Linkage (PL). BP assesses how restrictive the barriers are to forming a party, higher numbers indicating a lower barrier. PL considers the dominant way in which major parties are linked to their constituents. A lower number indicates more clientelist connection and a higher number denotes a more policy-oriented and programmatic link. The first image reflects the fact that establishing a political party has become easier in Mongolia over time. The second image demonstrates that the nature of the relationship between parties and citizens have been volatile during democratic transition and consolidation. When democracy was adopted in Mongolia, parties were linked to its constituents through their policy positions. This link quickly transformed into a more clientelistic relationship in the first decade of transition. The importance of policy and programs for this relationship increased between 2000 and 2016, rapidly deteriorating after the 2016 parliamentary election.

Another interesting indicator to look at in order to examine the characteristic of parties in democratic Mongolia is the effective number of parties against registered parties and electoral systems. Table 4.1 shows these measures.

Generally, the number of registered parties in Mongolia has been increasing, perhaps reflecting the earlier observation that barriers to creating a political party has been minimal. Effective number of parties (ENP) in terms of vote share has been following a similar trend overall. ENP in terms of parliamentary seats, however, is going in the other direction. The numbers suggest that—one to two parties have been dominating in the legislative branch over the past 30 years. ENP on a district



(a)

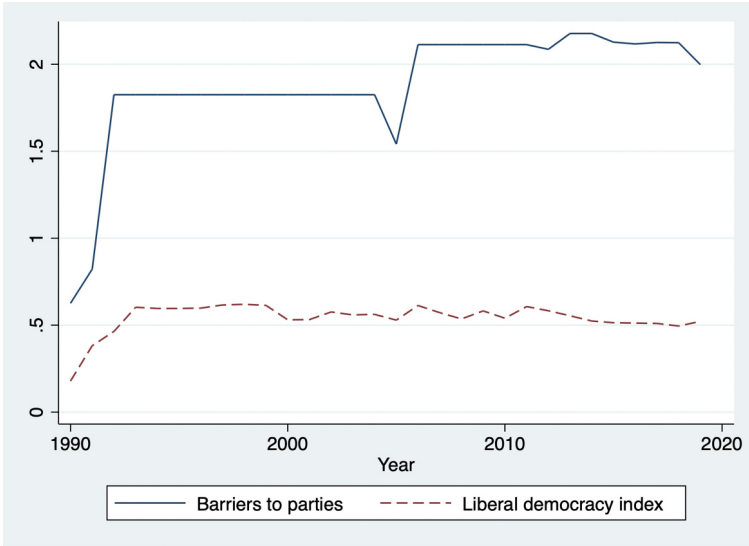


(b)

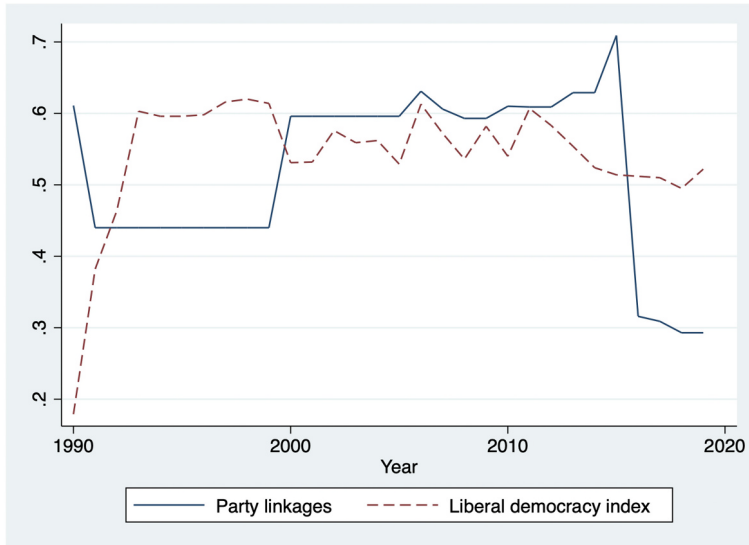
**FIGURE 4.2** Measures of Distinct Party Platforms and National Party Control Indices against the Liberal Democracy Index in Mongolia since 1990.

level seem to closely mirror the pictures on the national level (See Maškarinec 2017, 152 for ENP on district levels for 1996, 2000, and 2004).

In 2012, the ENP indicators reached their highest values, because the 2012 election produced the widest distribution of votes in terms of parties in the history of democratic Mongolia. The democrats in the DP won a total of 34 seats, whereas



(a)



(b)

**FIGURE 4.3** Measures of Barriers to Parties and Party Linkage Indices against the Liberal Democracy Index in Mongolia since 1990.

Source: Coppedge et al. 2020

**TABLE 4.1** Electoral Systems and Effective Number of Parties in Mongolia (1992–2020)

	1992	1996	2000	2004	2008	2012	2016	2020
Registered parties				21 <sup>b</sup>		21	24	36
Electoral system	Plurality with 26 multi-member districts	Majoritarian <sup>a</sup> with 76 single-member districts	Majoritarian <sup>a</sup> with 76 single-member districts	Majoritarian <sup>a</sup> with 76 single-member districts	Plurality with 26 multi-member districts	Mixed member proportional system (majoritarian <sup>a</sup> 26 multi-member districts (48 seats) and 28 seats from party lists)	Plurality with 76 single-member districts	Plurality with 29 multi-member districts
ENP (Votes)	2.72	2.58	3.25	2.33	2.26	4.02	3.12	3.65
ENP (Seats)	1.08	1.84	1.11	2.23	2.03	2.95	1.34	1.46

*Sources:* Information on election systems comes from the General Election Commission and Constitutional Court reports, Erdenebileg 2021, and Altankhuyag, 2021.

<sup>a</sup> Elections in 1996, 2000, and 2004 required the winners to obtain 25%+1 votes, not the typical 50%+1. If no candidate reached the threshold, a second round of voting must take place. In the 2012 election, majoritarian rule was defined as obtaining 28%+1 votes.

<sup>b</sup> As of 2005, as documented in Gerelt-Od Erdenebileg (2005). “Democracy in Mongolia and Political Parties.” Shine Toli. 52. <http://www.academy.edu.mn/content/монголын-ардчилал-ба-улс-төрийн-намуу/> Accessed October 10, 2020.

Author’s calculations based on data on election outcomes using methodology from Laakso and Taagepera (1979). Coalitions are counted as one party in the calculations. The numbers of registered parties come from various sources, including the Supreme Court, [www.ikon.mn](http://www.ikon.mn), and the General Election Commission. Vote and seat share information is collected from various sources, including the General Election Commission, Parliament, and [www.ikon.mn](http://www.ikon.mn). In case of conflicting information, I follow the most official outlet.



the MPP received 26. Justice Coalition, a combination of the MPRP and MNDP, came in the third place capturing 11 seats in the parliament. This is the highest number of seats taken by a third party in Mongolia in the past 30 years. Note that the MPRP and MNDP that constituted the Justice Coalition are not to be confused with parties with the same name mentioned earlier in this chapter. The MPRP, the remnant of the communist party, divided into two different parties in 2010, as its former leader Enkhbayar Nambar separated from the party with a splinter group. Enkhbayar's splinter party took the name MPRP following a legal battle and the former MPRP renamed itself the Mongolian People's Party (MPP). Enkhbayar's new party, MPRP, was a constituent part of the Justice Coalition. The other half of the Coalition, MNDP, is also a new party that was established in 2005 and is different from the MNDP that became a co-founder of the DP.

The main reason behind the higher number of ENP in 2012 is that Mongolia used a mixed system that combined majoritarian multi-member districts with proportionality-based party list. The Justice Coalition received four seats from the districts but expanded their seats to 11 in accordance with the proportionality rule. These numbers highlight the intricate relationship between electoral system and the party landscape. The volatility of electoral systems in Mongolia is a challenge for Mongolian parties—through the eight democratic elections, electoral rules changed five times (Sambuu 2020b) suggesting that most of the elections ran under differing rules.

Notably, the last two changes in electoral rules in 2016 and 2020 were less representative, as they took on a plurality system with either single member or multi-member districts. As a result, the ENP has been decreasing in the two most recent elections with the MPP winning overwhelming majority in both elections. This is despite the high number of registered as well as running parties—in 2020 the Supreme Court lists 36 registered parties and a record number of 13 parties and four coalitions, in addition to 121 independents, that nominated candidates in the 2020 election (Sambuu 2020a). This reflects the broader trend in election outcomes in Mongolia that candidates that are not elected have received more votes than candidates that made it to the parliament in every election since 2008. Such discrepancy brings up questions about the legitimacy of the parliament and the electoral systems that have led to these outcomes.

### ***The Two Main Parties and Their Features***

The effective number of parties on the national level reflects the fact that two parties emerged as prominent in Mongolian politics. They are the continuation of the communist-era party, MPP, and the eventual union of the democrats, the DP. Some observers note that the two-party system in Mongolia has been relatively well established. In this section, I describe the general features of the two parties, based on secondary sources as well as interviews conducted with researchers and party members.

Do the two main political parties differ in terms of party platforms and policy positions? Generally, researchers characterize the MPP as a social democratic, center-left party and the DP as center-right. Figure 4.2 above suggests that the overall number of parties with distinguishable party platform has been declining over the past three decades. This is consistent with the statements from the interviewees, who criticize both major parties for being unfaithful to and vague about their ideological and policy positions. Particularly when it comes to economic policies the two parties' policies are hard to fit into one category, although in theory the DP differs from the MPP in that it promotes the role of the private sector, business owners, and small and medium businesses, rather than a large state. The commonality is that they both try to appeal to as broad a base as possible.

However, in regards to political ideologies, some argue that there is a notable difference in their overall approaches to governance. An interviewee compared the four years when the DP controlled the Parliament in 2012–2016 versus the years the MPP held majority in 2016–2020. Parliament under the DP adopted and implemented many laws to increase the participation of citizens in the state-society relationship. An example is the General Administrative Law and the Law on Administrative Procedure. They established the standards for making administrative decisions and legalized avenues for participation of civil society. As a result of these laws, civil society could sue the bureaucracy, if the latter adopts decisions that violate public interest. They compared these kinds of laws with the fact that one of the first laws the Parliament amended after the MPP's win in 2016 was the Law on State Secrets, which allowed the government to define a list of state secrets. As a result, the list of state secrets, which stood at 60 in 2016, grew considerably to 565 within three years (Ikon 2020). They also proposed to amend the General Administrative Law to separate the government from its constituent agencies in the legal sense, so that government agencies would be potentially excluded from being sued by civil society if they violate public interest. The types of laws adopted may highlight the persistence of the MPP's Soviet-style approach to governance in comparison to the more open-minded and participatory approach the DP tries to follow. This may also contribute to what one interviewee describes as actual distinctions—the DP and MPP genuinely do compete for votes with each other and appeal to different constituents.

From the perspective of the voters, more weight falls on the DP to be staunch about their values, because arguably the country's current political system was the result of their success in promoting new sets of values. Perhaps as a result of this expectation, the DP is frequently criticized. An interviewee who has been a member of the DP since the early days of transition highlighted that until 2000, the party leadership was inspired and guided by their ideological convictions. After that, the leaders themselves became confused about the directions of their political beliefs and policies. Their overall commitment to democracy remained, but their interest in power and wealth overshadowed their faith in the importance of liberal values, according to this DP member. The most recent example that attracted

widespread condemnation was in March 2020 when the leader of the DP, Erdene Sodnomzundui, questioned the government's decision to allow Mongolians returning from abroad to enter the country during the COVID-19 crisis. He stated that the policy practically allowed importing the COVID-19 virus into the country. Citizens interpreted this statement as a blatant violation of democratic values and talked about it as an example that the DP would do or say anything to score political points before the election in June.

Another interesting issue is the type and level of institutionalization of the parties. Organizationally, the MPP holds an inherent advantage from the Soviet era over the DP. Some Soviet countries took measures to equalize the political landscape by dismantling and taking resources away from the communist party. Mongolia did not go through the same process. Consequently, the MPP kept their properties and physical presence all over the country, including all of Mongolia's 21 provinces. For the current MPP, the main organization is the Great Convention. The Great Convention elects the party leader. It also constitutes the candidates for the Small Convention and an election runs every four years. The Small Convention in turn elects the Secretary General, who leads the work of the executive board. The executive board has offices for legal issues, communication, local affair, and political issues. Then, there are the non-governmental organizations under the party, such as the Association of Social Democratic Youth and Women. The MPP also has its own research organization, Strategy Academy, and publication, *The Truth*, inherited from the Soviet era. Other parties, including the DP, practically imitated this organizational structure in its entirety—the Great and Small conventions, branches in 21 provinces and nine districts in Ulaanbaatar, and the youth, women's, and elders' organizations. The agenda-setting power is mostly the hands of the party leaderships for both parties, though members can propose to include topics in the agenda. Both parties purportedly have anywhere between 180,000 and 200,000 members, though they seem to be inflated. This mass infrastructure takes up a lot of resources, which both parties compensate for through wealthy backers and candidates. The winning party is additionally accused of using taxpayers' money to sustain this system. New, relatively successful parties have tried to shift away from this model. For example, the National Labor Party (KHUN) touts itself as a party with no membership.

Aside from organizational structure, the two influential parties differ in a number of aspects. The MPP inherited its personnel policy from the Soviet era, which helped them prepare the next generation of politicians. The MPP is credited to have been preparing leaders in a more systematic manner. The recent appointments of socially influential and educated young individuals to important executive positions (i.e. Vice Minister, Head of an Agency) are seen as a positive step to make a generational shift. The DP's personnel policy and philosophy are difficult to pinpoint and numerous interviewees mentioned it as one of its weaknesses, particularly the conflict, perceived or real, with its younger aspiring leaders.

Another differing point for the DP and MPP is the style of leadership and culture within the parties. Generally, the former is said to have a horizontal leadership

structure on the national and provincial level, whereas the latter, vertical. The DP's leadership is not concentrated and is frequently contested, and the leadership-member relationship is unorganized. In contrast, the MPP's operation seems to run following an internal party hierarchy and culture. The main reason for the DP's horizontal relationship structure is that the party is formed from an alliance of many parties that emerged in the 1990s. An interviewed member of the DP credits the horizontal structure for creating a culture that defies blind obedience to party leadership. However, the transparency that comes with horizontal leadership sometimes harms the party's image, as internal affairs of the party is often well known to the public. Horizontal leadership may also lead to unclear division of labor and responsibility that, consequently, prevents the party from evolving further. The MPP inherited the Soviet-style hierarchic relationship structure and has managed to preserve it until now. One interviewee stated that the former Politburo lives on in the executive board of the MPP. Members aspiring to climb the political ladder know that there is a hierarchy that needs to be respected. Interviewees highlight that the advantage of the vertical system is that it allows the MPP to govern effectively, but the disadvantage is that sometimes it attracts individuals that are not adequately skilled to enter the party and its various levels of leadership.<sup>5</sup>

Internal democracy is another point of comparison for the MPP and the DP. Both parties say it is important for them, but the DP's implementation of this principle appears better than the MPP's. For instance, the two parties elect their party leaders through rather different procedures. The MPP elects its party leader during its convention. The Great Convention, which has 310 members, determines the leader based on a simple majority. A party member I interviewed said that there is quite a bit of politics and "framing" that happen before the vote. Usually, the most powerful candidate coordinates the efforts to obtain votes. Some report that leaders of local branches are sometimes tasked with returning a vote result in a certain way. Politics and power play are similarly an integral part of the process in the DP, but candidates running for the party leader's position should present their program to the members of all its branches, including the 21 provinces and nine districts in the capital city. Then, members vote. This is a process very similar to competition for national offices. Party leaders in the provinces are also elected from the entire membership in the given province.

The DP's shift to direct elections for key leadership positions is laudable from the perspective of internal democracy, however, the interviewees pointed out that it also has negative consequences. It amplifies the disagreements within the party, as divided delegates may view the party leader elect as illegitimate. This in turn has contributed to the party's inability to stay united and perform well in national elections. It also wastes considerable resources for the internal races, which could be used for critical national and local elections. The question of resources is particularly critical for the DP, given the much better position of its main opponent MPP. A member of the DP reported that DP membership grew considerably as the party shifted to a party-wide election, suggesting that it may have caused institutional distortions for the party as well.

The process of determining the candidates for key national elections seems to be equally centralized and non-transparent for both parties, despite differences in formal guidelines for open competition. For the DP, there are specified procedures for candidates that require the candidates to be active participants in party undertakings and be up-to-date on membership dues and donations. For local elections, the DP aims to take a bottom-up approach and the members of a district party branch and the party headquarters must play primary roles in determining who will run for district representative bodies. As for the MPP, the executive board and the party leader make the decision. Nonetheless, informal and ad-hoc rules appear to dominate the nominating procedure in both parties, such as to be in good relations with the party leadership and be financially capable of shouldering the expenses incurred during campaigns. As a result, there are often complaints that lower-level party organizations do not have much say in determining candidates, especially for the DP, as members expect wider participation in these processes. It can also lead to a disconnect between a candidate and the voters. As such, some candidates end up running in districts that are not familiar with them and losing the election, costing the party.

Generally, internal democracy and transparency are likely to increase after a party loses an election. One interviewee argued that when the times are good, party leadership does not have an incentive to examine the party and improve its connections with their members. Following a defeat, party leadership is more likely to listen to both its members and criticism from challengers, as it is often a period when responsibility is discussed.

## Challenges Facing Parties and Party Politics in Mongolia

Although parties have played a crucial role for Mongolia's democracy during transition and consolidation, party politics in Mongolia face several challenges. These are important issues that can threaten the nature of political competition and, subsequently, Mongolia's democracy. I identify three main challenges to Mongolia's political parties—notably low public trust in parties, unreliable and unsustainable financing, and potential hegemony of a single party.

One of the most monumental challenges for Mongolian parties is that the public's confidence in them is not high. The public's belief in the importance of political parties is closely tied to their belief in the democratic political system. However, the public discourse can be described as being dominated by disdain for the two major parties. One of the interviewees observed that the discourse that parties are unnecessary started to gain some currency in Mongolia.

The Politbarometer surveys from Sant Maral Center provide a temporal view of how confidence in political parties fluctuated over time since the 1990s. I display a sample of years following legislative elections, when available, in Table 4.2.

The share of respondents, who expressed high or moderate levels of confidence (Very confident and Rather confident), is almost always lower than those who expressed low confidence in political parties (Rather and Totally not confident).

**TABLE 4.2** Measures of Confidence in Political Parties

	1997	2001	2005	2009	2013	2018	2019	2020
Very confident	2	3	2	8.5	5.8	4.2	2.9	5.1
Rather confident	25	22	14	27.9	26.8	18.5	20.9	30
Rather not confident	39	36	39	29.7	27.9	32.3	19.4	20.8
Totally not confident	18	20	23	19.5	29.2	40.4	54.3	40.3
No answer/Don't know	16	19	22	4.8	10.5	4.6	2.4	4

Source: Sant Maral Politbarometer.

This was true even in the 1990s and early 2000s, when the enthusiasm about multi-party system was rigorous. From the 1990s, the level of confidence in parties has declined, however there was a notable boost after the 2008 election. The main reason for this may be the post-election violence in July 2008 that led to several deaths and considerable destruction. This was shocking for a nation proud to have transitioned to a democracy in 1990 without breaking “a pane of window.” This tragic event may have led more people to realize the value of democracy and peaceful transition of power, which would be consistent with this jump in 2009. After 2009, the trend was downwards. The share of people who chose “Totally not confident” stood at almost half of the respondents in 2019. Interestingly, 2020 witnessed a significant increase in public confidence in parties. It may be because the public associated the then-excellent management of COVID-19 by the MPP government with the broader concept of parties.

The low confidence in parties, particularly the two main parties, is also reflected in the fact that in 2020 a record number of independents and third parties ran for the legislative election. In the end, independents and third parties managed to scoop only three seats, but the fact remains that the population views the two main parties as deeply problematic. The main reasons why public trust has been low in parties are multi-fold. First, many view parties as means that elites and bureaucrats use for their own enrichment and power. In the public’s eyes, those in power often maintained their relationship with the party supporters through taxpayers’ money. Lack of transparency in election finances is another source of suspicion and mistrust in political parties (Open Society Foundation 2018). Citizens also criticize the oligarchization of parties.

The public also accuses parties that their policy differences are not apparent, and their programs are driven purely by their interest in power. The campaign before the 2008 election provides such an example. During their campaign, the DP pledged one million tugruqs per person (approximately \$380 at the time of this writing) in exchange for victory in the 2008 parliamentary elections. This was a clear violation of democratic principles. The MPRP initially criticized this pledge, but shortly afterwards promised 1.5 million tugruqs per citizen. Another practice

that smears the parties' reputation is vote-buying. It does not always involve the straight trade of money for votes. The processes are often complicated. The state bureaucracy plays a significant role in this process. The bureaucracy is estimated to employ about 250,000 people. Many these people are tasked to recruit their families to vote for a ruling party in elections. During elections, candidates also follow legal means to distribute money with an implicit hope to increase their votes. For instance, candidates hire more canvassers than they actually need in order to legally pay potential voters. Therefore, parties will have to play by cleaner rules in order to regain the public's trust.

The second challenge to the political party system is unreliability and opacity of party financing. The source of this problem is the provision in the Law on Political Parties that states that parties will operate on the principle of self-financing. At this moment, the DP and MPP are financed through several means. First, it collects membership fees. Both parties charge members 12,000 tugrugs (~\$4.6 at the time of this writing) a year, though interviewees noted that most regular members do not pay their dues in practice. Elected delegates to the party conventions pay considerably more. They also receive funds from the state—parties with parliamentary seats receive 1,000 tugrugs (~\$0.38 at the time of this writing) per vote once after the election. In addition, parties get 10 million tugrugs (~\$3,850) for every seat in the legislature. They may also receive support from international entities. A member of the MPP who was interviewed mentioned that the MPP has received monetary and other forms of support from the Communist Party of China, United Russia Party in Russia, and the Ebert Foundation under the Social Democratic Party of Germany.

Although these funds help the parties' financial needs, they are not enough to maintain the large physical and social apparatus of either party. Although party activities are not intense during non-election years, the regular activities, such as celebration of traditional holidays and maintaining relationships with party members in social settings, cost a significant amount of money. Therefore, it appears that both parties resort to non-transparent financing practices that are arguably inconsistent with party competition in a democracy. Interviewees almost uniformly agreed that both parties look to wealthy businesspeople and sponsors to make up the majority of the party budget. Candidature in national elections requires significant wealth from party members. Most deals are struck behind closed doors, but some financial dealings are made known. For instance, in the 2020 election, the DP officially required its candidates to contribute 100 million tugrugs (~\$38,400) to the party. Given that monthly family incomes averaged \$480 in 2019 in Mongolia, this is a significant amount of money. An interviewee said that this is just the tip of the iceberg. Members of the MPP and newspaper accounts also suggest that large amounts of money come into the party from businesses to help them out in the elections. As a result, the parties and their priorities become dominated by political players, whose main interests may not be effective and beneficial policies for the society. Corruption inside and outside the party is likely to follow.

The obscurity around party finances is exacerbated by a lack of legislative regulation and audit. The election campaigns are audited per law; however, these audits are likely not reflective of the actual revenues and expenditures of the campaigns for both parties. The official reports perhaps underreport the amount of money flow. In addition, the leadership of the National Audit Office, tasked with running these audits, is appointed and supervised by the Parliament and, therefore, the winning party usually has a lot of influence over how the audit office runs its business. Parties do not release annual financial reports and the law does not require auditing of the party's finance; the legal requirements only pertain to election finance and election accounts separate from the party accounts. The two parties have internal formal mechanisms that are supposed to oversee party finances. The MPP has a Supervisory Committee that is meant to oversee the activities of the party, including financial activities. The DP provides a formal audit report to its members at least in the case of some provinces. Both mechanisms are easily manipulated by the party apparatus and members assume it as such.

The third challenge is closely related to the second one—the bipolar system of party competition in Mongolia is becoming rather one-sided and the MPP is securing its place as a hegemonic party. Fish and Seeberg characterize Mongolia as a “single party hegemony” (Fish and Seeberg 2017, 141). The MPP has been a dominant party due to its institutional, cultural, and political inheritance from the Soviet era, but its edge over the DP is quickly growing. It won the last two parliamentary elections by considerable margins, which granted them access to the state coffers. As the winning party, they use the state's resources to distribute patronage and sustain the party. It implies that the MPP has undue advantage over the DP in terms of maintaining a network of supporters, who are financially dependent on them. The financial advantage is obvious just in terms of physical assets. The MPP has a large building for itself in the center of Ulaanbaatar, which some say it built using state resources after the electoral violence in 2008. The DP does not own a building for its headquarters at the time of this writing.

In addition to these inherent advantages of the MPP, one of the key reasons that it is close to becoming a hegemonic party is the issues of the DP, particularly its lack of internal cohesion. The fault lines of the different parties that co-founded the DP in 2000 are persistent and cause continuous fractures. The party endured several strong factions, such as the Falcon, Polar Star, and Mongolian Democratic Union factions (Radchenko and Jargalsaikhan 2017). The cleavages that divide and solidify these factions are strong. An example is that in 2012, when a member of the Polar Star faction Altankhuyag Norov became Prime Minister, he gave key positions to his faction members. Interviewees report that this factionalism and division go down to the sub-provincial party systems. To be fair, internal strife is not uncommon within the MPP either. The latest and most scandalous fight was perhaps the removal of its former leader Enkhbold Miyegombo, who led the party to victory in 2016. However, interviewees agree that the culture within the MPP is different from the DP's in that the internal struggles do not often end up in newspapers or on



social media. There are formal separate groups, such as the Leftist Association, but they are few and far between. Informal conflicts are often resolved using informal intervention from the party leadership at the relevant level.

Another challenge for the DP is that there are many other small parties that appeal to its constituents. The most recent example is the National Labor Party (KHUN), which managed to command wide support from the educated and the young. An electoral coalition including KHUN scored one seat in the most recent parliament. In the past, the Civic Will Green Party also emerged as a notable challenger to the DP, splitting precious votes. The DP will need to figure out how to unite the political forces that constitute the democratic bloc. In contrast, there are not many viable parties competing for the base constituents of the MPP, except for its splinter MPRP. However, in building electoral coalitions, the DP would benefit from more discipline and expression of commitment to their main ideology. It lost a lot of credit with voters when it entered into a coalition with its former nemesis MPRP and the New Party (United Coalition of Fair Citizens) in the local elections after failing to obtain a majority in the national legislative election. The policy and ideological platforms of these parties are almost orthogonal to that of the DP's. One interviewee mentioned that if the DP does not re-organize and get their act together, they may lose the election in 2024 and eventually expire as a party.

Finally, the DP must improve its relationship with its new generation of leaders. Conflict with the aspiring leaders was mentioned by several interviewees as a critical problem for the DP. This fracture does not sit well with voters and it diminishes the political capital of the party. It also prevents renewal of party leadership and direction.

## Conclusion

The last of these three challenges—hegemony of the MPP—could pose questions for Mongolia's democracy. Although the MPP is discursively committed to democracy and has received positive feedback for their effective governance, it has many aspects that can turn it into an agent of authoritarianism, some of which are explained earlier. New parties serious enough to challenge the MPP and the DP may be hard to come by, especially in light of the new Constitution that went into effect by the time of writing of this chapter. The Constitution specifies that establishment of a party requires the association of citizens no less than 1 percent of the total number of citizens that have the right to vote. Many viewed this as a restrictive step to put barriers up against new political parties, while many others welcomed it as an essential milestone to regulate political competition in future elections. The future remains to be seen.

This chapter argues that parties have emerged to be a key institutional mechanism that has played a crucial role in democratic transition and consolidation in Mongolia, based on an examination of the evolution of Mongolia's main parties in the past three decades. Parties as institutions contributed to Mongolia's

democratization by providing institutional mechanisms of preference aggregation, alternative policy choices, and accountability of different institutions. Their role in the early years of transition and features changed in the years afterwards. Parties became more similar to one another, party-constituent links have become clientelistic rather than programmatic, and barriers to party entry have decreased, to list a few. The two main parties and broadly the party system in Mongolia face considerable challenges, most notably low public trust in parties, unreliable and opaque financing, and the potential hegemony of a single party.

## Appendix

### List of interviewees

<i>Interview number</i>	<i>Name of the interviewee (if allowed)</i>	<i>Position</i>
2020_1	Myagmarsuren Dashzevge	Scholar, political consultant
2020_2	Enkhbold Bukhchuluun	Member of the DP, district representative
2020_3	Munkhtur Janlav	Member of the DP
2020_4	Odhuu Sanduijav	Scholar, member of the MPP
2020_5	Munkhjargal Byamba	Member of the NEW Party
2020_6	Anonymous	Member of the DP
2020_7	Batsukh Tumur	Researcher
2020_8	Anonymous	Member of the DP
2020_9	Enkhtsetseg Dagva	Researcher
2020_10	Purevsuren Sandagdorj	Member of the DP

## Notes

- 1 Yeganeh Torbati. 2016. “Kerry hails Mongolia as ‘oasis of democracy’ in tough neighborhood.” Reuters. [www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-mongolia/kerry-hails-mongolia-as-oasis-of-democracy-in-tough-neighborhood-idUSKCN0YR02T](http://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-mongolia/kerry-hails-mongolia-as-oasis-of-democracy-in-tough-neighborhood-idUSKCN0YR02T) Accessed October 15, 2020.
- 2 Byambasuren was later appointed to be the Prime Minister by Mongolia’s first democratically elected Parliament and served in office from 1990 to 1992.
- 3 In addition to the MDP and NPP, the United Party was part of this coalition party.
- 4 The DUC (MNDP, SDP, United Party) eventually co-founded the Democratic Party in 2000.
- 5 There is an informal term for those who seek public office by blindly supporting powerful individuals—“bag holders.”

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# 5

## ELECTORAL RULES EFFECT

### Explaining the Party System Stability in Democratic Indonesia

*Noory Okthariza*

#### Introduction

Despite largely being regarded as the most improved country among the “Third Wave” democratizers in Southeast Asia,<sup>1</sup> an increasingly dominant literature on Indonesian politics argues that the country has been undergoing a downward trend in its democratic quality over the last several years (Power and Warburton 2020; Aspinall et al. 2020). This can be seen in the country’s position within the global democratic ranks conducted by renowned independent institutions such as the Freedom House and the Economist Intelligence Unit (EIU). For instance, Indonesia has been classified as a “partly free” country since 2013, in contrast to its “free” status nine years earlier in the Freedom House index. In 2019, the EIU’s assessment placed the third largest democracy at 64th position out of 167 countries, making it placed below Timor-Leste (41), Malaysia (43), and the Philippines (54). The key terms used by the Indonesian specialists to examine the current democratic drifts are also varied, from illiberalism (Hadiz 2017), deconsolidation (Mietzner 2018), repressive pluralism (Fealy 2020), to stagnation and regression (Power and Warburton 2020; Warburton and Aspinall 2019)—all pointing to the deteriorating trends of democratic quality.

Despite being touted as such, the country has not been as mired compared to the non-democracies in the region. At the very least, Indonesia’s status as an “electoral democracy” is maintained such that there exists a minimum, regular level of competition through which many political parties compete for power through free and fair elections. Politics also remains an open field because many new and old players are allowed to form their parties or various political vehicles. Likewise, electoral competition has been quite stable and institutionalized, although, in recent years, it may have exhibited some flaws in its implementation. Nonetheless, this chapter argues that these perceived flaws are largely arbitrary and should be distinguished

from the main institutional, formal features of electoral democracy which remain in place. Why and how did this stability and institutionalization come into being? What factors account for such outcomes?

In addressing these questions, the chapter revisits the literature on party systems. Drawing mainly from the work of Mainwaring (2018), which sought to refine the earlier concept of a party system, this chapter posits that, in general, Indonesia performs above average among many new democracies concerning the level of consolidated party systems, particularly in terms of the core dimension of interparty competition. This has been indicative if we look at certain comparative measurements such as patterns of new party votes, patterns of main contenders' votes, and medium-term stability among political parties. Some other critical dimensions, such as electoral volatility and the changes in the party's ideological position, also show positive progress.

While one predominant view on this issue looks at the role of political cleavages in explaining the relative stability of a socially rooted party system in Indonesia (Ufen 2008b; Mietzner 2008, 2013), others saw the significance of past authoritarian legacies in molding the features of parties and party systems in general (Hicken and Kuhonta 2011, 2015). Other perspectives look at the influences of more contemporary factors, such as the presidentialization of politics (Slater 2018; Ufen 2018) or the role of figures and personalities in local and national-level elections (Tan 2006; Liddle and Mujani 2007, 2010). Many of these works underscore both explicit and implicit claims regarding the relative stability of political parties and party systems in Indonesia. Yet, they tend to neglect how Indonesia fares compared to other developing countries. An exception is Hicken and Kuhonta (2011, 2015), who made a systematic comparison with other Asian countries. They found that institutional legacies are the most crucial after accounting for factors contributing to party system institutionalization, such as electoral rules, the passage of time, and government type. Their analysis, however, is limited to the level of electoral volatility so that some other crucial dimensions of party systems are left untouched. Additionally, it mainly relies on a correlational analysis in Asia that excludes the country-specific context.

The goal of this chapter is to explain on the distinct characteristics of electoral rules that promote stability and predictability of Indonesia's party system. Unlike the previous research that tends to understate its importance, I argue that electoral rules designed by parties' elites have helped the party system to stabilize by way of three interrelated factors: (1) increasing barriers to entry for many new players and, at the same time, reinforcing the current players to stay in the game; (2) the timing of the issuance of such rules; and (3) the anticipated outcomes of electoral rules. These factors have assisted the electoral democracy in upholding and maintaining the minimum level of competition among parties. Despite several attempted to amend electoral rules, the fundamental elements of these rules have arguably been upheld due to the concerted efforts existed among party elites who share a common interest in preserving the current system. In this way, parties played an unintended role in designing the backbone of competitive elections as they acted

on, in the words of Bermeo and Yashar (2016, 22), “coordinating, negotiating, and designing regime change; participating in competitive elections, and generating citizen support for democracy before and after elections are held.” This could also be one of the insights inferred from Teehankee, Padit, and Park’s introduction in this volume which stresses the need to understand a specific mechanism during the start of the democratization process that allows subsequent political development to mold.

To illustrate the argument further, the next sections are organized as follows. First, the discussion of the party system will be situated within the context of the current gloomy assessment of Indonesian democracy. Second, the chapter will touch upon the comparative literature on party systems and the specific works on party system in Indonesia. Here we will highlight the role of political cleavages in affecting the development of the party system and examine why this perspective falls short in elucidating the current system. Third, the chapter proceeds with presenting evidence about the party system’s institutionalization. Drawing from the results of five legislative elections from 1999 to 2019, we will see how the relative stability of the party system has been achieved, as can be seen in several indicators previously mentioned. Fourth, the discussion is then advanced with a detailed exposition of the role of electoral arrangement for party system stability. The chapter ends with an implication and insight for further studies.

## Democracy in Indonesia: The State of Debate

The majority of contemporary scholarship on Indonesian politics in the last decade is filled with critical assessments of the performance of the country’s democracy. Despite often being lauded for its democratic success in the 2000s, the country has yet to escape from its traditional problems, such as a weak bureaucracy, pervasive corruption, and the surviving forces of the old elites. Aspinall (2010, 32) notes that the accommodation of old elites into a new system after *reformasi* has helped Indonesia undergo a smooth transition, though at the expense of having a trade-off between democratic success and democratic quality. This accommodation was reflected, for instance, in the controversy over the efforts to revoke some key rights of Indonesia’s Corruption Eradication Commission (KPK)—one of the most trusted political institutions—in carrying out its tasks such as wiretapping and prosecuting suspects in 2009 (Mietzner 2012, 214). This move was controversial because of the fierce back-and-forth contentions between the KPK and the National Police, which involved the top leaders of the two institutions (Kimura 2011). Another point that has been much criticized at this time was the weak protection of minority rights. These include the rights of religious minorities such as the adherents of Ahmadiyya, Christians, and sexual minorities (Burhani 2014; Mietzner 2012).

The transition of power from President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono to President Joko “Jokowi” Widodo in 2014 does not seem to deliver a significant improvement in the country’s democratic quality. An emerging discourse among Indonesian

specialists is that the country has moved from “stagnation to regression” (Power and Warburton 2020). Power (2018, 329) explains how the government used “a deliberate and increasingly systematic effort to impede and enfeeble the legitimate opposition essential to democratic systems” in the 2019 election. Triggered by the devastating loss of Jokowi’s close ally in the gubernatorial election in Jakarta and the prior political dynamics surrounding it,<sup>2</sup> the government started to organize its law enforcement to repress opposition by way of criminalizing politicians, groups/organizations, and curtailing the space of its political opponents. This phenomenon has led some scholars to coin the practice in Indonesia (and elsewhere) as “authoritarian innovations” (Curato and Fossati 2020; Mietzner 2020; Pepinsky 2020). The term should be differentiated from full-blown authoritarianism in that it tends to be gradual and subtle and frequently uses the language of democracy to subvert it (Curato and Fossati 2020, 7). Some articles use the terms “repressive pluralism” (Fealy 2020) and “democratic paradox” (Aspinall and Mietzner 2019) to highlight the increasingly illiberal nature of democracy in Indonesia.

Despite these worrying trends, Indonesia has yet to breach the “threshold” towards non-democracies. At the very least, the 2019 election reaffirmed Indonesia’s status as an electoral democracy in which elections remain competitive, the multi-party system still holds, and a minimum degree of political pluralism exists. These ensued against the current regime’s keen desire to silence its rivals (Aspinall and Mietzner 2019). While it is true that electoral democracy cannot be equated with liberal democracy, as the latter requires a set of more complex and robust conditions of political rights and complete fulfillment of civil liberties (Freedom House 2020), the ability of democracy to persist in Indonesia has sparked interest as to why and how this system to endure for over two decades amidst serious challenges. Competitive legislative and presidential elections have been regularly held since 1999, with a total of five legislative and four presidential elections conducted to date. Unlike the legislative elections under the New Order, four different political parties won Indonesia’s first four post-suharto’s elections (*Partai Demokrasi Indonesia Perjuangan* or PDI-P in 1999, *Golongan Karya* or *Golkar* in 2004, *Demokrat* in 2009, and PDI-P in 2014). The “two-turnover test” in the executive changes has also taken place smoothly so that Indonesia formally met Huntington’s minimum criteria for consolidated democracy (Huntington 1991).

This chapter posits that to better understand why and how electoral democracy can stay afloat in Indonesia, it may be necessary to shift the focus from analyzing informal power struggles, as I have previously examined, to examining the formal nature of party competition. The former may help us understand the gradual process through which democratic quality deteriorates. But it may not be enough to explain why the minimum level of competition remains. The minimum level of competition is arguably a dimension that makes Indonesia’s democracy stand out. Party competition requires the condition of whether or not the minimum means for channeling political participation among parties in predictable ways exist. It is thus crucial to analyze the number of parties and the level of stability of party competition. Here, the discussion over the party system becomes essential.



## The Case of Party System Institutionalization in Indonesia

Party system refers to the “set of parties that interact in patterned ways” (Mainwaring and Torcal 2006). The idea of a party system can be traced back to Sartori’s groundbreaking work *Party and Party System* (1976). Unsatisfied with Duverger’s (1954) simple dichotomy between two-party and multiparty systems, Sartori came up with two important dimensions that structure the party system: the number of relevant parties and the degree of ideological polarization among them. The number of relevant parties can be counted by how many parties “exhibiting either coalition or blackmail potential” exist (Evans 2002, 156), that is, the ability of a party or parties to be part of a government’s coalition or to influence the nature of electoral competition and to induce the electoral behavior of other parties. On the other hand, polarization here refers to the ideological distance of parties from the poles. When parties move inside the poles, the nature of competition is centripetal and ideological differentiation among them will be less diverged.

In contrast, centrifugal competition happens when the high polarization moves parties outside the poles, resulting in a more polarized and divisive competition. This view was advanced when Mainwaring and Scully (1995) incorporated the institutionalization dimension into the party system concept. Inspired by Huntington’s view, the two authors claim that the party system should better be comprehended as a continuum instead of the dichotomy between consolidated systems and non-systems, as the case of Sartori has shown. From a continuum perspective, scholars can comprehend the degree of institutionalization within party systems across the globe regardless of their types of government. In their assessment of Latin American cases, the two authors lay out three different typologies of the party system: highly institutionalized system (as in Argentina), inchoate or weakly institutionalized (Peru, Bolivia, Brazil, and Ecuador), and hegemonic party systems (Mexico and Paraguay) (1995, 17–20).

In its subsequent development, several scholars pointed out the limitations of the party system to explain the individual level of institutionalization of political parties. Randall and Svåsand (2002) argued that the party system could be stable despite only one or few parties being institutionalized. Mexico is a case where the hegemonic Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) has uninterruptedly stayed in power from 1929 to 2000 (Wallis 2003). The *Golkar* party during the New Order era could also be the case, as it became the sole dominant party in the six elections (1971–1997), yet the nature of interparty competition in broad terms has been stable—as indicated by the low level of electoral volatility. This phenomenon allowed scholars to treat party institutionalization as a distinct concept from party system institutionalization. Levitsky (1998) offers “value infusion” and “behavioral routinization” as two elements contributing to party institutionalization; Randall and Svåsand flesh out party institutionalization as “the process by which the party becomes established in terms both of integrated patterns of behavior and of attitudes, or culture” (2002, 12); while Basedau and Stroh (2008, 7–10), building on from Randall and Svåsand’s model, place party institutionalization within two

**TABLE 5.1** Dimensions of Party Institutionalization

	<i>Stability</i>	<i>Value-infusion</i>
<b>External</b>	Roots in society	Autonomy
<b>Internal</b>	Level of organization	Coherence

Source: Basedau and Stroh 2008.

dimensions, stability vs. value-infusion as well as external vs. internal dimensions (see Table 5.1). However, as Casal Bértoa and Enyedi (2021) argue, indicators of party system institutionalization are often based on the number of parties, electoral volatility, or both. These solutions have the benefit of being relatively basic and accessible, but they all share the fundamental flaw of failing to capture the structure of interparty competition. They examine the phenomenon of the institutionalization of party systems through the concept of closure. Party systems can be deemed closed and, hence, institutionalized when the prospective governing choices are not just recognized but also reasonably familiar and predictable.

Concerning the degree of institutionalization, the Indonesian party system has been relatively stable compared to other countries in the region (Ufen 2012; Mietzner 2013; Hicken and Kuhonta 2015). This stability, for the large part, stems from the ingrained historical precursors which then carried over to the present days. Ufen (2012) attributes this stability to the presence of political *aliran* (stream), which allows the party system in Indonesia to follow the cleavage-based model as proposed by Lipset and Rokkan (1967). This *aliran* came from early periods of modern Indonesian history in the 1950s–1960s, during which the three seemingly contradictory ideologies, namely, nationalism, Islamism, and communism, were at play. Though these ideological sprouts were found during pre-independence Indonesia, it was not until the post-independence era that the three forces manifested well into dominant political parties. These parties are the Indonesian National Party or PNI (nationalist), the *Masyumi* and the *Nahdlatul Ulama* party (Islamist), and the Communist Party of Indonesia or PKI (Communist). In the first election in 1955, when more than 30 parties competed, these four controlled 78 percent of the votes.

The predominant literature on Indonesia’s party system almost invariably links to the first election in 1955 as the starting point to understand the subsequent party system developments (Tan 2015; Ufen 2008a; Ufen 2008b; Mietzner 2008). Despite many parties eventually being repressed under the New Order (1966–1998), once the country underwent a political transition in 1999, this political *aliran* has arguably been resurrected, and its magnitude prevails in the first democratic election (Fossati 2020, 2019). Moreover, its scale seems to be more profound in the last election in 2019, in which the patterns of party votes were conspicuously divided along geographic, ethnic, and religious dispersions (Pepinsky 2019; Aspinall 2019).

By revisiting the case of party system stability in Indonesia, I need to illuminate what many related works explicitly and implicitly say about “stability.” Mietzner (2008) finds that the stability of the current system has been mainly due to the

nature of interparty competition, which leads to the centripetal direction of party behavior, thus contributing to the stability of the political system as a whole. On the other hand, the structuring force of *aliran*, as argued by Ufen (2012), has been apparent and contributes to the stability of party competition in the post-*reformasi* elections. He noted how different parties earn support from distinct voter demographics, and these patterns tend to persist over multiple election cycles. On a different tone, Tan (2015) espouses that the party system is weak, and unlike Ufen, she argues that the legacy of both Sukarno and Suharto's eras has emasculated the party system stability in democratic Indonesia. Political cleavages do not drive the party system; rather, the electoral rules structure the interaction of current parties to be catchall parties behaviorally. Writing seven years after Suharto stepped down from power, Tan (2006) also explained that Indonesia's party system receives "a mixed score card, strengths and weaknesses mixing to deprive the parties of legitimacy" and had taken a step towards deinstitutionalization due to the prevalence of figures and personalities in politics.

Although many relevant studies may not primarily aim to explain the degree of stability within the party system, it is still necessary to approach this concept with greater precision. How stable and institutionalized is the party system in Indonesia? What factors account for the levels of stability and institutionalization? And how does Indonesia's party system compare with the region? Hicken and Kuhonta (2011) found the Indonesian party system to be quite stable institutionally but not at the levels attained by Singapore and Malaysia. However, Hicken and Kuhonta's analysis is limited to the level of electoral volatility in Asia and the influence of past regimes on the current system.

Tan (2006) approaches the issue by applying Mainwaring and Scully's (1995, 1) four dimensions of the party system to the Indonesian context. These dimensions are stability in interparty competition; parties have stable roots in society; the degree of parties and elections are accepted as the legitimate means that determine who governs; and party organizations have stable rules and structures. As expected, Indonesia's score has been mixed on these dimensions, and Tan's findings tend to be inconclusive.

Given the topic itself has been elaborated greatly and many comparative works have advanced our understanding, it might worth the effort to revisit this issue with a fresh approach. Here, I draw on the recent research by Mainwaring (2018), which sought to refine the concept of the party system in a more attentive way. As stipulated in Mainwaring and Scully (1995), the core four elements of party systems arguably cannot be treated equally as some elements might be devoted to explaining phenomena other than the party system itself. For example, party organizational structure and party roots in society might be best used to explain the degree of party institutionalization instead of the party system. At the same time, the acceptance of parties and elections as legitimate procedures for power transfer might be best used to characterize countries under a democratic transition process. As the concept of the party system implies a certain degree of competitiveness, interparty competition

has arguably been the most critical dimension to be explored. Mainwaring states that the refined concept of the party system can be approached by focusing more on the level of stability and predictability of interparty competition instead of complementing the four overarching frameworks (2018, 21–27). Many works have focused solely on the level of electoral volatility to explain this stability, whereas other possible indicators, such as patterns of votes of new and old parties, are not adequately illustrated. The following section will be devoted to explaining these phenomena in greater detail.

### **The Stability and Institutionalization of Indonesia's Party System from a Comparative Perspective**

The post-*reformasi* Indonesia has shown an establishing trend in terms of party system institutionalization (PSI). To demonstrate this argument, I follow the criteria as expounded by Mainwaring (2018, 36–54) in determining the PSI by (1) focusing on the stability of the membership of the party system; (2) stability in intraparty competition; and (3) changes in the parties' ideological positions. This chapter sought to use the most similar data sources whenever possible, but a slightly different way of using indicators is inevitable due to data constraints. For example, the referenced work used the presidential and lower chamber elections to compare the mean score of parties' votes. This method could be done presumably because each party can nominate its cadre to be a presidential candidate, regardless of the number of seats one has. However, the same technique in Indonesia is barely applicable as electoral barriers for presidential candidates are set quite high by its electoral law. Only a party or coalition of parties with at least 20% of national votes in the previous election or 25% of parliament seats can nominate a candidate for president. Unless they form a coalition, these barriers made the possibility of smaller parties nominating their candidates minuscule. As a result, bigger parties typically enjoy greater chances of nominating their candidates, leading to a constrained pool of potential presidential nominees (for instance, only two presidential candidates running in the 2014 and 2019 elections). Due to this limitation, this chapter draws its data largely from the legislative elections regularly held every five years.

In explaining the stability of the party system's membership, the indicators used are the vote share of new parties, stability trends among main contenders, and stability of parties' votes in the medium term. These three indicators are intuitively connected since a dramatic change in one of them will certainly affect the value of other indicators and generate a less stable party system. The point to be observed for the vote share of new parties can be earned by calculating the total and mean votes of new parties (see Figure 5.1). Indonesia made the shift from a three-party system that was in place during the New Order era to a multiparty system with 48 registered parties during its first democratic election in 1999. As we might expect, this dramatic change brought up extreme vote volatility as the older three parties

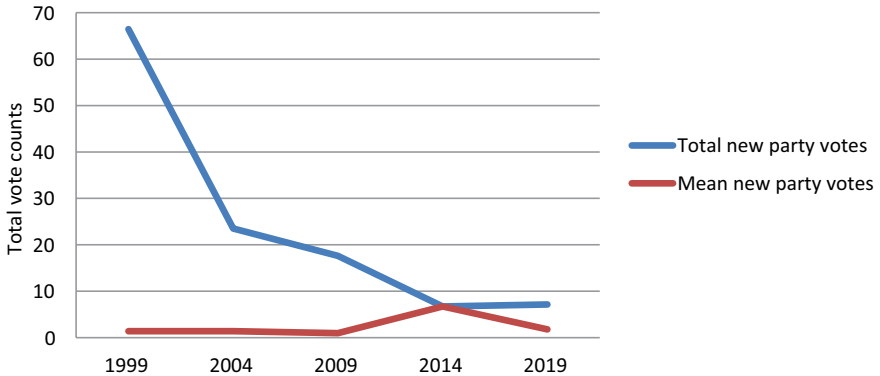


FIGURE 5.1 Stability of New Party Votes (1999–2019).

Source: Author's calculation

(*Golkar*, *Partai Persatuan Pembangunan* or PPP, and PDI-P) only earned 33.5 percent of votes as opposed to 66.5 percent for the newcomers. However, with the steep rise in the number of new parties, the mean new party votes also became very small (1.4 percent). The votes of new parties then declined considerably as the elections continued. In 2004, 16 out of 24 competing parties were new parties formed after 1999, and the total votes dropped to 23.51 percent (the mean score was 1.4 percent); in the 2009 election, 18 out of 44 were new parties and the total and mean scores were 17.62 and 0.97 percent; in 2014, only one new party competed (*Nasdem* party), so the total and mean scores were the same at 6.72 percent; and in 2019 there were only four new parties participating which shared on average 1.8 percent of votes. If we total the mean score across five elections, all new parties will get 2.45 percent of the votes. This will situate Indonesia in comparison with countries in the lower end in terms of new party votes in Latin America, such as Chile (1.6 percent), Uruguay (1.8 percent), and the Dominican Republic (2.4 percent). At the same time, the Indonesian score is much lower than Colombia (12.6 percent), Guatemala (12.7 percent), Venezuela (14.2 percent), and Peru (14.5 percent).<sup>3</sup>

The second indicator looks at how stable are the votes earned by main contenders, defined by parties which, at a minimum, earn 10 percent of votes in every election. In a stable system, “the same parties compete time after time” (Mainwaring 2018, 38). Conversely, different parties compete in every election in a weakly institutionalized system. Since 1999, six parties have reached this threshold (Table 5.2). PDI-P and *Golkar* were the most stable parties in this regard, as they managed to muster more than 10 percent in all five elections. *Partai Kebangkitan Bangsa* or PKB and PPP performances were particularly good in the first two elections, whereas *Demokrat* and *Gerinda* progressed to the higher ranks from 2009 to 2019. We then counts the number of repeat contenders from the previous election. For instance, the main contenders in the 1999 election were PDI-P, *Golkar*, PKB, and PPP. And

**TABLE 5.2** Vote Stability of Main Political Party Contenders (1999–2019)

<i>Election/party</i>	<i>PDI-P</i>	<i>Golkar</i>	<i>PKB</i>	<i>PPP</i>	<i>Demokrat</i>	<i>Gerindra</i>	<i>Repeat contenders</i>
1999	x	x	x	x			
2004	x	x	x				3 of 4
2009	x	x			x		2 of 3
2014	x	x			x	x	3 of 3
2019	x	x				x	3 of 4
Total main contenders repeated							11 of 14 (0.78)

Source: Author's calculation.

out of this four, only PDI-P, *Golkar*, and PKB managed to get at minimum 10 percent of votes in the 2004 election. By calculating this, there were 14 potential contenders from five elections, and 11 of them managed to repeat their attainments (or 0.78, 11 divided by 14). This tells us about the frequent turnover of major parties in Indonesia. The interpretation will be the closer the score to 1, the more favorable this indicator becomes. Again, if we compare Indonesia to Latin American countries, the country is just marginally different, as the mean of 18 countries in Latin America is 0.79.<sup>4</sup> Indonesia is well below Brazil (0.88), Costa Rica (0.86), El Salvador (0.85), and Panama (0.82), but it is ahead of Paraguay (0.75), Nicaragua (0.67), Ecuador (0.65), and Venezuela (0.54).

The last indicator of the party system's membership is the medium-term stability of the main contenders. This indicator signifies the percentage that each party that earned a minimum 10 percent of votes in one election achieved it again in all other elections. The formula for calculating medium-term stability is

$$\frac{N}{P * (E - 1)}$$

where  $N$  is the actual number of times that parties receiving a minimum 10 percent of votes went on to achieve the same again in all other elections;  $P$  is the number of parties that won at least 10 percent of votes in elections; and  $E$  is the number of elections being held. The score then will range from 1 (perfect stability) to 0 (lowest stability). According to Figure 5.3, six parties garnered at least 10 percent from 1999 to 2019 elections and 11 times for  $N$  value (PDI-P and *Golkar* had four repetitions while PKB, *Demokrat*, and *Gerindra* had one repetition each). The score for Indonesia then is 0.45; that is, from six parties that received at least 10 percent in one election, the number of times that these parties achieved this again in all other elections is 45 percent. Nonetheless, this score should be read with a caveat. *Demokrat* and *Gerindra* were relatively new parties. The first time the *Demokrat* party took part in the election was in 2004, when the party became the political vehicle for then presidential candidate Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono. By then, the party received 7.45 percent of the votes.

Similarly, *Gerindra* party's initial foray into electoral politics occurred in 2009, when they managed to secure 4.5 percent of the vote. But even then, the 0.45 is a figure that is quite competitive with that of Latin American countries, as the mean for 18 countries stands at 0.51. Those anchoring the lower range in that region are Guatemala (0.17), Venezuela (0.18), and Peru (0.22), while Uruguay (1.00), Chile (0.96), and Mexico (0.96) are among the top countries in this respect.

The second dimension of interest, stability in intraparty competition, is measured by the widely used indicator, electoral volatility (e.g., Bértoa et al. 2017). This indicator denotes the net change of all parties' votes from one election to the next election. The electoral volatility is measured by the Pederson index,<sup>5</sup> in which the range of volatility varies from 0 (the most stable) to 100 (the most volatile). If we follow this formula, we will see a clear pattern. In the wake of democratization in 1999, in which Indonesia underwent a dramatic change in its party system, the volatility index stands at 30.03 (1999) and 31.55 (2004). But after experiencing two elections, volatility is dwindling to 19.88 (2014) and 12.69 (2019). The level of vote volatility in post-Suharto's elections has been approaching that of the New Order era when only three parties competed, despite the fact that more parties are associated with a less stable party system (Figure 5.2). The mean for democratic elections in Indonesia (1999–2019) is 23.53, slightly better than the mean (25.1) in 18 Latin American countries in the legislative election.<sup>6</sup>

One may tempt to infer that authoritarian governments tend to produce a more stable party system, as can be seen from the level of vote volatility under the New Order. As Hicken and Kuhonta (2011) found, election under authoritarian regimes tends to produce a more stable party system, but it does not necessarily explain the quality of democracy. In contrast, this indicator can be used to understand a party's "natural" votes and the state of ideological turnover or changes in voters' alignment. This is partly because this indicator can presumably be used to assess the extent to which voters' preferences and party elites converged. When this convergence happens, voters may not need to change their party options (thus strengthening voters and party linkages through party loyalty), and, consequently, this will contribute

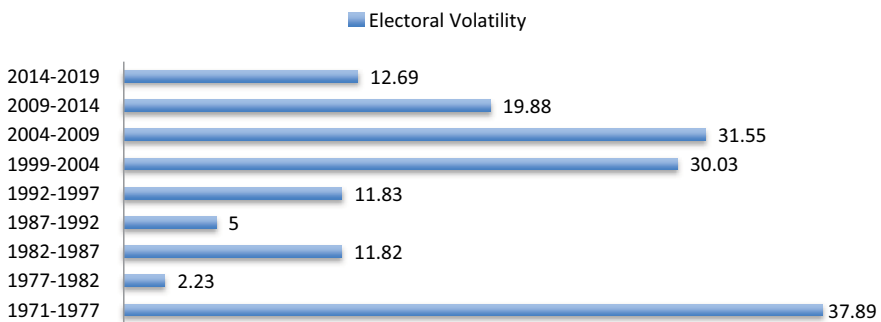


FIGURE 5.2 Electoral Volatility of Political Parties, 1971–2019.

Source: Author's calculation

to the stability of the party system in general. In addition, electoral volatility can be used to understand the extent to which efforts to build new parties exist and whether or not the given electoral formula gives leniency for elites to form new parties. This is because the high volatility is partly driven by the plethora of new parties that manage to capture votes from established ones. In other words, the value of electoral volatility could be used to suggest barriers to entry for creating new political parties. When barriers to entry are high, elites may find options to build a new party as something less attractive than tapping into the existing ones, and vice versa. The discussion on this matter will be done in greater detail in the subsequent section.

The final dimension under observation pertains to the party's ideological position, but we are concerned by the insufficient data available in this regard. Such a dimension intuitively needs a moment or policies where each party can show its clear standing over various heated issues that are being debated so that party's distinction on a "left and right" spectrum can be useful. Or at least we need a public opinion survey that asks respondents about the changes in the party's ideology at two different times ( $T_2 - T_1$ ). The sudden ideological change of party can be one instance that fosters the dilution of a political party (Lupu 2014). Likewise, the classic work of Downs (1957) indicates that parties will maximize their votes by taking a certain position on a policy dimension. Consequently, voters may be discouraged when they perceive an ideological gap between the party's position and the party's brand (Fagerholm 2016; Schumacher et al. 2013). This situation potentially leads to an unstable party system.

Recent research suggests consistent patterns of party brand and party position on certain issues, especially religion. Aspinall et al. (2018) found that although all parties' elites tend to converge on a wide range of issues, their positions are different regarding the role of Islam in public and political life. This has been emphasized by Fossati et al. (2020, 10), who argue that "ideology plays an important role in structuring party choice for Indonesians." In a slightly different vein, Pepinsky et al. (2012) found that the Islamic platform will pay off when voters have no cues about economic uncertainties.

And the salience of ideological cleavages in Indonesian politics has been more about a continuation of what happened in the 1950s rather than a termination. Building on the influential works of Geertz (1976) and Feith and Castles (1970), the subsequent Indonesian scholarships have never failed to acknowledge the importance of cleavages, particularly political Islam, as an ordering force that structures political life. Except for Liddle and Mujani (2007), most research has illustrated the importance of cleavages, although some argued their effect is waning (Menchik 2016; Tanuwidjaja 2010; Hamayotsu 2014 and 2011; Ufen 2008a).

However, the effect of ideological clout has been more prevalent since at least the end of President Jokowi's first term. The polarizing Jakarta's gubernatorial election during 2016 and 2017 became one contentious moment that reshaped the course of contemporary Indonesian politics, including the presidential election in 2019 (Setijadi 2017). The voting patterns in this election showcase this



contention. For example, the votes received by Jokowi and Prabowo Subianto are largely divided along cleavages such as ethnicity, geography, and, particularly, religion. Pepinsky (2019, 57) found that Prabowo “did not win a majority of the votes in any district with more than a 50% share of non-Muslim.”

In contrast, Jokowi got overwhelming support among Javanese-Muslim, whereas the support for non-Javanese Muslims tends to be given to Prabowo. It turns out, however, that these voting patterns resembled that of the 2014 presidential election when the same candidates squared off. The support from conservative Muslims was squeezed towards Prabowo, whereas Jokowi drew votes heavily from poor rural areas (Gueorguiev et al. 2018). The Centre for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) survey conducted before the 2019 election also indicated the relevance of cleavages. For instance, Jokowi won 60.5 percent of the support among Javanese as opposed to 20.6 percent for Prabowo. Whereas Prabowo leads overwhelmingly among those non-Javanese such as Acehnese (77.3 percent), Melayunese (52.6 percent), Minangkabau (66.7 percent), and Sundanese (46.7 percent).<sup>7</sup> These have been indicative of the salience of cleavages, if the term “ideology” is less precise here, which continue to shape Indonesian politics these days. This trend persists and affects how parties position themselves in the eyes of their constituencies.

## Interactive Effects of Electoral Rules

We have explored the relative stability and institutionalization of Indonesia’s party system as can be seen from the patterns of parties’ votes, medium term stability of parties’ votes, electoral volatility, and party’s ideological position. We now move to the questions of why and how such stability and institutionalization of the party system come into being. What factors may account for such reinforcement? The literature on party behavior effects on the electoral system states that strategic party choice on electoral rules leads to a general trend towards a proportional representation (PR) system (Okthariza, 2022; Colomer 2004, 2005). The general assumption is that the PR system offers a higher possibility of many parties not being likely losers in the election. When neither party is quite sure about how many votes they will get in an election, the less risky electoral system choice will be favorable. In contrast, when an election produces one or two dominant parties, the majority system will be more desirable as the absolute winners will have more opportunities to define the further rules of the game. This guiding logic will illuminate the party’s behavior in the wake of designing electoral rules in democratic Indonesia.

### *Higher Barriers to Entry*

First, the effect of electoral rules can be seen in the increasing barriers to entry for new political parties wishing to compete in an election. Under the current electoral law, all political parties must have permanent party branches in all 34 provinces and at least 75 percent of more than 500 districts (*kabupaten/kota*). Additionally, parties must also have branches in half of the sub-districts (*kecamatan*), which comprise

more than 7000 across Indonesia. These administrative requirements have been set to be more progressive from one election to another (Table 5.3). To illustrate, in the 1999 election, political parties were mandated to establish party branches in only one-third of the provinces and in half of the districts within those provinces. There was no provision for the presence of sub-district offices at that time. The requirements were advanced five years later, with at least two-thirds of branches in all provinces and two-thirds of district branches from those selected provinces to be met by political parties. By the 2014 election, the same requirements were set for the provincial and district levels. However, a new stipulation was introduced that made it even more difficult for new parties to form, as they now had to establish branches in sub-district levels.

The high threshold for establishing party branches is evident when we compare Indonesia to other countries in Southeast Asia. The Varieties of Democracy (V-Dem) data show that Indonesia is ahead of other countries in the region regarding the number of “party branches.” This variable asked of respondents: “How many parties have permanent local party branches?” The responses range from 0 (none) to 4 (all). Indonesia’s rank is situated on the 3 to 3.5 scale. This may be a decent accomplishment given the vast size of this archipelagic country, comprising more than 17,000 islands, so the ability of parties to build their permanent offices might tell us about a relatively robust organizational capacity. This assumption is again reflected in the V-Dem data on “party organization,” which indicates the party’s organizational capacity level. This variable asked of respondents: “How many political parties for national-level office have permanent organizations?” signifying “a substantial number of personnel who are responsible for carrying out party activities outside the election season” (V-Dem 2020). The data reveals that Indonesia is

**TABLE 5.3** Electoral Rules in Indonesia, 1999–2019

<i>Election Year</i>	<i>Provincial Branches</i>	<i>District Branches</i>	<i>Sub-district Branches</i>	<i>Parliamentary Threshold</i>
1999	One-third	Half district in those one-third provinces	-	-
2004	Two-third	Two-thirds from those two-third provinces	-	-
2009	Two-third	Two-thirds from those two-third provinces	-	2.5 percent
2014	All provinces	75 percent of districts	50 percent in those 75 percent districts	3.5 percent
2019	All provinces	75 percent of districts	50 percent in those 75 percent districts	4 percent

Source: Author’s own.

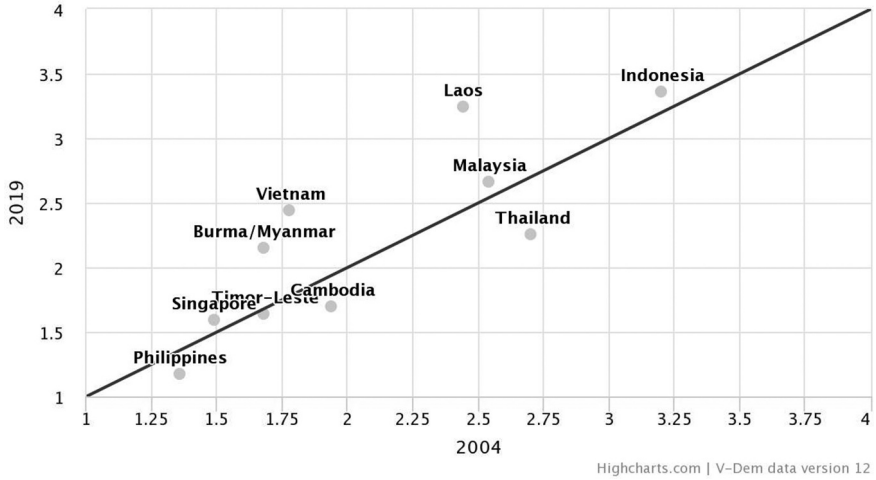


FIGURE 5.3 Party Branches Index in Southeast Asia.

Source: Coppedge et al. (2021)

well above all countries in Southeast Asia, including those countries often dubbed as “competitive authoritarianism,” such as Malaysia and Singapore (Croissant and Lorenz 2018). This finding may challenge Hicken and Kuhota’s argument (2011) that these countries, with their longstanding nondemocratic tendencies, should have had stronger organizational capacity (Figure 5.4).

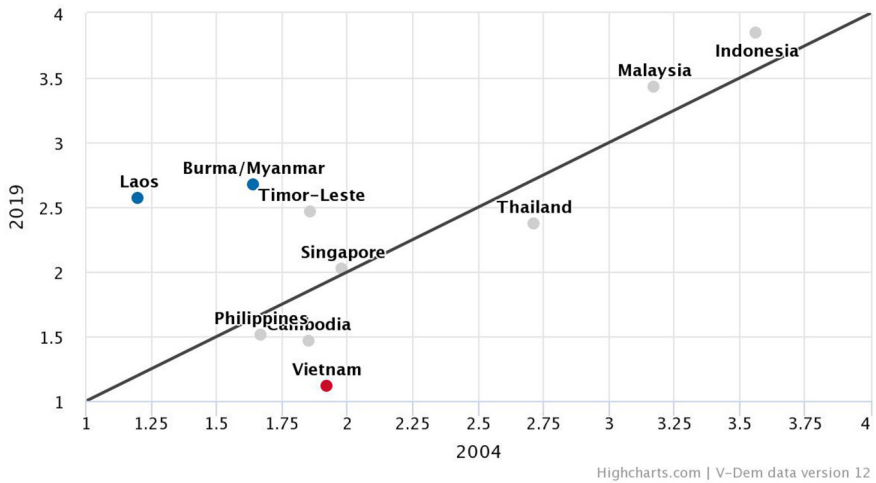


FIGURE 5.4 Party Organizations Index in Southeast Asia.

Source: Coppedge et al. (2021)

Another factor—perhaps the most important one—that puts more stringency on political parties is the presence of a parliamentary threshold. This connotes the minimum votes the party must get in order to qualify for seats in the parliament. This provision was made in the electoral law for the first time in 1999 when the bar was set at 2 percent. In 2009, the threshold was increased to 2.5 percent. From 18 new parties formed before the 2009 election, only two parties could pass the threshold (*Gerindra* and *Hanura*). The bar was then increased incrementally in 2014 to 3.5 percent. And its constituting effect was forceful as the 2014 election showed a sudden drop in the participation of new parties. From 12 parties competing in the 2014 election, only one new party formed (*Nasdem*), which was successful as it received 6.72 percent. The bar was then set even higher by 4 percent in 2019. And for the first time, none of the four new parties could pass that threshold, notwithstanding one of them, the *Perindo* party, which was formed by one of Indonesia's largest media network owners.

Aside from those increasing administrative requirements, the barriers to entry have to deal with a crucial dimension that beset many new parties in Indonesia, one that pertains to the linkages between voters and new parties. It contends that many new parties formed after democracy consolidated in Indonesia will find it difficult to define their partisan identities. Most partisan identities between voters and new parties are weak, but even if not, are strictly limited to certain groups of people. A stronger electoral expansion is thus needed to make them more competitive. However, a recent study showed that partisanship cannot be achieved quickly. The studies from Lupu found (2014, 2016) showed that partisan support can be earned when parties successfully build their party brand; a party brand needs to be cultivated over time and one that needs to be shown its consistency through what a party stands for and how it performs in office (Lupu 2014, 568–269).

In the same vein, another work shows that robust parties will likely emerge from “periods of intense polarization accompanied by large-scale popular mobilization and, in many cases, violence or repression” (Levitsky et al. 2016, 3). This argument echo many Asian cases on party development where authoritarian states persisted for a long time (Hicken and Kuhonta 2011, 2015). In the absence of such a conflict, parties must rely on strong party organization as defined by Van Dyck (2014, 3) as a “party’s infrastructural penetration of society.” Such a grassroots penetration will be more effective when a party is occupied with many committed activists who will work in “organizing rallies, going door to door distributing written information, and transporting people to polling booths” as in the case of the Workers’ Party in Brazil has shown (Van Dyck 2014, 3).

To understand why the party brand linked to new parties are feeble in Indonesia, it is necessary to delve into the current condition of the party landscape. Regarding ideologies, the Indonesian parties can at least be classified into two camps: Islamic-oriented and nationalistic or pluralistic-oriented parties. Some related works distinguished between Islamist, Islam-inclusive, and secular-inclusive parties (Baswedan 2004) or between Islamist and secular parties (Buehler 2013) to emphasize different brands associated with the presence parties. But again, these brands are not well

associated with those party latecomers, or at least it is not well entrenched yet. The identification of nationalistic parties has long been associated with major parties such as PDI-P and *Golkar*. The origins of these two parties can be traced back to the Suharto era, and their developments were significantly influenced by the New Order's politics. In the case of PDI-P, its growth can also be attributed to prolonged conflicts, which may be best understood through the lens of the "authoritarian inheritance" perspective (Loxton 2015). Although PDI-P's inception formally began in 1999, the party spirit can be traced back to Sukarnoism, and its previous incarnation could be closely associated with the Indonesian National Party (PNI), which was formed in 1927, and the Indonesian Democratic Party (PDI), which was founded in 1973.

Similarly, Islamist and Islam-inclusive parties have long been associated with parties such as *Partai Keadilan Sejahtera* or PKS, PPP, *Partai Bulan Bintang* or PBB (Islamist), and PKB and *Partai Amanat Nasional* or PAN (Islam-inclusive). These Islamic-based parties were founded before the 1999 election and were organized before the tightening of electoral barriers. The current differentiation within Islamic parties has been relatively clearer than non-Islamic parties. PKS, PPP, and PBB have relatively more conservative voters than PKB and PAN. These three parties are regarded as "Islamists" because of their stronger Islamic appeals and the fact that Islam serves as the party's base in their articles of association.

Along with these Islamist parties, we have PKB and PAN as two Islam-inclusive parties that serve two different Muslim electorates. Although the distinction may not be mutually exclusive, PKB has been closely associated with more traditionalist Muslims and the *Nahdlatul Ulama*, the country's largest Muslim organization. In contrast, PAN has been closely linked to modernist Muslims and the *Muhammadiyah*, the second largest Muslim organization. The main differences between the two have been more about ways of performing Islamic rituals and the degree of appreciation towards Islamic cultures and traditions. Together these three types of Islamic parties (Islamists, traditionalists, and modernists) embody a different type of Muslims by which the main differences between them, if they are well understood, are still useful in reading the political dynamics in Indonesia.

Given the relatively solid identification of established parties in terms of party brands, the case for new parties to carve out their presence in the eyes of voters—and amid the increasingly stringent regulatory barriers—has been onerous. This is not to mention the increasingly stringent parliamentary threshold set by electoral rules. At this point, it is safe to say that parties formed after 2009, when the stronger barriers have been put in place, will face sturdier challenges than those formed before 2009. Parties formed after 2009 will also likely face more difficulties defining their core constituencies. Consequently, this will contribute to the tendency of "freezing" the party system where the number of new players who can be "in" or "out" from the system can be minimized.

### ***Stability of Electoral Rules***

The final crucial factor affecting the development of PSI is the stability of electoral rules. Rules stability induces certain regularity that allows a stable interparty

competition to manifest (Mainwaring and Scully 1995, 5). In Indonesia, these rules could be seen in several main features stipulated in electoral laws. Even though electoral laws have always been amended in every election, the nature of its core principles in organizing Indonesia's legislative election has not undergone any dramatic change since 1999.

There are two dimensions of interest that we must pay attention to: first, the timing of electoral reform; and second, the subsequent outcomes of electoral laws. Indonesia's early electoral reform in the late 1990s is unique in that such reform has been possible not because it is consciously designed to achieve certain institutional goals but rather because something tends to be forced by specific circumstances. This departs slightly from the vast literature on electoral reform studies. For example, concerning the debate on the relationship between the party system and electoral system, some scholars are at least split into two camps, namely, those who argue that the party system should be seen as a consequence of having certain electoral engineering (i.e., the advocates of the Duverger's Law) and those who argue quite the opposite—it is the party system that tends to influence the outcomes of the electoral system (i.e., Rokkan 1968; Taagepera 2003; Colomer 2004 and 2007). The Indonesian case might be fit to be called the “middle ground” between these two views.

To illustrate, the story behind the early choice of a proportional representation system over a majority system is quite telling. After Suharto stepped down in May 1998, the country earnestly set up its first democratic election in June 1999. The interim President BJ Habibie formed the so-called “*Tim Tijuh*” (Team Seven), a small group of political experts assigned to draft a new electoral bill (Abdul 2018). According to the group leader, Ryaas Rasyid, the government initially proposed the first-past-the-post combined with a mixed electoral system to change the proportional system implemented during Suharto's reigning years.<sup>8</sup> However, this proposal was rejected when it was offered to the parliament, especially after the old elites knew that there were provisions that would completely eliminate the special seats allocated to the military.

Thus, a compromise was made, and both president and parliament eventually agreed to readopt the PR system, which is considered more capable of accommodating the many growing aspirations of many parties. The PR system itself is widely implemented in countries that practice multiparty democracies. This is in line with the desire of many elites who wanted to form new political parties at the beginning of democratization. Likewise, there had been the feeling from some elites ahead of the 1999 election of not wanting to be associated with the *Golkar* party or being associated with Suharto's cronies.

Under the high uncertainties typical within any political transition, including one experienced by the *Golkar* elites themselves, the then elites tended to be risk averse. They favored a less risky choice that allowed them to stand their ground even when their vote counts in the election were insignificant. In this sense, the PR system was arguably more favorable as it allowed non-major parties to benefit from the residual votes of major parties in many districts that could be converted into seats.

This pattern is consistent with what Negretto (2006) found in the case of political transition in Latin America. The transitional coalitional government between civilian and military tended to accommodate the aspirations of smaller parties if they saw that the political development would lead towards a new re-configuration of many new players by way of a democratic election. Again, this choice was made due to uncertainties that beset many old and new players within the transition. If this explanation holds, the selection of the PR system over other possible electoral choices in the wake of the political transition in 1999 was more about a collective agreement between many involved parties, regardless of their political strengths at that time.

In its subsequent development, discourses over whether or not the existing electoral law needs to be amended have ensued. The preferences over choice of the ideal electoral system have now changed between major and smaller parties. In many respects, their differing stances reflect their interests to expand their electoral base or remain in existence via election. In discussions in the early 2000s, major parties such as PDI-P and *Golkar* tended to favor the majoritarian over the PR system, or at the very least, their propensities revolved around the efforts to reduce the number of parties and to simplify the existing party system. This includes efforts to increase the parliamentary threshold, reduce the number of district magnitude, and increase the bar of the presidential threshold. In contrast, smaller and medium-sized parties would tend to maintain the current PR system model, lowering the parliamentary threshold, increasing the number of district magnitude, and reducing or even eliminating the high bar of presidential nomination—as required in the current electoral law. These divergent views are evident if one looks at the parties' stances during the electoral bill debates throughout the elections from 2004 to 2019.

These seemingly conflicting interests had been reconciled after all, at least as of now. This has been mainly driven by the fact that the final outcomes of any elections since 1999 have always been skewed more toward the interests of major parties. Of five democratic elections, PDI-P won three, *Golkar* won one, and *Demokrat* won one. PDI-P and *Golkar* have also never fallen out of the top three since 1999. They controlled the majority of the parliament's seats and consecutively controlled the cabinets by installing their party leaders as presidents, vice presidents, and ministers. As such, big parties that frequently set up the terms of the debate over the electoral bills would find less reason to significantly change the rules of the game from which they earned their accumulative power.

The divergent positions between big and small parties at the beginning eventually led to a convergent view among them, especially regarding the choice of specific electoral arrangements. This compromise has been made with certain requirements, such as the provision to set the minimum bar for the presidential threshold. Under the current electoral law, any candidate wishing to get a ticket in a presidential election must generate support from a party or a coalition of parties with at least 20 percent of seats in parliament or 25 percent of votes from the previous election. This has been a requirement that is impossible to be met by smaller

parties unless they form a coalition with bigger parties. But again, this provision does not remove the core element in the electoral law that allows smaller parties to maintain their existence through the adoption of the PR electoral system. As such, the current multiparty system remains stable, and all parties involved in the struggle for power in democratic elections, regardless their size, have been getting their fair share of the votes.

In this regard, one may say that the current rules of the game from Indonesia's electoral system have been stable, and they contributed to the stability of PSI in a sense that even when major parties have opportunities to roll back or significantly change the electoral design to be more aligned with their interest, they opted not to do so. The more inclusive PR system remains in place and has turned out to be more favorable than any other possible electoral formula. Following Colomer (2004), the longer an electoral system is adopted, the more political actors will undergo a *learning process* through which they acquire an understanding of how to get relative gains from the implementation of such a system. This minimizes the possibility of having a dramatic change within one electoral system that, if realized, could possibly shake up an established PSI. In short, an early political choice made in the wake of democratization in 1999 has been solidified years after its implementation. The timing, sequence, and outcomes of electoral rules have allowed the certain political scheme to establish and regulate the behavior of key players in politics. Together with the first factor discussed previously, the increasing barriers to entry, these combining dimensions interact and add to the consolidation of the party system in general.

## Conclusion

This chapter has shown the relative stability and institutionalization of the Indonesian party system two decades after its democratization. As presented, these can be seen from several indicators related to the stability of interparty competition, such as patterns of parties' votes, the medium-term stability of votes, electoral volatility, and changes in parties' ideological positions. Among these indicators, Indonesia's score is relatively good, including if we compare it with that of Latin American countries, wherein the stability of the party system in this region is largely considered more stable than its Asian counterpart.

The emphasis on electoral rules means that this chapter acknowledges the importance of formal institutions in constraining the interaction of political players under a recurring pattern of rules and scenarios. It is safe to say that the outcomes of electoral rules so far have been possible due to a certain amount of cooperation among political parties in structuring the rules of the game. This cooperation is possible as parties manage to get their relative gains provided by implementing the current PR electoral system. For dominant parties, unchanged rules mean the prospect for them to maintain their dominance is quite high, whereas for medium and



smaller parties, the same rules imply lower uncertainties and a better understanding of the potential challenges of political fields. As North (1991, 97) rightly pointed out, cooperation among different players is easier when “the play is repeated, when they possess complete information about the other player’s past performance, and when there are small numbers of players.” It could be said that political parties, through the intervention of party elites, essentially played an unintended role in designing the core element of competitive elections in Indonesia (see Bermeo and Yashar 2016). Against the backdrop of widespread criticism about the weak performance of parties in new democracies like Indonesia, political parties could turn out to contribute to the crafting of a democratic playing field (see also Uvsh 2023) for the Mongolian case in this book). This has been one of the key insights neglected in most scholarship on Indonesian politics.

The stability of electoral rules also associates with the stability of the party system. Even though every time an election is held, a new electoral law is always made, the core principles of it remain in place. Provisions related to the electoral system formula, the imposition of parliamentary threshold, and the minimum requirements of party branches across different levels of government, among others, are hardly changed. The latest development over the discussions of the new electoral bill for the election of 2024 shows how these core principles will likely be held. The main discussion so far has revolved around the issue of whether or not all regional elections should be held concurrently with the national legislative and presidential elections and rarely touch on the issue of fundamentally changing the electoral system formula (The Star 2021).

Finally, as stronger barriers have been established since 2009, we might expect that many new players who wish to participate within such rules will find it difficult to gain ground. This was seen in the 2019 election, where none of the new political parties got seats in the national-level parliament. Unless the current political parties agree to lower the barriers, the prospect of having significant political parties in the national landscape will be unlikely in the foreseeable future.

## Notes

- 1 The Philippines and Indonesia were part of the so-called “Third Wave” of democratization (Huntington 1991) in the region that saw the toppling of long-entrenched dictatorships (Marcos and Suharto) and the restoration of electoral democracy.
- 2 Then incumbent and candidate for Jakarta gubernatorial election, Basuki ‘Ahok’ Tjahaja Purnama, lost in a two-round election to Anies Baswedan in 2017. This election was marred with allegations of religious blasphemy conducted by Ahok during his campaign at the end of 2016. He quoted a verse from Quran, which was later considered blasphemy by many Muslims. This incident incited a series of massive rallies by Muslim voters in Jakarta which led to the defeat of Ahok. For more information see: <https://www.newmandala.org/interpreting-jakarta-election/>
- 3 These numbers were drawn from the Lower Chamber Elections in Latin America in 1990–2015 (Mainwaring 2018, 37–38).
- 4 Mainwaring (2018) used the United States’ scores as the baseline in comparing the level of party institutionalization of Latin American Countries. For the purpose of this chapter, I dropped the US and recalculated the average scores of the 18 countries in Latin America.

- 5 The Pederson index formula:  $\Sigma = \frac{V_{pt} - V_{pt+1}}{2}$  wherein  $V$  is the votes earned by the party  $p$  in the year  $t$  minus the votes earned in the previous election. The sum used is the absolute value of all calculation.
- 6 This number is drawn from 18 countries in Latin America + the US (see Mainwaring 2018, 48).
- 7 See CSIS Survey, March 15–22, 2019 at <https://www.csis.or.id/publications/laporan-hasil-survei-nasional-pertarungan-antara-elektabilitas-dan-mobilisasi-pemilih>.
- 8 Presentation of Andi Mallarangeng, member of the Seven Team, at a conference on “Electoral Reform in Indonesia,” at CSIS, Indonesia, June 2019.

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# 6

## NEITHER POORLY ORGANIZED, NOR WELL ESTABLISHED

### Conceptualizing and Exploring the Dynamics of Moderately Institutionalized Hybrid Party System in Malaysia

*Muhamad M.N. Nadzri*

#### Introduction

Scott Mainwaring's seminal work on party systems theory highlights the importance of classifying party systems based on their level of institutionalization (Mainwaring 1998). While it is advantageous, particularly in distinguishing party organizations in established democracies and the "third wave democracies," one might have problems applying his conceptions, particularly in those countries categorized under hybrid regimes. Mainwaring's current typologies of the levels of institutionalization are too dichotomized between well-institutionalized and weakly institutionalized party systems. And it would be problematic in the political context of certain states, in which the party systems are neither strong nor weak but much more moderate and dynamic in character. This chapter, therefore, offers an additional typological conceptualization of Mainwaring's party systems theory, which is a moderately institutionalized or hybrid party system, drawing from the historical experience of party politics in Malaysia as a case study.

In March 2020, Malaysia's *Pakatan Harapan* (Alliance of Hope—PH) government fell to a political coup after only 22 months in power following its historic win in the 2018 General Election against the long-standing *Barisan Nasional* (National Front—BN) regime. The conservative faction in the PH orchestrated the coup, which got full support from opposition parties led by the United Malays National Organization (UMNO), the dominant party in the BN. The new ruling coalition, known as the *Perikatan Nasional* (National Alliance—PN), headed by Muhyiddin Yassin, was heavily dominated by Malay-Muslim leaders composing 90 percent of overall MPs in the Parliament as well as its Cabinet. Nevertheless, PN only has a

razor-thin majority in the legislature, which motivates it to arbitrarily use the state apparatuses to cling to power.

Various manipulative and skillful maneuvers were used, including exploiting state agencies to subvert opposition parties and dissenting voices, thus crippling the institutional checks previously set in place. Later in August 2021, another coup occurred, this time within the PN, making way for the rise of UMNO's Ismail Sabri Yaakob as the new premier. Many observers view the current development with pessimism, especially regarding the democratizing prospect in Malaysian politics in the foreseeable future. Notwithstanding the apparent democratic backsliding in political development, it is argued that the party system's institutionalization is dynamic and still modest overall. Additionally, the inter-party competitions remain competitive, despite the problem of shifting political alliances, particularly since 2018. The return of UMNO and the old order in the new form, that is, the PN regime, however, does not command a comfortable majority in the Parliament, such as the case in the pre-2008 General Election (GE) period where Malaysian politics was practically dominated by one party or coalition. In addition, the PN government is much weaker and more unstable than the previous PH government, with less than a five-seat majority in the national legislature.

Thus, despite the recent party-hopping activities, which only involved less than 14 per cents of overall MPs, the current political regrouping in Malaysia—now polarized between the BN+PN and the PH—has relatively sustained the level of political competition in Malaysia, which does not differ much from the 2018 popular vote. That said, the problem of party-hopping and the issue of party institutionalization should not be underestimated. Not only was it responsible for the fall of the federal government in 2020, but also there are many precedents where state governments fell from such political maneuvering. Positively, as the problem has affected both sides of the political divides, a potential breakthrough might be in place in late 2022 with the passage of an anti-party hopping law.

Building on these premises, this chapter is divided into five sections. The first section seeks to make a case for what this author refers to as the “moderately institutionalized or hybrid party systems” conception by using Malaysia as the case study. In the remaining sections, this chapter critically explores the dynamics of a moderately institutionalized party system in Malaysia over its six decades of political history across four main eras—the consociationalist system, one party dominant, competitive regime, and the “New Malaysia,” and beyond. On the empirical exploration of the Malaysia case study, this chapter seeks to identify the major factors that influence the development of contemporary political parties and party system institutionalization in Malaysia. It tries to better understand both the dynamics and performance among parties. It also examines the state of party and party system institutionalization before exploring a new way of strengthening the political parties in support of democratization in Malaysia through better comprehension of its actors' nature, practices, and performance.

## Conceptualizing Party Politics in Malaysia as a Moderately Institutionalized “Hybrid” Party System

Some scholars have been rather pessimistic about the potential of party politics in developing countries. Sartori (1976), for example, suggests that there is no party system in a number of states in Latin America. This has been aptly debunked by Mainwaring (1998), who suggested that scholars pay more attention to the levels of party institutionalization rather than focusing much on ideological polarization in categorizing the party system of states. Through this approach, an important distinction was made to differentiate between a well- and a weak-institutionalized party system. As a result, in contrast to Sartori’s definition, most, if not all, of the third-wave democratizers could be said to have a party system.

Nonetheless, this chapter argues that the two Mainwaring (1998) categorizations are too dichotomized and static and rather problematic to be comfortably applied, particularly in those classified under hybrid regimes. This is because the party system in some political organizations cannot be confidently categorized as well-established or weakly-institutionalized, as they live organically and dynamically in the grey areas—between the two typologies. To say they are part of well-established or weakly institutionalized party systems, while they could be empirically less fitting to those categories, is, therefore, conceptually unreflective. The grey areas of neither a well-organized nor weakly-institutionalized party system warrant a classification of their own, which might be referred to as a “hybrid party,” essentially characterized by a moderately-institutionalized party system.

Using Malaysia as an explanatory and exploratory case study, which generally is regarded as a hybrid regime, this chapter distinguishes the moderately-institutionalized system and Mainwaring’s well- and weakly-institutionalized party typologies. Personalism and partism are often two contrasting notions of party institutionalization. Partism might be defined as positioning the party’s supremacy out of everything else, including its key leaders, essentially through collective decision-making at all party levels. This would include high “value infusion” of the party ideology and “behavioral routinization” (Levitsky 1998) of its organizational “systemness” (Randall and Svåsand 2002). Conversely, personalism could be explained by the centrality of personality(ies) within a respective party. Its supreme leader(s) is more or less like “the owner” of the party, often with unrestrained control over the party, its members, and its trajectory. Largely based on these divergent notions of institutionalization, Mainwaring and other scholars categorized the party system institutionalization of states in many parts of the world (Ufen 2008; Hicken and Kuhonta 2011).

The dichotomy of two contradictory processes is at the heart of the aforementioned Mainwaring typologies. On the one hand, there is “partinization” (structuralization), which leads to strong institutionalization, and on the other is “individualization,” which leads to weak party institutionalization. In a hybrid party system, these two processes often go hand in hand, not necessarily endangering



each other but can be complementary. Within this moderately institutionalized system, neither parties nor individuals have complete dominance against one another. Leaders can be ousted from parties, and parties can lose their popularity over their leadership's issues and vice versa. In other words, the parties in the hybrid system are more than just personal vehicles for individuals, even though there are often some tendencies of individuals to dominate/personalize their parties. Leaders and parties in the hybrid system often depend on each other as a whole.

As a result, the convergence or divergence of the processes mentioned earlier would produce a mixture of outcomes—liberalization, and autocratization at the same time, but they would never be in full. In this dynamic context, higher institutionalization does not necessarily bring about democratization, although it would probably create a liberalization effect. Strong party identification among voters—an important dimension of well-institutionalized parties—can contribute to democratic resistance. Conversely, weaker institutionalization does not always bring about personal despotism, although there is a substantial tendency towards authoritarianism. Although elite fragmentations, particularly in developing countries, often leads to the weakening of parties, it can also make democratization and regime change possible. Concisely, the moderately institutionalized party system is often a manifestation and part of those countries classified as hybrid regimes and new democracies.

As shown in Table 6.1, the conception of moderately-institutionalized systems is positioned between the grey areas of the two Mainwaring's typologies of party institutionalization, not just analytically but also empirically, as explored in the latter parts of this chapter. Mainwaring identifies four dimensions of party institutionalization, namely:

- i. Stability in patterns of interparty competition.
- ii. Party roots in society.
- iii. The legitimacy of parties and elections.
- iv. Party organization.

In terms of interparty competition, stability is the defining characteristic of well-institutionalized systems, and electoral volatility is a common pattern in the weakly institutionalized system. But in a hybrid party system, major parties remain on the scene for decades with modest electoral volatility. In other words, despite the growing challenge in popularity against the major parties by the newer ones, the former often remains resilient largely due to better institutionalization.

Concerning party roots in society, there is a mixture of patterns in the moderately institutionalized systems. Some parties are substantially rooted, and some others much more modest. But parties' influence among the populace is not overtly dominant. Significant segments of the electorate are rational voters. They vote based on issues, or the perceived candidate's credibility, rather than identifying themselves with any political party. Consequently, while organized interests among

**TABLE 6.1** Three Levels of Party Systems Institutionalization

	<i>Well Institutionalized Systems</i>	<i>Weakly Institutionalized Systems (Fluid)</i>	<i>Moderately Institutionalized Systems (Hybrid)</i>
Stability in patterns of interparty competition	Highly stable: Major parties remain on the scene for decades; electoral volatility is low.	Quite volatile: Some parties suffer precipitous declines, while other parties enjoy sudden electoral upsurges.	Relatively stable: Major parties remain on the scene for decades; electoral volatility is modest.
Party roots in society	Parties are strongly rooted in society. Most citizens vote for the same party over time and vote because of the party. Organized interests tend to be associated with a party.	Parties are weakly rooted in society. Only a minority of citizens vote for the same party. Instead, citizens vote according to candidates or, if they vote because of the party label, they switch party preferences.	Parties are moderately rooted in society. While some citizens vote for the same party, some others vote according to candidates or based on issues (rational choice). Switching party preferences is not uncommon.
The legitimacy of parties and elections	Parties and elections enjoy unassailable legitimacy. Parties are seen as a necessary and desirable democratic institution.	Many individuals and groups question the legitimacy of parties and elections. A significant minority of citizens believe that parties are neither necessary nor desirable.	A significant minority question the legitimacy of elections, particularly among the oppositions and their supporters. But most accept parties and elections as important organizations and processes in the political system.
Party organization	Parties have significant material and human resources. Party processes are well institutionalized. Individual leaders, while important, do not overshadow the party.	Parties have few resources. Parties are the creation of and remain at the disposal of, individual political leaders. Intraparty processes are not well institutionalized.	At the system level, different parties have distinct organizational strengths and resources. Party processes are moderately institutionalized, often with shifting power play between parties and individual leaders.

*Source:* Updated and Modified based on Scott Mainwaring (1998), “Rethinking Party Systems Theory in the Third Wave of Democratization: The Importance of Party System Institutionalization.” *Kellogg Institute: The Helen Kellogg Institute for International Studies.*

the electorate tend to be associated with parties, some are non-partisan or less partisan and open to switching votes between elections.

In terms of the legitimacy of parties and elections, as the incompetence of electoral administration and incumbents' manipulation are not uncommon, a significant minority often raises questions on the validity of elections, particularly among the oppositions and their supporters. But most accept parties and elections as important organizations and processes in the political system.

On the part of party organization, overall, different parties have different organizational strengths and resources at the system level. Some parties, usually the incumbents, have better resources due to their control over the government and networking with big businesses. Some others have limited resources and are thus much more dependent on individual leaders. But most of the time, the relations between parties and individual leaders with regard to resources are complementary. Party processes are moderately institutionalized, often with shifting power play between parties and individual leaders.

This chapter utilizes this analytical framework to explore and explain the dynamics of party system institutionalization in post-colonial Malaysia in two main eras: the dominant party system (1957–2007) and, later, the competitive electoral regime (2008–2020). The selection of these cases allows for a focused and organized comparison. The study is based on newspaper articles, field observation, and interviews.

## **From Malaya to Malaysia, 1955–1969: A Consociationalist Dominant Party**

Largely due to the British colonization policy in Malaysia (from the late 18th century to the mid-20th century), its population, which now stands for over 32 million people, is remarkably diverse and divided. But the two most important dimensions of Malaysian diversity are culture (particularly ethnicity, language, and religion) and region (regional state and urban-rural divide). Based on these cultural-regional matrices, five main social cleavages existed in Malaysia: Malays, Chinese, Indians, Sabahans, and Sarawakians. Interestingly, most of the political parties in Malaysia, whether major or minor, are established based on the cleavages and thus often attempt to organize the interests of the social cleavages they claim to represent. Nonetheless, no one party in Malaysia has absolute control or representation of any cleavages. For example, at least two parties traditionally struggle to represent the Malay communities: the United Malays National Organization (UMNO) and Pan-Malaysian Islamic Party (PMIP, later known as PAS). But since the late 1980s, several more Malay-based political parties have been established to challenge UMNO and PAS in representing the Malays in national politics.

Nevertheless, several parties in Malaysia are attempting to be multicultural and multiregional, particularly the Democratic Action Party (DAP) and the People's Justice Party (PKR). Both these parties are of multiethnic membership and operate both at the Peninsular and Sabah and Sarawak. But due to the dominance of Peninsular Malay within the PKR and Peninsular Chinese within the DAP both in

their memberships and leaderships, the parties and their orientations are perceived by some segments to be relatively biased to those cleavages.

The extreme diversity of the population and political divisions have resulted in no single party having the ability to win the national elections without forming a coalition with other parties. Despite this rather “open recipe” for success, unfortunately, only one “grand coalition” (Lijphart 1977) existed in Malaysia until the late 1980s, that is the *Barisan Nasional* (BN—National Front). Originating from the Alliance coalition in 1952, with UMNO as the major party, the BN became a grander coalition in the early 1970s, with more than ten components that represented the majority of social cleavages in Malaysia. The main motivation in building a coalition with other parties (and thus relatively other social cleavages) is to enhance the chance of winning elections and build a stable government (in the case they can make the breakthrough) which is reflective with social pluralism in Malaysia. Chiefly due to the less coordinated opposition force, the Alliance/BN had decisively dominated the Malaysian elections from 1955 until 2008 (except for the 1969 General Election).<sup>1</sup>

In the 1955 General Election, the first general election held in Malaya, the Alliance’s main competitors were the multiethnic *Parti Negara* (the National Party) and the PMIP. Interestingly, both parties were splinters from UMNO. Despite its multiethnic orientation, *Parti Negara* was too new (formally established in 1954) and weakly rooted in the society, in contrast to UMNO, which had been established almost a decade before. Founded in 1951 with a different notion of nations-of-intent (Shamsul 1996),<sup>2</sup> the Malayan state, PAS, gradually formed its roots with the Muslim communities through *dakwah* (Islamic preaching), particularly in the Malay-majority rural areas. But more importantly, the Alliance’s tremendous coalitional advantages, the opposition incoordination, and a rather weak institutionalization, particularly of *Parti Negara*, had allowed the Alliance to easily dominate the 1955 election<sup>3</sup> and, thus, in 1957, formed the first Malayan independent government with Tunku Abdul Rahman as the premier. There was also a class-based party in the 1955 election, the Labour Party of Malaya (Lab). Nevertheless, class-consciousness among Malaysians was rather constrained, making it difficult for the party to attract more supporters.

Nevertheless, a number of opposition parties were eventually strengthening themselves, particularly by improving their rootedness in their respective social cleavages. In the 1959 General Election (GE), the PMIP/PAS emerged as the new hegemon on the East Coast of the Peninsular, controlling the state of Kelantan and the state of Terengganu. It also secured 13 parliamentary seats at the national level. The socialist groups in Malaya organized themselves into two parties. Chinese and Indian socialists supported the Lab, and Malay socialists were largely organized by the *Partai Raayat* (the People’s Party). Together they established an electoral-political pact known as the Socialist Front (SF) in 1958. The SF made a significant breakthrough at eight parliamentary seats in the 1959 GE.

Despite having better institutionalization with its control over the state’s structures, Tunku’s mixed political approach caused contradictory progress of parties,

particularly in terms of ideological polarization, during his premiership in the 1960s. Known as a staunch anti-communist and radical politician, Tunku went aggressive against the SF. In 1960, he introduced the notorious Internal Security Act (ISA), which allowed the government to arrest and detain those identified as dangerous criminals and communists. The SF was not happy with a number of Tunku's policies, including his Malaysia plan in 1961, and took their grievances to the streets. In response, the Tunku government launched a massive arrest against the Left involving many SF leaders in 1963, which caused the front to perform badly in the 1964 GE.

On the contrary, Tunku was more tolerant of his non-socialist opponents and allowed the parties to groom and strengthen, albeit under a considerably controlled condition. Furthermore, new social cleavages were incorporated into the state with the forming of Malaysia in 1963, involving the merger with North Borneo (Sabah), Sarawak, and Singapore (until 1965), but no fundamental action was taken to integrate those cleavages within the Alliance. The new cleavages were represented by other opposition parties instead. Subsequently, there was a decreasing trend in the Alliance's electoral performance in 1964 GE, and in 1969 GE, the Alliance lost its two-thirds majority in the Parliament. If not due to the problem of malapportionment and gerrymandering (Lim 2002), the Alliance might lose its federal power as its popular vote was less than 45 percent.

Continuous politics of identity (and to some extent citizenship), as captured in Shamsul's nations-of-intent, with PAS pulling for a more Malay-based ethnonational Malaysia and DAP for equal multiracialism, had significantly jeopardized the image of the Alliance-styled inter-racial elite-based bargaining (Ratnam 1965). Entrapped in its play of middle politics, the Alliance's moderate and accommodative interracial policies on nation-building drew considerable dissatisfaction among some segments of the populace. Riding on these issues, both PAS and DAP secured some significant gains in the 1969 GE.

In sum, there was considerable stability in interparty competition during this period. Although the socialist groups were highly controlled, other non-socialist-based parties were allowed to operate and develop. Significantly, this policy enabled the electoral system to be substantively competitive. The popular vote of the Alliance (UMNO, MCA, and MIC) recorded a steady decline over 15 years, to the opposition's gain, but it still held on in the national government. The party roots overall were more than modest. The UMNO relied on the party-state structures in building networking with all Malay constituencies and villages in the Peninsular. Other parties, like DAP, MCA, MIC, and Lab, are rooted in their civic ties and associations. This can partly explain the growing competitiveness of elections in Malaya/Malaysia during Tunku's years. Despite growing concerns over the legitimacy of elections made by some quarters in the opposition, particularly when the Lab boycotted the 1969 GE, the overall elections and party politics were very much regarded as important and valid democratic processes for political renewals and policy contestations rather than organizing the populace through violent means. Most parties were moderately institutionalized in terms of party organization, whereby

party supporters and individual leaders provided financial support. Although elitism and individual powers within the party were rather observable, especially among the parties in the Alliance, the coalition's poor performance in the 1969 GE had caused the UMNO to push for its leadership renewal successfully.

### **From Razak to Abdullah: Consolidation and the Demise of a Dominant Party, 1970–2008**

After GE 1969, Tunku was sidelined by UMNO, and his deputy, a nationalist Abdul Razak Hussein, took over UMNO leadership and the ruling government. Soon after, as the 1969 GE triggered racial riots in Kuala Lumpur and Melaka, a national emergency was declared whereby the parliament was suspended, and the National Operations Council (NOC) was established as the *de facto* government. During the operations of the NOC until 1971, Abdul Razak, as the premier in effect, moved for political reconciliation among the divergent political parties through the National Consultative Council (NCC).

As a result, many opposition parties were incorporated into the ruling pact, making it a grander coalition consisting of more than ten parties, including regional parties from Sabah and Sarawak. Formally known as the *Barisan Nasional* in 1974, the BN represented much of the majority of social cleavages in Malaysia. The Razak years (practically from 1969–1976) signified the shift in policy and the regime's character. Equal partnership, as in the Alliance, was compromised. Instead, UMNO played a dominant role in the new coalition.<sup>4</sup> Consequently, as the inter-ethnic elite bargaining was limited with the new power configuration in the ruling coalition, the government's national policy was more reflected in UMNO's ambition and biased toward Malay centrism.<sup>5</sup>

With a grander ruling coalition, partly due to the electoral manipulations (Lim 2002), the BN achieved a landslide victory in 1974 GE with an increase of 61 seats from the previous election. But the growing UMNO dominance in the coalition, and intense intra-coalition competition between UMNO and PAS in the state of Kelantan, were opposed by PAS, who later decided to leave BN in 1977. The mingling of PAS with UMNO soured the former relations with its supporters. UMNO was not only harshly labeled as a "secular" party by the PAS leadership in its politics of Islamic state in the past, but PAS's entrance into BN had brought many disadvantages to the party, particularly by losing Kelantan to UMNO in 1977. Accordingly, in GE 1978, PAS had lost miserably to UMNO/BN, led by Hussein Onn (Abdul Razak's brother-in-law), both at the national and state elections, although it secured almost 16 percent in the popular vote nationally.

In 1981, following an internal power struggle in UMNO, Mahathir Mohamad took over the national leadership from Hussein Onn. Once again, the power configuration within the party-state was undergoing fundamental changes that shifted dominance from UMNO to the Prime Minister. The new concentration of power was not fully personal (or individualized), as suggested by many Hwang (2003) and Slater (2003), but more toward the office of the Prime Minister (centralized).

Mahathir also introduced new draconian laws to stifle dissent against his regime, such as the Printing Presses and Publication Act (1986) and the Communication and Multimedia Act (1998), and innovatively changed several provisions in the Malaysian constitution and other laws to check against vertical (civil society) and horizontal (legislative, judiciary and political parties) challenges against his administration.

But Mahathir's most skillful maneuver was his ability to structure and divide the opposition force through his "syncretic state" approach (Jesudason 1996).<sup>6</sup> At one time (particularly during the election), he promised a more racially equal Malaysia to woo the non-Malay supporters to BN, particularly from the DAP. But at another time, he aggressively worked for his Islamization policy, especially in courting conservative Muslims away from PAS. The entrance of Anwar Ibrahim into UMNO—a man who was influential in the resurgence of Islam in Malaysia in the 1970s (Muzaffar 1986)—was engineered by Mahathir to draw more Malay Muslims and PAS supporters into UMNO. Despite the "paradoxes" in Mahathir's policies (Khoo 1995), they were substantially persuasive to the floating and rational voters and the uninformed masses.

The cunning ability of Mahathir not only caused divided opposition throughout the 1980s, but also made him very popular among the populace. Throughout his first stint as the Malaysian premier (1981–2003), BN never failed to get re-elected at the national level with a two-thirds majority in parliament. When the opposition came to term in building a political pact in confronting BN as a united front in GE 1990, it took two coalitions to integrate PAS with DAP through UMNO's splinter party—the *Semangat 46* (S46—the Spirit of 46). On the one hand, S46 made a pact with PAS and two other Islamic-based parties known as the *Angkatan Perpaduan Ummah* (APU—the United Islamic Front). And on the other hand, a coalition was built with DAP, a regionally-based party of *Party Bersatu Sabah* (United Sabah Party), and several other small parties known as the *Gagasan Rakyat* (the People's Front). Nevertheless, this rather peculiar integration of parties, analogous to Mahathir pragmatism and syncretism (or the so-called "Mahathirism" (Khoo 1995)), was impactful. BN had only garnered 53.4 percent of the popular vote in GE 1990—the worst performance throughout the first Mahathir administration.

With the opposition pacts of GE 1990 fragmented in GE 1995, apart from the 1994 biased constituency delineation (Lim 2002), BN returned to power with a sound majority. Nevertheless, the Asian Financial Crisis in 1997 and the Mahathir-Anwar conflict in 1998, which later led to Anwar's incarceration on politically-based charges, pulled the opposition parties back together, this time as a more united coalition under one roof, which was known as the *Barisan Alternatif* (BA—Alternative Front). It was headed by Anwar's wife, Wan Azizah Wan Ismail, who was herself the chief (representing the incarcerated Anwar) of a new party now known as *Parti Keadilan Rakyat* (PKR). Although BA managed to make a substantial impact in GE 1999 through its politics of *reformasi* (reform), particularly by wresting away the state of Terengganu from BN and winning over 40 percent in the popular vote largely from the Malay electorate, BN was still able to survive with the

lack of opposition coordination among their counterparts in Sabah and Sarawak, the impact of the 1994 delineation exercise, and also due to solid support from the Chinese voters largely due to successful fearmongering tactics and patronage (Wong, Chin and Othman 2010).

To check against the increased number of Malay supporters of BA, Mahathir, without warning, singlehandedly declared Malaysia as an Islamic state in 2001. Naturally, it triggered PAS to respond aggressively with its Islamic ideology of state—a state based on the teaching of the Koran and Islamic laws, including hudud (*Astro Awani* 2014). As the response deeply conflicted with DAP's ideal of racial equality, many DAP supporters and their grassroots leaders pushed its national leadership to abandon BA, which eventually took place in late 2001. At the same time, another constituency delineation was made in 2003, which was skewed to Johor and Perak (the then BN's strongholds) and mixed constituencies due to the fact the Chinese support sustained the ruling party's two-thirds majority in GE 1999.

After about 22 years in power and bringing about stability from the impacts of the 1997 crisis, Mahathir stepped down from office in late 2003 and passed the position to Abdullah Ahmad Badawi just a few months before the next GE was due. The Mahathir administration's success in responding to the 1997 crisis and his administration's other achievements and popular policies like Vision 2020, were suggestive indications, often massively propagated to the electorate during elections as some kind of politics of performance, of BN's apparent credibility in governing (Case 2001). Based on the above contributing and convergence factors, with Abdullah himself known to his supporters as a political "gentleman," Islamic, and somewhat "reformist," particularly with his politics of integrity, BN recorded a super majority, its best electoral achievement ever, in the parliament during GE 2004.

Probably due to the huge electoral mandate of Abdullah's administration, the government was perceived to have moderately loosened the Mahathir-style authoritarian grip and become somewhat tolerable to the fragmented opposition and civil society. At the same time, however, a number of issues and Abdullah's administration policy in 2005 turned unpopular and led to widespread dissatisfaction. Anwar was also released from prison in late 2004, which has brought some potential for new direction, leadership, and re-integration of opposition forces. Within this opened political context and the appalling loss of the opposition forces in GE 2004, networking and cooperation among the opposition parties and civil society were forged again, particularly through civic and electoral platforms. In mid-2005, the Joint Electoral Committee for Electoral Reform (JACER), later known as Coalition for Clean and Fair Elections (BERSIH), was formed based on this initiative. In late 2007, BERSIH organized a street rally in Kuala Lumpur, which was massive and highly supported by more united opposition forces and many civil societies.

The Hindu Rights Action Force (HINDRAF), a civic platform of a number of Hindu civil societies in Malaysia, complained about what they saw as a systemic abolition of temples, particularly in urban centers, in 2005 and 2006. As a result of the perceived government inaction, HINDRAF launched a street demonstration in late 2007. The Abdullah administration also was not that effective in controlling



the spike in the cost of living, which had become much more unbearable, particularly among the urban folks, thus significantly compromising BN's performance politics. Accordingly, despite the absence of a formal opposition in GE 2008, an understanding was achieved under Anwar's persuasive and influential leadership. The opposition forces agreed to cooperate in the election, particularly by avoiding contesting against one another to minimize the number of wasted votes for the opposition. This strategy, and the factors mentioned earlier, contributed heavily to the opposition's success in denying BN's two-thirds majority nationally and snatching four states from BN while keeping the state of Kelantan. The result was extremely unexpected and was, at the time, the worst BN performance since its inception. Consequently, Abdullah was pushed by UMNO, particularly Muhyiddin Yassin and also Mahathir, to relinquish his post.

BN's horrific performance in GE 2008 marked the demise of the strong party state system built and strengthened by the Razak and Mahathir administrations. Razak and Mahathir's eras epitomized that strong party institutionalization does not always lead to democratization. The incremental authoritarian character of Malaysian politics (Crouch 1996) occurred when BN was strongly rooted in society through various manipulations of the state structures, making party identification among the populace of the ruling party widespread, and contributing to the long-term authoritarian resistance in Malaysia. On the contrary, individualism (on party organization dimension) as indicative of the UMNO/BN split into the 1980s and 1990s has also brought about a liberalizing effect, particularly in providing checks on the party-state system and better interparty competition (on the legitimacy of parties and elections, as well as interparty competition dimensions).

### **Malaysia Post-GE 2008–March 2020: Competitive Regime, (Re) Construction of a Two-Coalitional Party System, and the 2018 Electoral Breakthrough**

The BN party-state system, largely due to the significance and the centralization of the office of the party president and the Prime Minister's Office, tends to associate the party's electoral performance with its supreme leaders. When a UMNO supreme leader managed to bring the party back to power with a resounding majority like Mahathir's administration from 1981 to 2003, the leader would greatly influence the party's direction. But when the electoral performance was poor, as with the sidelining of the Tunku right after GE 1969, the party president was held accountable instead. After GE 2008, Abdullah was pushed to the side, allowing Abdul Najib Razak, the eldest son of Abdul Razak Hussain, to assume office as the new Malaysian premier and UMNO president in April 2009.

Najib acknowledged that he was entering a new and transforming political system in Malaysia, particularly the growing electoral and inter-party competitions. BN oppositions, having achieved remarkable results in GE 2018, started organizing themselves into a new coalition known as the *Pakatan Rakyat* (PR—the People's Coalition). Consisting of three component parties—PKR, DAP, and PAS—the PR

controlled five states, including Selangor and Penang, the most developed states in Malaysia. PR also controlled Perak, Kedah, and Kelantan. As the governments of these states, the PR could show their governing credentials through their various state policies *vis-à-vis* the BN-controlled states and the national government. In Selangor, for example, various pro-people programs were initiated, and new subsidies were introduced, for example, the supply of free water.

These developments demand Najib and the ruling regime be more cunning and tactful. Responsively, Najib launched various transformation programs under his *1Malaysia* banner to win the hearts and minds of the populace. Economically, he introduced massive subsidies and aid programs to the populace, particularly to the lower-income group. Politically, in getting support from the middle class and the more informed segments of the populace, Najib became a conditioned democrat and introduced legal reforms, including the repealing of the ISA in 2012. Socially, he repeatedly played the rhetoric of Malaysian togetherness based on inclusivity for a more multicultural Malaysia, principally in wooing the urban Chinese support that had switched their vote to BN's opposition in GE 2008.<sup>7</sup>

Despite the intense inter-coalitional competition between the BN and the PR under Najib and Anwar's leadership in GE 2013, the former resisted change, largely due to its popular policy. Furthermore, the PR in that election, as argued by Ufen (2020), was not comprehensive enough (with the lack of collaboration with regional parties in Sabah and Sarawak) and was less cohesive. Nevertheless, in GE 2013, BN suffered much more electoral loss than GE 2008 in terms of the number of the parliamentary seats and the popular vote. Nonetheless, Najib acted swiftly in ensuring his re-appointment as the Prime Minister right after the election to avoid internal resistance against him.

Najib later unsympathetically diverted his electoral performance by blaming the Chinese voters (*Utusan Malaysia* 2013). Although it was true that most Chinese voters supported the PR in GE 2013, the trend was not exclusive to the group, but other ethnic groups as well, particularly in urban areas all over Malaysia. In other words, the resistance against Najib's regime was not simply ethnically based but more regionally or urban based. Having exhausted a lot of state finance due to the massive subsidy program in winning the GE 2013, Najib's administration started to make a gradual subsidy rationalization involving a number of essential goods starting in 2014. A new tax system was also introduced in that year, the Goods and Services Tax (GST). These decisions constitute a double jeopardy to the lower- and middle-income groups, which had already been struggling with the rising cost of living.

In late 2014, Najib's 1Malaysia Development Board (1MDB) scandals, involving billions of dollars in money laundering, including hundreds of millions of dollars deposited to Najib's personal bank accounts, slowly appeared in the Malaysian political scene (Lamb 2015). These scandals were used by Najib's rivals, particularly the then UMNO Deputy President Muhyiddin Yassin and his supporters, in sidelining Najib from the party. Mahathir also insistently intervened by calling for Najib's resignation. But in response, Najib made a hostile retaliation against the internal dissenters. Muhyiddin, Shafie Apdal (UMNO's Vice President) and

Mukhriz Mahathir (the Chief Minister of Kedah) were demoted from their executive posts in their respective governments and later expelled from UMNO.

The new elite split in UMNO in 2015 did not really position PR any better for some time. Significantly, 2015 was a chaotic year for both BN and PR. On 9 February 2015, Anwar was unanimously found guilty by the Federal Court on the second sodomy charge made against him by the “compliant judiciary” (Marzuki 2004). A few days later, the PAS’s progressive spiritual leader Nik Aziz Nik Mat passed away. Nik Aziz had played an important role in moderating PAS’s Islamic state ideology to a “welfare state” and thus accommodating the party struggles with more secular versions of “nations-of-intent” as championed by DAP and PKR (Shamsul 1996). The incarceration of Anwar substantially left the PR without an important bridging figure, and the death of Nik Aziz caused the rise of the conservative element in PAS and the return of Islamic state politics. Not only was there a party split in PAS, whereby the progressive faction was sidelined by the conservatives in mid-2015, but a few months later, PAS conservatives pulled out from PR and officially ended the coalition. In fact, it was BERSIH that fundamentally played the oppositional politics against BN, temporarily replacing the disarrayed opposition parties in 2015 and 2016 by organizing mass rallies (Chan 2018).

Thus, despite the split in the leading party of the ruling coalition, the deeper fragmentation of the opposition made BN a better organization in inter-party competition. The PR was reorganized back as the *Pakatan Harapan* (PH – the Alliance of Hope) by Wan Azizah in late 2015, consisting of the original component parties in PR minus PAS, which its splinter party replaced—*Parti Amanah Negara* (Amanah—the National Trust Party). In mid-2016, two separate elections were held—the Sarawak State election in May, followed by the twin by-elections in Sungai Besar and Kuala Kangsar in June. The BN won handsomely in these elections principally due to the less coordinated opposition, which were competing with one another in the three-cornered fights (BN vs. PH vs. PAS), causing a split in the opposition vote. These embarrassing losses forced PH to be more pragmatic in its political strategy towards Putrajaya (the national government). Accordingly, the PH leaders assisted Mahathir and Muhyiddin in building a new Malay- and native-based political party projected to replace UMNO.<sup>8</sup> As a result, the *Parti Pribumi Bersatu Malaysia* (Bersatu—the Malaysian United Indigenous Party) was established, and after being endorsed by the incarcerated Anwar, Bersatu was accepted as of the PH component in early 2017. At about the same time, Shafie Apdal founded a new Sabah-based party, the Sabah Heritage Party (*Warisan*), taking many UMNO party defectors with him.

The PH eventually became a stronger alliance with Mahathir and former UMNO elites in *Bersatu* (and *Warisan*). Just a few months before the GE 2018, the PH surprisingly announced Mahathir as its prime-ministerial candidate before passing it to Anwar, should it win the coming general election. Thus, despite PAS behaving like the opposition’s vote splitter by becoming the third party in GE 2018, it was rather negligible as the real competition at the national level in the election was essentially between the BN and the PH. Focusing against the 1MBD-related

issues, the GST and Najib's administration's political-economic mismanagement, with coordinated and widened opposition forces, and with additional credibility supplied by the entrance of Mahathir in PH, and the huge support from pro-PH civil associations, particularly BERSIH, the opposition forces finally were able to make an electoral breakthrough in Putrajaya, for the first time since the country's independence (Nadzri 2020).

Thus, in this era of Malaysian political transition, the different forms of party institutionalization evidently brought a complementary impact to the political system. A sign of a rather weak party institutionalization, for example, the party split, individualism, and the establishment of splinter parties (*Bersatu*, *Warisan*, and *Amanah*) would eventually (again) bring a liberalizing impact to the political system, even though the original intention of Najib in sidelining his internal competitor was too personalized UMNO and the government. Meanwhile, a substantial institutionalization of parties, as indicative especially with the relations among BERSIH with PKR and DAP, in contrast to the BN's practices, has also led to political liberalization.<sup>9</sup> Nevertheless, despite the shifting number of parties in Malaysia during this period, particularly with the problem of party splitting, the main parties like UMNO, PAS, DAP, and PKR remain on the political scene and are overall still influential and competitive. After all, there was also a consistent trend for having a two-coalitional party system since 2008, even though there will be some changes in their character.

### **Party Politics in the “New Malaysia” and after the Sheraton Move, 2018–2020: The Rise of the “Strategic Group,” Shifting Political Alliances, and the End of Parties?**

The PH electoral breakthrough was made possible at a huge cost—the incorporation of the cast, conservative UMNO elite within the coalition. Contrary to the argument made by Ufen (2020) on the strength of the PH coalition in GE 2018, the PH still actually lacked ideological cohesiveness even without PAS. The ex-UMNO leaders in Bersatu still had a different notion of nations of intent for Malaysia which was essentially different from PKR and DAP.<sup>10</sup> The ex-UMNO leaders are still subscribed to the idea of the Malay hegemony while PKR and DAP are for more liberal and multiracial Malaysia. The main objective of Bersatu was not for the long-term goal of a more equal and just multiethnic Malaysia, but rather to defeat Najib's administration and to replace UMNO, based on the original spirit of UMNO.<sup>11</sup> In other words, despite the apparent inter-coalitional party contest between BN and PH in GE 2018, the underlying reality was the intra-elite struggle for power among the conservative, top Malay leaders within and outside the UMNO circle.<sup>12</sup>

Soon after Mahathir and the former UMNO elites in Bersatu were able to make a comeback in Putrajaya, the quasi-replacement regime subtly sustained their Malay ethno-nation ideal, sectoral, and personal interests which were contrary to the politics of reform advocated by the other component parties in the PH and its

civil society allies. Therefore, in the 22 months of the PH's *New Malaysia* (from May 2018 to February 2020), policy changes, U-turns, and divergences were not uncommon. The government backpadded its ratification of the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (ICERD) in late 2018. The reversal was not only pushed by the PAS and the UMNO leaders, but more importantly, it was also strongly supported by the Bersatu leaders. The government's plan to ratify the Rome Statute also faced a similar fate.

More importantly, the PH leaders started to dispute over the spoils of war, particularly on the issue of power succession after Mahathir. Based on the general understanding in PH, Mahathir should only lead the government temporarily, for about two years, and then pass the baton to Anwar. But the question of leadership change did not merely involve a simple issue of transfer of power in the Prime Minister's office; it also encompassed a lot of other complicated and conflicting interests between parties, factions, and individuals in the PH. A lot has happened before and after the historic breakthrough in 2018. In the PKR, intraparty infighting between pro-Anwar and pro-Azmin Ali (then PKR Deputy President) has risen since 2015. In the *Bersatu*, Muhyiddin was increasingly unhappy with Mahathir's growing control over the party and his less important role in the Cabinet (Liew 2020).

In checking the influence of the major parties in the PH, Mahathir skillfully utilized his prerogative as the premier to build an equal cabinet.<sup>13</sup> Thus, although *Bersatu* only had 13 Members of Parliament (MPs), 80 percent of them were appointed to the Cabinet. In contrast, only about 30 per cents of DAP and PKR MPs were cabinet members. Mahathir placed Muhyiddin as the Home Affairs Minister, holding internal security powers and agencies. Mahathir also appointed Azmin to an important position in a newly designed Economic Affairs Ministry, which has controlled many Government-Linked Companies (GLCs) without the consent of PKR.<sup>14</sup> By doing so, Mahathir did not only make Azmin a new ally, but he was also able to exert some influence over the GLCs through Azmin. Controlling less than 10 percent of the overall MPs in the PH, Mahathir and the *Bersatu* leaders felt helpless, particularly with its long-term objective of replacing UMNO and becoming a dominant party.<sup>15</sup> As a result, *Bersatu* openly attracted UMNO/BN MPs and supporters to the party through various means. By mid-2019, *Bersatu* MPs have doubled to 26 MPs due to *en masse* defections of UMNO/BN MPs, particularly from Sabah. In one of the cases, a UMNO MP of Jeli in Kelantan defected to *Bersatu* when the police interrogated him on a case related to the 1MDB.

As the prime minister's office promised two-year power transition was about to end, some segments and individuals were extremely worried about their future as Anwar was expected to change the course of the status quo. At the same time, the UMNO/BN and PAS political pact in mid-2019, known as the *Muafakat Nasional* (MN—the National Concord), proved to be a potent political force of the Malays by winning all the by-elections they contested in that year, riding over ethno-populist politics (Liew 2020). These worrisome developments encouraged Anwar's enemies, within and outside PH, to frustrate his presumptive rise to power. The political marriage among parties and individuals in the PH was no longer

sustainable, particularly for the pro-Mahathir and pro-Bersatu factions. As a result, there emerged a clandestine cross-party and cross-coalition “strategic group of shared interests”<sup>16</sup> of individual MPs with the main objective of establishing a new Malay-based government without Anwar’s PKR and DAP and thus toppling the PH government. The first move became apparent in October 2019 when Azmin and UMNO’s Hishammudin Hussein were reported to conduct a clandestine meeting with UMNO and PKR leaders at Azmin’s residence (Wong and Zikri 2019). Despite such a move, Mahathir did not condemn Azmin but, on the contrary, appeared to have been protecting him against internal criticisms.

In early 2020, as Anwar’s supporters were much more eager to push for the transition of power largely due to Mahathir’s prolonged reluctance to provide a clear date, the strategic group once again was on the move, this time they were collecting support from the opposition MPs through statutory declarations (Sarawak Report 2020).<sup>17</sup> On February 21, 2020, the PH had its presidential council meeting, with the main objective being to discuss a clear date for the transfer of power. Mahathir’s supporters, particularly the Azmin faction, went hostile in the meeting and pushed for Mahathir’s full tenure. They also expected the meeting to turn into a crisis, even though, in the end, it was peaceful, with Anwar willing to compromise and remain patient.

Nevertheless, the meeting was projected as a political “crisis” in the PH, and on February 23, 2020, Azmin and Hamzah Zainuddin of *Bersatu* and a few other key individuals initiated the so-called “Sheraton Move.” Held in the Sheraton Hotel in Petaling Jaya, the move brokered the support between the pro-Bersatu and the opposition MPs towards having a new majority in the Parliament in toppling the PH government for a new one. The day after, despite denying his involvement in such a move, Mahathir resigned after seeing the head of state (the Agong), claiming that he no longer had the majority. Mahathir soon announced, with the permission of the Agong, the resignation of his entire cabinet and thus officially ended the PH rule in Putrajaya. About one hour later, Muhyiddin, the *Bersatu* president informed the media that *Bersatu* was no longer with the PH. Instead of returning the question of control over the House to the MPs through a parliamentary session, as per the convention in the Malaysian parliamentary system, the Agong unconventionally played a role in deciding which MPs had the majority in the palace. After a number of attempts to ascertain which individual MPs had confidence, on February 28, 2020, the Agong agreed to appoint Muhyiddin as the new premier based on the latter’s representation of SDs, despite being disputed by Mahathir.

The power play of the strategic group, within and beyond parties, has significantly changed the practice of party politics in Malaysia.<sup>18</sup> The government was conventionally formed in the past based on the pre-electoral coalition agreement. In the Malaysian context, this arrangement provided stability to the party system as the electoral results much less reflected the electorate’s wish. But during the Sheraton Move, it was a post-electoral pact based on shifting political alliances, and it happened in the mid-term of the electoral interval outside August House.<sup>19</sup> More importantly, the government that replaced the PH, known as the *Perikatan*

*National* (PN—the National Alliance), was composed of the losing parties in the election and thus was against the democratic norm of the consequence of choice (Schedler 2002).

The palace's innovative move in this regard was not new. In 2009, Najib orchestrated the collapse of the PR state government of Perak through a similar move, which was later approved by the compliant judges recognizing that there are many ways to ascertain a legislative majority, including through the palace, instead of tabling it in the House. The court ruling on this case in 2010 has redefined and widened the roles and powers of the palace in removing a sitting government and forming a new one merely by having political representations in the palace, practically at any time, except during elections. After the Sheraton Move, a number of the PH-controlled states fell to the PN. The latest one was Sabah in September 2020, when the former BN Chief Minister Musa Aman proved his majority via party hopping outside the state assembly. But unlike the PH Chief Minister of Melaka in early March 2020, the Sabah Chief Minister was able to get consent from the state governor to dissolve the state assembly before a fresh election was held, which directly contributed to a sudden increase of COVID-19 cases in Malaysia. Much more recently, Anwar, in early October 2020, announced to the public that he had the majority in the parliament. At the same time, UMNO/BN president Ahmad Zahid Hamidi told the media that a number of UMNO MPs supported Anwar based on their individual decision. Rather unsurprisingly, Zahid did not denounce their decision.

The strategic group(s) presence and their political significance in changing governments in Malaysia, particularly after the Sheraton Move, brought about deep political repercussions and uncertainty in its party system. It was no longer as stable as before GE 2018, as the political decisions of parties were not solely based on the organization as a whole but by key individuals in parties. Some members of the populace were starting to doubt party representation and election.<sup>20</sup> The *GERAK* Independent, for example, an ad hoc civil society movement, was initiated by a small group of lawyers to condemn partisan politics due to the problems and *gerak* (move) for individual-based representation in providing a direct link between the representatives and electorate.

Is this a sign of the end of political parties in Malaysia? Not so fast. Although it is undeniable that parties in Malaysia are still operated within an oligarchic system,<sup>21</sup> political leaders in Malaysia need parties to organize the populace due to rather strong partisan sentiments,<sup>22</sup> which dynamically responded to the social cleavages, among the electorate. Although Mahathir, for example, had led UMNO and Malaysia for more than two decades in his first stint as the Prime Minister with huge popularity among the electorate, many were supporting him because he was part of UMNO rather than his persona. His *Bersatu* party was the biggest loser, winning merely about 20 percent of the allocated contested seats, mostly against UMNO, in contrast to other component parties in the PH during GE 2018. The *Bersatu* would lose more seats if not due to their cooperation with the PH.

Unsurprisingly, the Azmin faction in PKR, which defected from the party during the Sheraton Move, later joined Muhyiddin's Bersatu, recognizing that they would be at a great disadvantage without an established party organization. In the Sabah State Election, which was held in September 2020, although three candidates were able to win the election as independent, statistically speaking, it only accounted for about 4 percent of the total number of seats (73) in the state assembly. As in the history of Sabah's politics and the fate of the Azmin's camp, the three independent candidates would eventually support and join particular parties of their choice or perhaps establish a new one.<sup>23</sup>

The Muhyiddin administration, after Anwar's claim of having the majority confidence of the MPs through SDs in October 2020, was successful in influencing the Agong to declare a state of emergency under the pretext of combating the COVID-19 pandemic in mid-January 2021, thus once again frustrating Anwar's rise to power. Such a move, though, has successfully sustained his administration through the extra-legal process. For the time being, party politics in Malaysia arguably has continued, albeit under a much-constrained condition. The PN extraordinary position as conferred by the emergency powers has not changed the fact that the leading party in the coalition, the Bersatu, is no more than a minority party that lives off the support of other parties and the state apparatuses.

In August 2021, only after 17 months in power, the Muhyiddin administration finally fell following the defection orchestrated by the top leadership in UMNO. It later opened up the way for the rise of Ismail Sabri and UMNO/BN's consolidated resurgence at the federal level in Malaysia. In late 2021, largely due to the COVID-19 Standard Operating Procedure's manipulation, the opposition discoordination, and PH supporters' disillusionment, BN-friendly Sarawak Parties Alliance (GPS) won the state election with a more than two-thirds majority. The BN repeated its electoral successes in Malacca and Johor in early 2022. Notwithstanding UMNO/BN's growing re-consolidation, Malaysia's "multiparty mayhem" since the Sheraton Move has relatively stabilized under the Ismail Sabri administration (Case 2021). Learning from Muhyiddin's mistakes, Ismail entered into inter-coalitional cooperation with the PH, akin to a confidence and supply agreement (CSA), strengthening his slim majority in the parliament. As per one of the provisions in the agreement, both the BN and the PH are now working to legislate anti-party hopping measures to minimize further recurrences of the problem and thus potentially stabilize future governments.

Based on the political momentum from 2020 to 2021, the BN was expected by many to make a comeback after the next national election, which should be held before mid-2023. Despite this, there are arguably two possible and somewhat positive outcomes based on the current and past experiences of (and lessons in) Malaysia's party politics. Suppose the BN wins big (defined by a two-thirds majority in the Parliament), the much-needed socio-political stability could be strengthened as the strategic interests of the old order would be in place, and the interests of the majority communities would be symbolically protected *vis-à-vis*



some concessions to the minorities.<sup>24</sup> Although this path might lead to deepening backsliding, it will also provide the conditions for the opposition forces to regroup. Perhaps this time, it will be based on the lesson learned during the PH experimental years (2016 to 2020) by prioritizing ideological coherence higher than potential electoral success amidst socio-political fragmentations, thus coming with much stronger pushback and minimizing “winning by accident” in the future. If the BN wins with a small majority, a new CSA will probably be brokered to ensure continued governmental and political stabilities *vis-à-vis* the democratic push to the political system. These possible scenarios could be further reinforced if the legal mechanism(s) in demotivating party-switching among the legislators is in place before the election commences.

Rather unexpectedly, Ismail conceded to BN’s President Zahid in calling for a fresh election in November 2022. Contrary to the predictions, BN fared badly in the 15th General Election with just 30 parliamentary seats. Nevertheless, the number was enough to help Anwar’s PH to form a coalition government together with its newfound allies in Sabah and Sarawak. This situation of strange bedfellows brought two contradictory effects to the Malaysian party system, nevertheless. While it brought a new norm of post-electoral pact and political maturation (amid the deep-seated ideological fragmentation) at the interparty level, personalistic practice mostly continued at the intraparty level.

## Conclusion: Looking Back, Moving Forward

Based on the four cases which have been historically explored throughout, this chapter expounded on the characteristics of a moderately institutionalized or hybrid party system. Using Malaysia as a case study, it explained the dynamics of party system institutionalization in Malaysia, which is neither poorly organized nor well established. In contrast to the dichotomized and clear trend of partism in the well-institutionalized system, and conversely personalism in the weakly institutionalized one, there is frequently a dynamic mixture of interactions and unclear developments between party organizations and their leaders in the hybrid party systems. Their relations are not always in conflict but are often symbiotic.

What can be done to improve party system institutionalization in Malaysia? The party institutionalization in Malaysia has remained modest overall and historically as a system. However, there were also a number of extreme cases of high personalism, such as the existence of cross-party strategic groups (during the Sheraton Move) and the elite recapture over a political sphere (through declarations of Emergency in 1969 and 2021).<sup>25</sup> Essentially, the 1957/1963 Federal Constitution of Malaysia has embedded strong democratic principles for the running of the federation, namely the concepts of the supremacy of the constitution, parliamentary democracy, constitutional monarchy, and the separation of powers in ensuring an orderly state system based on the rule of law. Nonetheless, the ruling party’s dominance over the state structures, particularly during the BN era, had been misused to bring changes and inverted innovations against these constitutional principles in their political

struggles and move towards centralization of power. This has caused the constitutional checks and legal constraints, particularly those in power, to become limited and less effective.

Thus, the way forward for Malaysia is to look back to the founding ideals of the state as enshrined in the Federal Constitution. As constitutionalism will take years or decades to be cultured and understood among the citizens, the shorter way, for now, is to have a systematic legal mechanism that could provide democratic checks against any activities that could be considered unconstitutional and illegal. For the moment, the state not only has limited legal constraints against unprincipled political actions but on the contrary, the system is rewarding them. Most of the Azmin's faction in the PN are now constituted members of the Cabinet. Those from BN who switched to *Bersatu* during the PH era were rewarded with positions and protected by the government against legal actions. Muhyiddin himself, through his "scheme of things" (*The Star* 2020), rewarded the MPs and parties in support of his government with positions in his super-sized cabinet and the GLCs<sup>26</sup> and what can be understood as the payroll vote (Wong 2020a). Conversely, the MPs who defy the ruling elite would be politically punished in various ways, including withholding the financial allocation to their constituencies.<sup>27</sup> In federal-state relations, the opposition-controlled state will be discriminated unevenly against those under the ruling party.<sup>28</sup> Practically the politics in Malaysia is based on a zero-sum-game and winner-takes-all policy.<sup>29</sup>

As for the legal mechanisms, they must be constructed based on founding principles as can be found and understood in the Federal Constitution of Malaysia. The most popular counter-measures against party-hopping and strategic group activities are introducing anti-hopping laws<sup>30</sup> and recall elections (Wong 2020b). Both of these measures are due to the underlying fact that most electorates in Malaysia vote for political parties, in contrast to candidates during elections.<sup>31</sup> The first measure abstains and makes it illegal for any elected representatives to switch parties after legislative elections (Azril 2020). Party switchers can be barred from taking new office and temporarily disallowed from contesting in elections. The second measure, as the name suggests, is to call for a fresh election at the respective constituency of the switching MP(s) to ensure that the perceived mandate to the party from the electorate in the previous election is not stolen and redirected against their political aspiration. There is also a call to change the voting system from the first-past-the-post to some kind more akin to a proportional representative, not only in strengthening minority parties but the party system as a whole. All of these measures ensure that the "consequence of choice" made by the electorate is respected by the elected representatives and brings about stability and maturity to the political system.

## Notes

- 1 The UMNO made a pact with Malayan Chinese Association (MCA) before incorporating the Malayan Indian Congress (MIC) prior to the 1955 General Election. This inter-ethnic political pact strengthened each individual party. Arising from a popular Malay nationalist movement (with the involvement of the Malay communities from

- various backgrounds and origins in the Peninsular) in the mid-1940s which was against the British post-war plan for independent Malaya—the Malayan Union state—the UMNO was well rooted among the Malays. The MCA was established by Chinese tycoons and businessmen, and the Indians constituted the third largest community in Malaya. Through the coalition, they were able to avoid contesting against one another, and the sharing of their resources made the pact formidable. The MCA helped to finance the UMNO and the MIC handled political operations and campaigns, whereas the UMNO and the MIC supplied their voters' support to MCA (and each other).
- 2 Shamsul (1996) argues that there are multiple and competing notions of nation-state ideologies which are based on socio-political cleavages in multiethnic Malaysia. The UMNO, for example, is struggling for a Malaysian state that is based on the idea of Malay primacy whereas DAP is championing a more secular state based on the idea of "Malaysian Malaysia."
  - 3 The opposition had only managed to win one parliamentary seat, a rural Malay majority area of Krian in Perak.
  - 4 Mahathir Mohamad (Former Malaysian Prime Minister and Pejuang Member of Parliament for Langkawi), interview with author in Putrajaya, September 14, 2020.
  - 5 Mahatir, interview.
  - 6 According to Jesudason (1996), Mahathir was able to cleverly challenge and tease PAS and DAP, from time to time, to openly express their political ideologies to the public. When they responded to the calls, the Malays and PAS will become suspicious of the Chinese and DAP, and vice versa. These scare tactics against "extremist PAS" and "chauvinist DAP" had naturally projected BN, with the backing of the highly controlled mass media, as a moderate party most suitable for multiethnic Malaysia.
  - 7 For comparison in "elite vs. mass politics", please see the chapter on the Philippines in this book.
  - 8 Mahatir, interview.
  - 9 For comparison, please see the chapters on South Korea, Taiwan, and Indonesia in this book.
  - 10 Wan Ahmad Fahysal (Deputy Minister of Sports and Youth and Bersatu' Youth Chief), interview with author, September 7, 2020.
  - 11 Mahatir, interview.
  - 12 Very much akin to what Lee Kuan Yew did against Lim Chin Siong, the Chinese-educated leaders in the PAP of Singapore in 1950s (Bloodworth 1986), Mahathir and Muhyiddin were riding on the PH to challenge Najib's BN in their fight to Putrajaya.
  - 13 Mahatir, interview.
  - 14 Mahatir, interview.
  - 15 Mahatir, interview.
  - 16 Kartini Aboo Talib Khalid (Associate Professor of Policy Analysis and Deputy Director at the Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia's Institute of Ethnic Studies), interview with author, October 12, 2020.
  - 17 At the same time, the Bersatu and Azmin factions in the PKR and the opposition parties also intended to propose an unconventional vote of confidence in the parliament in March 2020 for Mahathir to remain as the prime minister for the full term.
  - 18 Steven Sim (DAP Member of Parliament for Bukit Mertajam (and former Deputy Minister of Sports and Youth), interview with author, September 7, 2020.
  - 19 The decision to form the new government was not made in parliament as per the constitutional convention, but was solely held in the palace, and thus raised a question on the limitation and separation of powers between the constitutional monarchy and parliament.
  - 20 Aria Nur Ariana (Manager, Democracy and Governance Unit, The Institute for Democracy and Economic Affairs), interview with author, September 7, 2020.
  - 21 Zaini Othman (Senior Lecturer in political science at Universiti Malaysia Sabah), interview with author, October 12, 2020.
  - 22 Ismail Sani (UMNO Deputy Chief for Hulu Langat District), interview with author in Hulu Langat, September 11, 2020.

- 23 Georgina L. George (UPKO's candidate in Panginatan Sabah), interview with author, September 24, 2020.
- 24 James Chin (Senior Fellow and the Director of Governance Studies at the Jeffrey Cheah Institute on Southeast Asia at Sunway University), interview with author, May 27, 2022.
- 25 See for comparison, Lorch 2020.
- 26 Ismail Sani (Selangor State Assemblyman in Dusun Tua), interview with author, September 11, 2020.
- 27 Syed Saddiq Syed Abdul Rahman (Member of Parliament for Muar (Independent), Former Minister of Sports and Youth and Former Bersatu Youth Chief), interview with author in Petaling Jaya, September 7, 2020.
- 28 Paul Porodong (Independent-STAR candidate for Matunggong), interview with author, September 24, 2020.
- 29 Amin Ahmad (Member of Parliament for Kangar), interview with author, May 6, 2020.
- 30 Syed Saddiq, interview.
- 31 Yillson Yanggun (Parti Bersatu Rakyat Sabah candidate in Kota Marudu), interview with author in Kajang, September 11, 2020.

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# 7

## PARTY-MOVEMENT INTERACTIONS IN A CONTESTED DEMOCRACY

### The Philippine Experience

*Arjan Aguirre*

#### Introduction

Party-movement interactions with its role in democratization involve the presence of political actors whose actions and even inactions affect the overall institutions, processes, and outcomes of democracy. Its history goes back to the very dawn of modern parliamentary politics in England when both the factions in the English parliament and middle-class movements fought over civil liberty issues—involving the free speech of John Wilkes and religious freedom of Roman Catholics, among others (Tilly and Tarrow 2015; Tilly 2004; Tilly 1981). Parties were eventually created as an internal response to the institution of power—the parliament or the legislature, with the changing environment brought by the electoral reforms of 1832, 1867, and 1884, to organize political resources, including existing factions and organizations that are needed to stay in power (Scarrow 2006; Lapalombra and Weiner 1966). This same impetus was seen with the emergence of the political parties in the fledgling government of the United States, where the intense factionalization was formally transformed into a more organized and disciplined body of legislators having the same stands on issues and pushing for a shared set of beliefs, agenda, and priorities in the government (Crotty 2006).

In most consolidated democracies, parties and movements are responsible for activating or disengaging the interplay between policy directives and issue articulations that affect either the development or decay of democracy (Tilly 1978). Social movements often produce or shape democratization through policy initiatives, reforms, regime change, and revolution (Markoff 1996; Coy 2001; Tilly 2004; Della Porta 2013). On the other hand, political parties are typically understood as an institution that organizes formal democratic politics—articulating issues, mobilizing support, responding to voters, and representing cleavages, among others (Gunther and Diamond 2003; Stokes 1999; Cox 1997; Lapalombra and Weiner 1966).

While these different roles seem too easy to recognize in most democratic societies, this distinction becomes “fuzzy and permeable” as new opportunities and openings to intervene appear to both parties and movements (Kriesi 2015; Kitschelt 2006; Goldstone 2003; Dalton 1995; Maguire 1995). As recent studies show, parties and movements can be both a bane and a boon to democracy. This enigmatic relationship has been used to radicalize mainstream politics with the emergence and growth of far-right movements masquerading as parties (Pirro and Gattinara 2018). Opposition parties also utilized it to increase their chances of defeating the incumbent party (Maguire 1995). This has also innovated political engagements due to the growing political base of new social movements, such as environmental movements that produced Green parties and coalesced with big parties, among other things (Dalton 1995).

In other societies, though, this understanding seems inadequate to capture the complex relationship between parties and movements whose interests, motivations, and choices are constantly shaped in contexts and histories that are contested and negotiated. As discussed in the first chapter of the book (See Teehankee, Padit, and Park, 2023), “democracies against the odds” tells us of a phenomenon where democratic resiliency is not associated with their economic performance (Bermeo and Yashar 2016). In the Asian region, many countries have shown positive signs of enduring democratic institutions and practices despite numerous economic shocks, political crises, and other social disruptions. Societies with long experience mobilizing the populace during their struggles against their colonizers and unresolved historical legacies that continue to shape their political structures, issues, and identities have succeeded in remaining democratic, notwithstanding numerous fluctuations and brief interruptions through the years.

Considered one of the oldest democracies in the Asian region, the Philippines has had some of the most bizarre combinations of qualities, attributes, and conditions that have shaped her democratic experience since the beginning of the twentieth century. Its first experience of democratic practice in the 1900s was designed and configured to appease and tame the political interests and excesses of the Filipino elites—from local to national (Hutchcroft 2019; Hicken 2014; Teehankee 2012a, 2012b, Hutchcroft and Rocamora 2003). The two-party system during the post-war era is nothing but an extension of this open and regular contestation for power and dominance between elite factions and dynasties belonging to the *Nacionalista Party* (established 1907) and the *Liberal Party* (established 1946) (Teehankee 2012b; Teehankee 2002; Wurfel 1988). From 1972 to 1986, the one-party/military rule of the late dictator, Ferdinand Marcos, in the 1970s gave a brief interregnum to this pattern and paved the way for the emergence of the political “machines” that changed the acquisition and utilization of political resources, no longer dominated by traditional families or dynasties (Teehankee 2012b; Machado 1974). The multiparty system that is currently used since the restoration of democracy in 1986, however, only saw the return of elite-based clientelistic party politics with some variations due to political “machines” and “marketing” campaigning (Aspinall and Hicken 2020; Teehankee 2010; Hutchcroft and Rocamora 2003).

Alongside these parties are movements whose history and traditions go way back to the Spanish era with the emergence of movements such as the Katipunan or the *Kataastaasan, Kagalanggalang Katipunan ng mga Anak ng Bayan* (The Supreme and Honorable Association of the Children of the Nation) that mobilized against the abuses of the Spanish authorities (Ileto 1979); *Sakdalista* (Accusers) that with their uprising during the American colonial era (Terami-Wada 2014); and *Hukbalahap* or *Hukbong Bayan laban sa Hapon* (People's Army against the Japanese) during the time of the Japanese occupation and reconstruction era (Kerkvliet 2002). In contrast with the elite-based parties, most of these movements are inherently mass-based and mostly left-wing in orientation. Other movements appeared later, having different agendas: free election movements such as National Citizen's Movement for Free Elections or NAMFREL and the anti-Marcos movements such as the *Lakas ng Bayan* (LABAN or Peoples Power (Hedman 2006; Thompson 1995).

These parties and movements were present in some of the most crucial moments in Philippine history. On the one hand, parties are a political means to get into power during local and national elections and a conventional way of engaging policy-making and running the government at the local and national levels. On the other hand, movements have been the impetus of the struggle for independence, especially during the latter part of the Spanish colonial rule; became an organized guerrilla force against the Japanese forces; mass organizations for the peasants during the crucial years of the aftermath of the Second World War; a vocal critic of western imperialism and called for the protection of the nation's interest in the late 1960s up to the early 1970s; and later on, a plethora of civil society groups, cause-oriented, and church-based movements mobilized during the authoritarian rule of Marcos, among others (Abinales and Amoroso 2017). With the new spaces and moments for political interaction brought about by the restoration of democracy in 1986, both parties and movements in the Philippines have struggled together and against each other in realizing their short-term and long-term political goals. Through this period, powerful dynasties, with their populist tendencies, patronage politics, and cartel parties, among others, continued consolidating their control of the institutions of power in Philippine society. This unfolded in the presence of weakened opposition party politics, passive movement mobilizations, and widespread political disinformation.

In those critical moments, it would be interesting to know how parties and movements interacted as a product or perhaps a cause of the fluctuations, shifts, and changes in the larger scheme of things in Philippine democracy. It would be equally worth exploring what types of interaction tend to produce conditions that may or may not facilitate the stability and persistence of democracy in the Philippines.

This chapter focuses on these party-movement interactions to understand how parties and movements facilitate democratization in developing societies. This focus on the role of parties and movements in democratization is an interesting area to explore, especially in understanding the puzzle involving developing societies and their positive democratic performance. This chapter will have a closer look at this phenomenon by investigating how parties and movements facilitate democratization



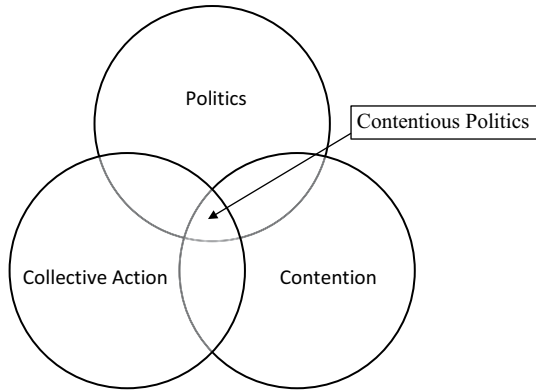
in a developing society with their emergence, dynamics, and outcomes. In particular, it will look at how parties engage movements during those crucial moments that shape democratic institutions and practices in a particular society.

Looking at the Philippine case, it seeks to understand how party-movement interactions—their emergence, dynamics, contexts, histories, and outcomes—shaped the trajectory or set the pace of democratization in almost four decades: from the restoration of democracy in 1986 up to the populist inversion of Philippine democracy that began in 2016. With its long history of democratic practice and rich tradition of civil society and social movements, it is vital to know why it has yet to democratize fully. Also, it would be equally interesting to understand how parties engage social movements in democratizing Philippine society. Most importantly, it seeks to know how and in what ways this interaction has contributed to democratic resilience in the Philippines.

The discussion below begins with a brief discussion of the “party-movement interaction” framework, “Contentious Political Interaction,” used in this study. Second, the discussion of the Philippine case covers a brief background of its party politics and democratic practice, contentious politics, and democratic outcomes since 1986—the year of the nonviolent revolution that ended the rule of the late dictator Ferdinand Marcos. Third, the framework is further elaborated against the backdrop of the Philippine case. The chapter concludes with a claim that the democratic outcomes which reveal democratic resiliency in the Philippines can be explained by the variegated engagements between parties and movements. It claims that despite moments of contestation and cooptation, parties-movements have been seen to cooperate in various instances to help democracy to thrive.

### **Party-Movement Interaction Framework: “Contentious Political Interaction”**

Borrowing the theory of “Contentious politics” from Tilly and Tarrow (2015), the interaction between parties and movements can be seen as similar to the “interactions in which actors make claims bearing on other actors’ interests, leading to coordinated efforts on behalf of shared interests or programs, in which governments are involved as targets, initiators of claims, or third parties.” This study uses this theory to make sense of the interaction between parties and movements—calling this “Contentious political interaction.” Contentious political interaction has the following features: *contention* or the act of making claims that bear on someone else’s standing or interest; *collective action* or the coordinated ways of engaging other entities on behalf of shared interests and programs; and *politics* or the presence of the entities of power (Tilly and Tarrow 2015) (see Figure 7.1). The concept of “political parties” is defined as an organized body that could influence public opinion, communicate social demands to the government, articulate a sense of belongingness or community, and act as a form of political recruitment in society (Lapalombra and Weiner 1966). “Social movement” here is understood as the presence and combination of sustained campaigns of claim-making; arrays of public



**FIGURE 7.1** Contentious Politics.

Source: Adopted from Tilly and Tarrow (2015).

political performances (like protests, petitions, lobbying, and the like); repeated displays of worthiness, unity, numbers, and commitment; and their sustainability through their organization, resources, solidarities, among others (Tilly and Tarrow 2015; Tarrow 2011; Tilly 1981).

Apart from the features of collective action, contention, and politics, the contentious political interaction between parties and movements has the following specific elements. First, the political outcome in this interaction is assumed as an offshoot of a *relational process* involving parties and movements in the initiation, alteration, deliberation, execution of bills, laws, policies, regulations (Goldstone 2003). This means that the action of an actor is understood to be constantly connected to the other actors engaged in a contentious situation. Second, the participants of this process are *rational actors* having dispositions and interests that come from the nature of their organization and function in the political arena—parties for conventional politicking and movements for challenging the status quo (Tilly 1981). This speaks of the ability of the actors to weigh in on their decisions and choose the best option for their desired outcome. Last, the interaction is *reactional* to the opportunities that may appear in a context or situation (McAdam and Tarrow 2019; Hutter, Kriesi, and Lorenzi 2019). This talks about the contingent nature of the space of relation between parties and movements—where the available resources to be deployed depend on what is provided by the present moment.

In interpreting this contentious political interaction in the Philippine context, the study revisited the Gramscian framework Hedman (2006) used in understanding the mobilization of pro-democracy movements in the Philippines in 1953, 1969, and 1986, and 2001. In her work, she identified crises of hegemony and authority as the main catalysts for the mobilization of movements such as the National Movement for Free Elections in 1953, the Citizens' National Electoral Assembly in 1969, the National Citizens' Movement for Free Elections, and the anti-Estrada movement in 2001 to mobilize civil society to counter any threat—from

the excesses of power of political leaders—against their dominance in the society (Hedman 2006). This framework is useful in understanding the mobilization of movements, especially those that embody the qualities of being in the “dominant bloc” and its interaction with parties that aim to advance the cause of “defending” the democratic gains from 1986.

The chapter also reconsidered the framework used by Quimpo (2008), “contested democracy,” to understand, this time, how left movements behave in the post-authoritarian era. In his work, he highlighted how movements and parties from the left were mobilized as a counterforce to the dynastic and clientelistic politics of the powerful sectors of Philippine society. By using this framework, the study assumes that as elite parties continue to ignore the plight of the general public and maintain their hold on power in the government through electoral means, the participation of the left parties and movements in conventional politics is aimed at “deepening” democracy by creating openings for making it more participatory and egalitarian (Quimpo 2008).

The framework, therefore, assumes that contentious political interaction comes from above (liberal democratic civil society groups and their allies with the moderate left) when movements mobilize to protect the gains and democracy by “defending” them and from below (moderate left and radical left) where movements also mobilize to cause democratic “deepening.” This characterization of party-movement interaction source, whether above or below, speaks of how party-movement interaction can make an impact on the democratization process in the Philippines: the “defending democracy” of the liberal democratic movements and its moderate left allies is aimed at preserving the institutions, values, and principles of liberal democratic practice; the “democratic deepening” of the progressive, moderate left and the radical left is aimed at introducing radical changes that aim to make Philippine democracy more social—egalitarian, participatory, and the like.

Therefore, contentious political interaction is assumed to manifest in three ways (Hutter, Kriesi, and Lorenzi 2019):

- a) *cooptation* or the taking over of a weaker entity intended for a new purpose;
- b) *cooperation* or the working together of two actors to achieve a common goal;
- c) *contestation* or the situation when actors openly go against each other.

These types of contentious political interaction are influenced by the context or environment that involves a heightened interaction between actors in a particular moment. In this situation, actors mobilize their collective action and articulate their contention vis-à-vis entities and institutions of power. In this framework, the concept of a *cycle of contention* is helpful to highlight the emergence of a struggle or contentious situation that activates the features of contentious politics (collective action, contention, and politics), intensification of forms of collective action (campaigns, protests, etc.), articulation of contention (differing claims on a particular object of contention), and contestation over power (targeting institutions, influencing processes, etc.) (Tilly and Tarrow 2015).

In investigating this phenomenon in the Philippines, the study used archival research and the existing literature to rediscover anecdotes about how parties and movements have behaved and facilitated political outcomes since 1986. With the use of process tracing and historical institutionalism, it examined this contentious political interaction by identifying and making sense of those moments, instances, and historical junctures that reveal how parties have become instrumental in the democratization of the Philippines.

## Parties and Movements in the Philippines

Since the return of democracy in 1986, the interaction between parties and movements vis-à-vis democratization in the Philippines has always been characterized by an intense, protracted, episodic, and unbalanced power struggle that usually favored the stabilization of elite rule (Hickens 2014; Hedman 2006). Parties in the Philippines are predominantly well-entrenched in the institutions of power, dominating and controlling the process and outcomes of the government and all of its instrumentalities. They organize their resources during elections and mobilize their ranks to constitute a government. Philippine movements, on the other hand, usually operate outside the space of power, challenging and disrupting the political space and its institutions by mobilizing the people on issues that concern their interests.

The privileged position to the power of parties in the Philippines can be explained by their development—its long years of being captured by powerful dynasties (Tadem and Tadem 2016; Teehankee 2018). Despite the entry of mass-based parties, dynasties, and their machines have continued to rule over elective posts in the Philippines—with more than 70 percent of the members of the House of Representatives coming from well-known dynasties (Tadem and Tadem 2016; Mendoza et al. 2012). While seen as an offshoot of the extant familial, factional, and clientelist relations (Teehankee 2012a; Teehankee 2009; Kerkvliet 1995; Lande 1965, 1968), these parties continued to evolve that allowed them to effectively capture some of the democratic institutions and processes in the Philippines. Through time, the Philippine state created institutions and practices that inhibit parties from converting social cleavages to their viable political forms: excessive powers of the executive office, exclusion of the left, and weak internal party organization (Manacsa and Tan 2005).

Second, this advantage of parties in Philippine politics can also be understood by looking at how parties have been organized since 1986. Since the return of democracy in 1986, parties in the Philippines have continued to evolve and harnessed their ability to offer an effective and organized yet “transient” means for actors to win a seat in the government (Manacsa and Tan 2005; Machado 1974). As a real political “machine,” they continue to specialize their operations, expand their networks, and incorporate new actors and practices that enable them to become a full-fledged electoral organization that coordinates the mobilization of the resources of a political actor (Machado 1974). This new tendency allowed elite factions to further their oligarchic rule with the

widespread exploitation of state institutions, bureaucracies, and practices to gain more wealth and power (Hutchcroft 1998). This dominance can also be explained by the dearth of alternative actors and institutions for people to direct their grievances, interests, or issues and represent them in the government (Hutchcroft and Rocamora 2003). For some authors, this predatory tendency was also seen in the effective and politicized appropriation and deployment of state coercion and physical violence by “bosses” to further solidify their rule and control in a locality (Kreuzer 2009; Sidel 1989).

### ***Traditional Political Parties***

With no real resources to cling to, contemporary parties also tend to depend on personalities or external forces with the wherewithal to run the party. This has created structurally deficient and institutionally superficial party organizational structures that undermine party discipline, weaken recruitment system, among others. As these “trapo” (short for “traditional politics”) parties serve the interest of their ruling elites, they participate in the larger scheme of patrimonial and predatory relations. Parties organize and mobilize their resources through these political alliances forged out of survival and having a share in the government (Quimpo 2007). Consequently, desperate politicians to persist and stay in power are usually forced to bolt their parties and switch to the ruling party. This inability to enforce party discipline and the allure of power have eventually contributed to the prevalence of party-switching in Philippine politics.

In connection with this, another way to make sense of the dominant position of parties in Philippine politics is regarding party performance. While there is no real party contestation in the institutions (e.g., legislative, executive, etc.) and practices (e.g., elections, issue articulations, etc.) of power in the Philippines, real political power is often seen in the government as monolithic parties more often than not tend to dominate the political space and smother opposing parties. This tendency to gravitate toward the ruling coalition can be explained by how the political structure and institutions of power in the Philippines were designed to allow the sitting government to have unbridled power to dispose of many political resources (Kasuya 2009). With this concentration of powers at the hands of the ruling party, opposition parties usually become marginal and almost not nonexistent. They are usually obliterated and decimated because of the accumulation of “pork barrel” among allies, widespread party-switching, weak representation, or lack of portfolios in the government, among others.

In the past 11 major elections since 1987, monolithic parties have emerged together with the election of a new sitting president (see Table 7.1). The incumbency of Fidel V. Ramos (with *Lakas-Kampi Christian Muslim Democrats* or LKC in the coalition), Joseph Estrada (with *Laban ng Demokratikong Pilipino* or LDP and Nationalist People’s Coalition or NPC in the coalition), Gloria Macapagal Arroyo (LKC and *Kampi* in the coalition), Benigno Aquino III (with the *Liberal Party* or LP in the coalition), Rodrigo Duterte (with *Partido Demokratiko Pilipino – Lakas ng Bayan* or PDP Laban in the coalition), and Ferdinand Marcos Jr. (with *Partido Federal ng Pilipinas*,

**TABLE 7.1** Percentage of Votes/Seats of Major Parties in the House, Philippines, 1992–2022

	1992	1995	1998	2001	2004	2007	2010	2013	2016	2019	2022
Turnout (%)	75.7	70.7	81.3	76.3	84.1	65.5	74.3	75.77	80.69	74.31	83.07
Pres. Votes Share (%)											
Ramos	23.6										
Estrada			39.9								
Arroyo					39.9						
Aquino							42.1				
Duterte									39.01		
Marcos, Jr.											58.77
Party Share in House % (% of votes)											
LKC	20.1 (21.2)	49.0 (49.0)	53.9 (49)	35.6 (35)	44.3 (35.3)	38.0 (25.5)	37.1 (38.5)	4.8 (5.3)	1.54 (1.3)	3.9 (5.11)	8.2 (9.39)
LDP	66.7 (45.0)	8.3 (10.8)	27.0 (26.7)	10.2 (10)	5.2 (7.6)	1.3 (1.5)	0.7 (0.5)	.7 (.33)	.67 (.30)	.65 (.62)	.31 (.78)
NPC	15.1 (18.7)	10.8 (12.2)	4.4 (4.1)	19.5 (21)	25.2 (19.6)	11.6 (10.9)	10.8 (15.3)	14.3 (17.08)	14.1 (17.04)	12.17 (14.3)	11.07 (11.7)
LP	4.2 (6.9)	2.5 (1.9)	7.3 (7.3)	9.2 (7)	13.8 (11)	6.6 (8.7)	15.8 (20.3)	37.5 (37.2)	38.7 (41.7)	5.9 (5.7)	3.16 (3.7)
NP	3.5 (3.9)	1.0 (0.8)			1.0 (0.5)	3.3 (1.5)	9.0 (11.4)	6.1 (8.41)	8.08 (9.42)	13.81 (16.1)	11.39(13.7)
PDP-					(0.1)	1.9	.69 (.72)	(1.02)	1.01 (1.9)	26.9 (31.2)	20.88 (22.7)
LABAN											

Source: Taken from Teehankee 2012a; Commission on Elections.

Nacionalista Party and LKC in the coalition) saw the concentration of support to the monolithic party of the sitting president in the House of Representatives. The emergence of a monolithic party usually comes from the change of party affiliation of most house members, which usually takes place during the early years of the new administration (Teehankee 2012a).

The disruptive nature of social movements in the Philippines since 1986 can be explained by their emergence, mobilizations, and outcomes. Considering their emergence, one can easily notice the strong connection of contemporary movements with their particular ideological orientations. Coming from the anti-dictatorship struggle of 1972–1986, there are two main strands of democratic movements that evolved since 1986—the moderate strand, which is composed of the liberal democratic movements (libdems), and social democratic/democratic socialists movements (socdems/demsocs) from the moderate left; the radical strand that is dominated by the national democratic movements (natdems) who are affiliated with the underground Communist Party of the Philippines (Thompson 1995). These movements, especially the moderate left and radical left, were formed and later expanded by their strong adherence and commitment to an ideology or set of ideas or beliefs that continue to help them make sense of political issues, offer programs of action, inform people of their roles, among others. Coming from the socialist ideology, the moderate movements opted to follow the social democratic/democratic socialist traditions, while the radical movements chose to subscribe to the Marxist-Leninist-Maoist tradition (Tolosa 2012; Quimpo 2018, 2008).

This strong ideological commitment has allowed these movements to effectively mobilize sectors in society by becoming an alternative locus for ordinary people, who for the longest time have been constantly excluded in Philippine politics due to the dominance of dynasties and their elite-based parties, to advance their causes and demand change in the society. Taking off from being an armed organization against the Japanese forces during the Second World War, the *Hukbalahap* during the time of the Japanese occupation and reconstruction era, later on, was reorganized and became a leading armed peasant movement, *Hukbong Mapagpalaya ng Bayan* (HMB) that adopted the Marxist-Leninist ideology of the *Partido Komunista ng Pilipinas* (PKP) (est. 1930) to engage the fledgling Philippine government in their agrarian struggle in Central Luzon (Quimpo 2008; Kerkvliet 2002). The story of the social democratic movements in the Philippines, on the other hand, is closely connected to organizations and formations that promote the Catholic social teaching and champion principles of social justice, protection of laborers and the marginalized, and so on—Social Justice Crusade in the 1930s, Institute of Social Order, Federation of Free Workers and Federation of Free Farmers in the 1950s (Tolosa 2012). These groups helped organize laborers, fisherfolk, and the urban poor, among others, in airing their grievances and pushing for societal reform.

Newer ideological movements were mobilized as a response to cater to the new cleavages and the growing dissatisfaction of the masses, peasants, youth, women, and laborers, among others, toward the Philippine state. From the radical left, a new communist party, the Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP), was established

**TABLE 7.2** Major Left Movements and Parties in the Philippines in the 2010s

<i>RADICAL LEFT</i>					<i>MODERATE LEFT</i>		
<i>Ideology</i>	<i>Communism (National Democracy) (Marxism-Leninism- Maoism)</i>	<i>Communism (Marxism-Leninism)</i>	<i>Communism (Marxism- Leninism)</i>	<i>Communism (Marxism-Leninism)</i>	<i>Democratic Socialists (mixed ND, SD, DS, Independent Socialists)</i>	<i>Social Democrats</i>	
Party	CPP (1968 from PKP)	RWP-P (1995 from CPP)	RWP-M (2001 from RWP-P)	PKP (1930)	Partido ng Manggagawang Pilipino (2002, split from CPP in 1995) Partido ng Lakas ng Masa (established in 2009)	AKBAYAN (1998)	PDSP (1973)
Armed wing Movements	NPA  BAYAN, Kilusang Mayo Uno, Kabataang Makabayan, Kilusang Mambubukid ng Pilipinas, League of Filipino Students, Migrante, etc.	RPA-ABB	RPA-M	–	–  Bukluran ng Manggagawang Pilipino, Kongreso ng Pagkakaisa ng Maralitang Tagalungsod, etc.	–  Popular Democrats, Bisig, Pandayan, Siglaya, Alliance of Progressive Labor, Confederation of Independent Unions, etc.	–

(Continued)



TABLE 7.2 (Continued)

<i>RADICAL LEFT</i>				<i>MODERATE LEFT</i>		
<i>Ideology</i>	<i>Communism (National Democracy) (Marxism-Leninism- Maoism)</i>	<i>Communism (Marxism-Leninism)</i>	<i>Communism (Marxism- Leninism)</i>	<i>Communism (Marxism-Leninism)</i>	<i>Democratic Socialists (mixed ND, SD, DS, Independent Socialists)</i>	<i>Social Democrats</i>
<i>Party-list</i>	Bayan Muna, Gabriella, Anakpawis, Kabataan Partylist, Act Teacher	Alab Katipunan	Anak-Mindanao	Partido ng Manggagawa <sup>a</sup> , Sanlakas	Akbayan Partylist	

**ACRONYMS** (RWP-P—Revolutionary Workers’ Party-Philippines and its armed wing, RPA-ABB—Revolutionary Proletariat Army-Alex Boncayao Brigade / RWP-M—Revolutionary Workers’ Party - Mindanao and its armed wing, RPA-M—Revolutionary People’s Army-Mindanao)

Source: Quimpo 2018; 2008.

<sup>a</sup> Partido ng Manggagawa (PM) became an independent party in 2007. This is different from the Partido ng Manggagawa ng Pilipino (PMP) established in 2002.

in 1968 using the Marxist-Leninist-Maoist orientation and later on absorbed the disgruntled members of the old HMB to form the New People's Army (NPA) (Weekley 2001). This underground movement was responsible for mobilizing peasants, students, workers, and so on, during the early years of Marcos' dictatorship or "First Quarter Storm" of 1970 through armed guerilla tactics, militant politics, and so on (Weekley 2001). From the moderate left, the 1970s also saw the rise of social democratic/democratic socialist movements such as the *Kapulungan ng Sandigan ng Pilipinas* (KASAPI), *Lakas ng Diwang Kayumanggi* (LAKASDIWA), *Hasik Kalayaan*, and *Kilusan ng mga Anak ng Kalayaan*, to mobilize groups from the peasants, urban poor, youth, laborers, and so on, using pressure politics and reformist electoral politics under the social democratic and democratic socialist ideologies (Tolosa 2012). In parallel with CPP-NPA armed struggle, some of these moderate left movements even adopted urban insurrection and armed resistance to intensify their opposition against the military rule of Marcos—*April Six Liberation movement* and the *Partido Demokratiko Sosyalista ng Pilipinas* (PDSP) (Tolosa 2012; Thompson 1995).

Another way of explaining the disruptive ability of movements in the post-authoritarian era is their outcomes. In 1986, the ouster of Marcos was a clear testament to how powerful the movements in the Philippines were in terms of their ability to mobilize and achieve their goal. During the 1986 revolution at Epifanio delos Santos Avenue (EDSA), or popularly known as "EDSA 1986," the thousands of people who participated in the four-day stand-off from 22 to 25 of February were mostly instigated and led by known activists and street-parliamentarians who have adopted and promoted the principles of active nonviolence since the assassination of the leading opposition to Marcos, Sen. Benigno Aquino, Jr. in 1983 (Tolosa 2012; Nebres, Karaos and Habana 2010; Aguirre 2010). These people who first responded to the call of the Roman Catholic Archbishop of Manila, Jaime Cardinal Sin, to protect the rebelling military officers at Camp Crame (along EDSA) were previously trained from 1983 to 1985 in active nonviolence seminars/workshops initiated by the transnational pacifist movement, International Fellowship of Reconciliation's representatives Jean Goss and Hildegard Goss-Mayr, at the behest of some Church officials, priests from the Society of Jesus, and other religious personalities (Aguirre 2010; Zunes 1999). Members of social democratic movements who are also closely working with institutions or groups aligned with the Roman Catholic Church hierarchy in the Philippines were able to attend seminars and workshops on nonviolence and, later on, organized their own seminars/workshops, like the pacifist movement, *Aksyon para sa Kapayapaan at Katarangunan* (AKKAPKA), for their communities leading to EDSA 1986 (Aguirre 2010; Moreno 2006).

Within the radical left, the aftermath of EDSA 1986 caused major rethinking and debates within the CPP and its affiliated movements (Quimpo 2018, 2008; Rocamora 1994). The major split in the party took place in 1992–1993, which led to the emergence of the "rejectionist" and "reaffirmist" camps—the latter committed itself to the Maoist line of revolutionary trajectory while the former refused to subscribe to such ideological reconfiguring and pushes for a more democratic and electoral engagement in the post-authoritarian era (Quimpo 2018, 2008; Rocamora

**TABLE 7.3** Philippine Party-List Elections: 1998–2022

<i>Partylist Elections</i>	<i>No. of Available Seats</i>	<i>No. of Won Seats</i>	<i>No. of Winning Party Lists</i>	<i>No. of Contesting Party Lists</i>
1998	52	14	13	122
2001	52	20	12	46
2004	53	24	16	66
2007	55	23	17	92
2010	57	41	31	150
2013	59	59	43	136
2016	59	59	46	116
2019	61	61	51	134
2022	62	62	55	166
Averages:	56.6	40.3	31.5	114.2

Source: Taken from Teehankee 2019 and Muga 2011.

1994). The split paved the way for new parties and movements, which later participated in the electoral contest for the party list system in 1998 (See Table 7.3). Since 1998, both the rejectionist and reaffirmist radical left movements and parties have been participating in the party-list elections by organizing party-list organizations aligned to their ideological cause (see Table 7.2) (Kuhonta 2016; Quimpo 2008).

### ***Contentious Political Interaction in the Philippines***

The investigation of contentious political interaction in the Philippines covers cycles of contention that emerged during the a) the restoration of democracy in 1986; b) the overthrow of President Estrada of 2001; c) regime stability under the Arroyo presidency; d) the Second Aquino presidency, e) populist resurgence under Duterte, and f) majority election of Marcos, Jr. These periods entail the existence of critical issues that mobilized both the parties and movements to engage each other (*relational element*). Also, they involve the presence of interests, motivations, and dispositions of these parties and movements toward those issues that inform their decisions and actions (*rational element*). Last, these periods saw differing responses from parties and movements anchored to the situation or context (*reactional element*). Each of these moments also saw three types of interaction: *cooptation*, or the taking over of a weaker entity intended for a new purpose; *cooperation*, or the working together of two actors to achieve a common goal; *contestation*, or the situation when actors openly go against each other. Last, to further understand these types of interaction, the discussion will also highlight the type of source of this interaction: “from above” or “from below.” With this understanding of the source, the interaction is assumed to impact democratization either by “defending” or “deepening” it.

During the *restoration of democracy in 1986*, the anti-Marcos movements and the opposition parties against the Marcos regime worked together to restore democratic institutions and practices. This was seen in the establishment of the revolutionary

government, drafting the new constitution, appointing officials at the local level, and so on. During this time, liberal democratic movements from the civil society and social democratic forces cooperated to achieve the goal of restoring Philippine democracy through the drafting and promulgating of the 1987 Philippine Constitution. Most of these anti-Marcos movements activists, both from the traditional parties and moderate left movements, were eventually absorbed into the government by holding key positions in some of the important departments of the Philippine government (Tolosa 2012; Nebres, Karaos and Habana 2010; Quimpo 2008; Thompson 1995). The social democratic party and movement, PDP-LABAN, for instance, saw the rise of one of its leaders, Aquilino Pimentel, Jr., to hold one of the crucial portfolios in the first Aquino government, the Department of Interior and Local Government (Thompson 1995).

This partnership can also be explained by the long alliance between the two forces, which were already in existence even during the time of Marcos regime—being part of the larger opposition coalition composed of opposition parties and movements that were mobilized in the 1978 legislative election, the 1981 presidential election, the 1984 legislative election, and the 1986 presidential snap election. In 1983–1985, this alliance was vital in promoting the active nonviolent approach, in contrast to the radical left's armed struggle approach in engaging Marcos. Also, during the numerous coup attempts against the first Aquino government, these movements remained loyal and supported the Aquino administration (Thompson 1995).

Most importantly, the cooperation between parties and movements during this period was also seen in the policy-making area, which saw the legislation of some controversial policies and measures. Progressive movements, with their allied non-government organizations and people's organizations, were able to engage the first Aquino government on the agrarian reform measure of 1988, the labor relations issue of 1989, and the urban land reform of 1992 (Borras and Franco 2010; Magadia 2003). These allied movements were crucial in giving their input and perspectives in deliberating and nuancing the policy measures being discussed in the legislature (Borras and Franco 2010; Magadia 2003). Unfortunately, though, the deliberation and legislation of these measures were generally controlled and dominated by established elite parties.

Concerning this, traditional politicians who used to be part of the old elite parties managed to infiltrate and return to power during the time of the first Aquino regime. This then led to a power struggle in the sitting party, PDP-Laban, where powerful elite figures, such as the brother of the sitting president, Jose Cojuangco as the party leader, and his allies from the newly created *Laban ng Demokratikong Pilipino* (LDP), coopted the organization and the social democratic orientation within it by accommodating other elite politicians to join the party and disregard the strict and rigorous political education and training of the party (Montiel 2012). This transformation of PDP-Laban during this time saw the beginning of the end of its progressive leftist movement character. This moment of cooptation between a party and movement only shows the privileged position of parties over movements—given their resources, influence, access to power, and so on.

In 2001, the overthrow of Estrada also revealed some patterns of party-movement interaction through the cooperation of liberal democratic movements, the moderate left, and the radical left to defend democracy against a corrupt and populist leader. This cycle of contention involves the mobilization of both movements and parties against then populist president Joseph Estrada who was elected following the presidency of Fidel V. Ramos in 1992–1998. Estrada was facing an impeachment trial over allegations of corruption involving his alleged participation in illegal gambling operations in the country. From the traditional opposition, parties such as Lakas–CMD, Liberal Party, and so on, have positioned themselves against Estrada from the day the scandal was publicized up to the last moment of the impeachment trial. Movements during that time were already active in their campaign against Estrada, focusing on his misdeeds, extravagant lifestyle, and so on. During the night when the Senate, seating as an impeachment court, decided not to open the envelope that would bolster the case against Estrada, movements from the moderate left, civil society groups, Roman Catholic Church leaders, and businessmen, through Kompil II or the Congress of Free Filipinos, were quick to mobilize in the historic EDSA Shrine to call for Estrada’s immediate resignation (Arugay 2004; Hedman 2006). Unlike in EDSA 1986, anti-Estrada movements were finally joined by the radical left, the national democrats, with their own network of groups, and the Erap Resign movement, calling for Estrada’s resignation (Quimpo 2008; Arugay 2004).

However, not all groups who went against Estrada are the same regarding their stand and disposition about the outcome of their cause. As an instance of contestation, other radical left groups who joined the call for Estrada’s resignation also clamored for the resignation of all public officials in the government. This faction, People’s Action to Remove Erap, is led by the rejectionist communist PMP allied movements and parties such as the *Sanlakas*, PM, BMP, and so on (Quimpo 2008). This effort to contest the dominant framing of the issue on Estrada is ideological in nature, for it highlights and openly rejects the mere overthrow of Estrada and restoration of elitist rule with Arroyo’s assumption of power (Quimpo 2008).

Going back to the partnership of civil society groups, the Roman Catholic Church, movements, and parties, the assumption to power of Arroyo also saw the same cooperation of liberal democratic movements and parties with the moderate left movements and parties that shaped the first Aquino government of 1986. Veterans of EDSA 1986 who assisted Arroyo during the second People Power in 2001 were appointed to key positions in the government—keeping the alliance of liberals and socdems intact. Once in power, however, Arroyo quickly restored the same clientelist network of politicians and dynasties in the House and strengthened her grip on the military with her renewed efforts to clamp down on communist insurgency. This became relevant throughout her term, especially with her election in 2004 for protecting herself from numerous impeachment attempts for allegedly cheating the presidential election against her closest rival, Fernando Poe, Jr., numerous scandals thrown against her involving the first gentleman, Jose Miguel Arroyo, and several coup attempts from junior military officers staged from 2003 to 2007 (Hutchcroft 2008).

Her former allies, the liberal democrats, some social democrats, and the influential Makati Business Club, among others, bolted the coalition in 2005 due to the “Hello Garci” scandal involving the discovery of a recorded phone conversation of her and an election commission official talking about the lead that she can get to win the election in 2004. This same group would later lead the opposition in resisting her attempts to change the constitution, mobilizing the public on numerous issues involving her government. In 2007 and 2010, this same group mounted national campaign efforts to engage the unpopular president and her allies.

The second Aquino administration (2010–2016) was actually an offshoot of this mobilization of movements and parties who are critical of the Arroyo administration in defending democracy. This period saw the return of the same partnership between the liberal democratic forces and moderate left movements and parties, closely resembling the first Aquino government from 1986 to 1992. Veterans of the anti-Marcos struggle and anti-Estrada movement, like Dinky Soliman, Florencio Abad, Cesar Purisima, and Teresita Deles, among others, were once again appointed by President Benigno Aquino III in the government holding the same positions that were given to them during the time of Arroyo. During the campaign, aside from the liberal democratic movements such as the Black and White movement, the Liberal party of Aquino renewed its alliance with moderate left movements and groups aligned with the *Akbayan party* (Hofileña and Go 2011). This partnership allowed the Liberal party to have direct engagements at the grassroots level, especially with the various sectors that Akbayan and its allied organizations served. The radical left decided to support the other presidential contender during the 2010 elections, Manuel Villar of the Nacionalista Party. The radical left movement and its allied party lists later became vocal critics of the policies and initiatives of the second Aquino administration.

During this era, movements and parties from the liberal democratic and moderate left were able to push their reformist agenda, which saw the passage and institutionalization of the following social protection measures or initiatives: Bottom-up-budgeting, Reproductive Health law, Sin Tax law, K-12 law, among others. However, these gains were easily sidetracked by numerous controversies that threatened to put his legacy into doubt. In 2013, for instance, when Typhoon Haiyan hit the Philippines, the second Aquino government was constantly criticized for its laggard and disorganized response. During his last year, his administration faced a crisis in handling the Mamasapano incident, where 44 members of the special forces elite group, Special Action Force (SAF) of the Philippine National Police, were killed by elements from the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) and its key ally Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters. The government was heavily criticized for seemingly halfheartedly handling the incident to fears of compromising the delicate peace negotiation with the MILF.

Most importantly, the time of the second Aquino regime also saw impressive economic growth. With an annual average of 6.1% GDP growth and increased domestic market activities, the second Aquino presidency witnessed the fastest economic growth since the 1980s (Teehankee 2016; Batalla 2016). While this economic

growth seems positive at the macro level, the economic gains did not translate to improving the lives of the general public—worsening the traffic situation on some major thoroughfares and a decrepit public transportation services (such as the Metro Rail Transit, etc. (Teehankee 2016)). Also, this administration also failed to curb the longstanding problem of abuse of the “pork barrel” among the legislators, and this got even worse with the discovery of the Disbursement Acceleration Program (DAP) allegedly used by the executive to facilitate political maneuverings in the legislature (Teehankee 2016). Unfortunately, these issues were left unattended and not addressed by the sitting administration and its allies. To the dismay of many, even the movements and parties aligned with the moderate left were helpless in influencing the government to push for reform measures such as the Freedom of Information bill, anti-dynasty bill, and party development bill, among others.

The populist resurgence in 2016 speaks of the electoral victory of Davao City Mayor Rodrigo Roa Duterte and his open contestation with the democratic movements and parties in the Philippines. Voted mostly by the upper and middle classes in society, Duterte’s rise to power is unprecedented due to its profanity-laced messaging, rugged image, and appearance of a disorganized campaign team which was composed of the small, yet old party, PDP-LABAN, and some ragtag volunteer groups scattered across the country (Teehankee and Thompson 2016). Duterte’s campaign actually mobilized the groups, parties, and factions that were excluded during the six-year term of the second Aquino administration—former president Arroyo and her allies in LKC and Kampi, the Marcoses and their “solid north” supporters, among others. Not to mention, during this period, typical party switching immediately happened months after the election of 2016 took place. Several allies of the previous administration, like the NP and NPC, were also quick to support the new administration by joining the ruling coalition. PDP-LABAN immediately becomes the new monolithic party overnight from a small party during the campaign period.

Since 2016, the Duterte administration has had many controversial policy changes that took many democratic movements and parties by surprise: unresolved killings of suspected drug users and dealers; the burial of the late dictator, Ferdinand Marcos, at the *Libingan ng mga Bayani* (Heroes’ Cemetery); the foreign policy shift toward China and Russia; imprisonment of his known political critic in the Senate, Senator Leila de Lima; the impeachment of Chief Justice Sereno, among others (Aguirre 2019). Apart from this, his administration is also known for pushing for controversial bills that used to cause major divisions and tension in society: the death penalty, lowering the age of criminal liability, and so on.

These issues, unfortunately, were met with little and weak resistance from various democratic movements and parties, even from the moderate left and radical left. Except during the mobilization for the burial of Marcos in November 2016, most mobilizations from movements and parties from the liberals, moderate left, and radical left were relatively small and mostly attended by the same protesters who were active in 1986, 2001, and Arroyo-era cycles of contention. Also, these mobilizations usually go simultaneously with other activities (protests, demonstrations, etc.),

being mounted for other existing controversial and contentious issues concurrently being activated by the allies of Duterte. This was seen in 2017 when the allies of Duterte floated the idea of reviving capital punishment to redirect the attention of the public. Democratic movements and parties during this time are usually distracted by this non-stop activation of issues. Most importantly, most of the framings used by the opposing movements and parties are politically reactive and too predictive—they usually articulate the same framings used in the past mobilizations—making it unappealing and insincere to the common and non-aligned people. The use of “Marcos” framing has been conveniently used to demonize Duterte as an authoritarian and fascist president and has been ineffective in undermining his popularity since 2016.

During the electoral cycle of 2019, the Duterte bloc (composed of former president Arroyo, Marcoses, Cayetano, Villars, and other allies) was able to consolidate its forces by capitalizing on Duterte’s constant high popularity rating and strengthening its coalition by establishing the regional party, *Hugpong ng Pagbabago*, led by Duterte’s daughter, Davao City Mayor, Sara Duterte (Aguirre 2019). This eventually led to the election of some of Duterte’s trusted and closest men to occupy seats in the Senate: Christopher Lawrence “Bong” Go and Rolando “Bato” dela Rosa. To the dismay of the opposition forces, only the independent candidates, re-electionist Senator Grace Poe and Senator Nancy Binay, and returning senator, Lito Lapid, manage to win senate seats other than the administration candidates.

However, it is unfortunate that despite the dominance in the Senate and House of Representatives, the ruling coalition seemed distracted by their internal petty political squabbling and short-sighted priorities. Through the years, despite the successful passage of some of the reform measures needed to further economic growth and social stability (such as the Ease of Doing Business Act, Feeding Program Act, Universal Healthcare Act, Tertiary Education Act, Bangsamoro Organic Act, among others) as advocated and pushed by other civil society groups and interest groups, the ruling coalition was not keen on tackling political reforms that are essential in defending and deepening democracy. Just like the previous administrations, Duterte’s government does not seem interested in working with the more progressive movements and parties to reform the electoral system to make it more representative and reflective of the current political interests; restructuring the party system to make parties more institutionalized and accountable to the voters; revisiting the political system/structure, especially on the issue of reforming the unity set-up, among others.

In 2022, the Duterte bloc pulled off another master stroke by facilitating the electoral victory of its ally and the first majority electoral outcome for presidential and vice-presidential elections since 1986. The son of the former dictator and his namesake, Ferdinand Marcos, Jr., and Duterte’s daughter, Davao City Mayor Sara Duterte-Carpio, with their own political parties and support bases, decided to cooperate and coalesce to secure the presidential and vice-presidential victory in May 2022. Through their coalition called “UniTeam,” Marcos, Jr. won the presidential race and got 58.77% of the total votes share for the presidential election,



while Duterte-Carpio received 61.53% of the total votes to become the vice president. The Senate and House of Representatives are also dominated by known UniTeam coalition partners from NP, NPC, LKC, and so on.

Just like in the 2016 and 2019 elections, the opposition parties and other political forces critical of Duterte and its political bloc (composed of Marcos, and Villar, among others) are once again decimated. Only the incumbent, Risa Hontiveros, won a seat in the Senate, and a handful of opposition members of the House (such as Edsel Lagman of Albay, Kid Peña of Makati, etc.) managed to win or get reelected. The emergence of the “Pink Movement” as the people’s campaign behind the presidential campaign of Vice-President Leonor “Leni” Robredo was able to unite some of the major opposition forces (such as the Akbayan party-list, Magdalo party-list, among others) and even got the support of the radical left movements (such as Bayan, Kilusang Mayo Uno, etc.) and party-lists (such as Bayan Muna, Kabataan, Gabriella, etc.) critical of the Duterte bloc and its allies.

This cooperation between parties and movements of the libdems, socdems, demsocs, and even natdems was inadequate in stopping the Marcos and Duterte dynasties, with their allies, from dominating the 2022 elections. Despite the huge campaign rallies organized across the country, support from influential people and personalities, and house-to-house operations, among others, the “pink movement” failed to counter the consolidated political bases of the UniTeam and their dynasties from northern and southern Luzon, Central Visayas, and the whole island of Mindanao; the well-entrenched disinformation operations found in various social media platforms (such as Facebook, TikTok, etc.); the intensified efforts to vilify the “EDSA 1986” narrative and its promises especially on Philippine democracy; and the emergence of the “NeoMarcosian” fantasy that recreates the authoritarian narrative of the past with the populist tendencies of the present. Despite the loss, this electoral alliance between and among the progressive forces and mainstream parties provided the needed blueprint for more democratic engagements in Philippine politics.

## Parting Thoughts

The role of party-movement interaction in democratization lies in their effort to work together to affect the overall institutions, processes, and outcomes of democracy. While most consolidated democracies are usually seen as responsible for the interplay between policy directives and issue articulations, democratizing societies have parties and movements whose interests, motivations, and choices vary due to the contexts and histories they constantly contest and negotiate in their societies.

As discussed above, these party-movement interactions showed how parties and movements facilitate democratization in developing societies by either defending or deepening the democratic gains and advancements of the recent past. In the Philippine case, the study was able to show how party-movement interactions during the restoration of democracy in 1986, Estrada’s ouster in 2001, Arroyo’s regime stabilization in 2005 to 2010, the second Aquino regime’s reforms and frustrations,

and Duterte's populist rule have shaped the trajectory or set the pace of democratization by defending democracy in 1986 and 2001 and failing to deepen democracy during the time of the second Aquino regime. The episodes of Arroyo in the 2000s, Duterte's inversion of Philippine democracy in 2016–2022, and the massive win of Marcos Jr. and Duterte-Carpio can be seen as reversals and setbacks to defend the democratic gains and efforts to strengthen democratic reforms in the society.

In these instances or cycles of contentions, the study was able to show that the interactions have been shaped by the a) dominance of political dynasties, especially with its exclusive access to wealth and power; b) clientelistic-patronage relations with its systemic and uninterrupted flow of resources to networks of control; c) malleability of the middle class and its newfound worth and importance that makes this class autonomous and believe that it is capable of producing its own class of leaders; and d) unresolved tensions among the Left movements that continue to cripple any effort for a concerted move to push for substantial and long-term reforms in the society.

The interactions that shaped Philippine democracy in the past decades were made possible by the numerous moments of cooperation in 1986 and 2001 between movements and parties to defend democracy; some instances of cooptation that allowed parties and movements to further agenda during times of normalcy; many cases of contestations that allowed parties and movements to either frustrate the democratic deepening in the 2010s or appropriately engage the reversals of the 2000s and late 2010s.

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# 8

## TRANSFORMING ETHNO-REGIONAL PARTIES IN NORTHEAST INDIA

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### Introduction

Political parties are important institutions in democracy, especially in a pluralist democracy, though their role and functions are rarely mentioned in a country's constitution. Political pluralism demands the representation of various groups, thereby ensuring legitimacy to regimes where political parties act as the agents for representation. Political parties are often described as the critical agents in the "third wave of democratization" (Huntington 1991). They are vital not only in democratic transition but also in democratic consolidation by serving as the medium for representation in the process. Furthermore, political parties not only democratize the political system but also act as an effective mechanism for democratizing communities by providing representation for various communities, groups, and segments of society.

According to the social cleavage theory, political parties manifest social cleavages, often contributing to the party system's stability and instability (Lipset and Rokkan 1967). In a competitive party system like India, cleavages are the potential means for political mobilization as parties organize people based on language, caste, and ethnic divisions. These cleavages demand representation in the power structures through parties, adding a new dimension to the democratization process. Moreover, as India is a country of diverse regions, ethnic and regional aspirations are always part of party mobilization based on languages such as Kannada, Tamil, Telugu, Marathi, Punjabi, and so on. However, the conventional wisdom in India is that cleavages threaten the national unity and stability of the regimes. The regional articulation of ethnic sentiments often antagonizes the nation-state and the democratic consolidation. According to this view, while the nation is considered the "imagined community,"<sup>1</sup> with a broader perspective, the region is imagined within a limited sphere. The Indian National Congress (INC), popularly cladded the Congress

Party, which dominated in the initial decades after the independence of India, was prejudicial in its initial approach to ethnic regionalism, perhaps due to its exposure to Western modernity values of nation-building. Further economic modernization, centralized planning, and development somehow undermined regional aspirations, leading to the assertion of various communities within their territorial space. The recurring regional aspirations and concerns often turn to an ethnic dimension, leading to the political assertion of ethnic communities initially as movements and later as political parties.

Ethno-Regional Parties (ERPs) often emerge out of ethno-regional movements. It is argued that “the most prominent feature of ethnoregionalist parties is undoubtedly their demand for the political reorganization of the national power structure, or some kind of ‘self-government’” (Tursan 1998, 6). However, an ideological shift occurs when such movements transform into political parties. They are the result of the articulation of ethno-regional demands and the cherished ethno-regional ideology that strives to serve the political aspiration of various communities. Furthermore, by mobilizing communities through ethno-regional appeals, sentiments, memories, and events, it is argued that “ethno-regional parties organize in [centralized] polities to agitate for [decentralization]. The desire for autonomy can stimulate ethno-regional parties as much as its achievement” (Lublin 2014, 225). The resentment against centralizing tendencies of the national government often forces the ethnic communities to demand ethnic decentralization, though political decentralization is guaranteed. Ethnic decentralization is a means to access political power. It is constructed based on an exclusive group identity demanding recognition and autonomy. Negotiating with the federal setup also demands ethno-protectionism and autonomy. It is argued that “rather the ethno regional parties’ best chance is to transform the agenda and behavior of the major parties, the major parties adapt because of the fear that the new ethno regional parties will only benefit their traditional political enemies” (Newman 1996, 16). ERPs raise the issues ignored by the traditional parties, thereby opening new vistas for political participation. While ERPs challenge the national political parties, the latter often discredit ERPs and describe them as a threat to national unity and integration, thereby posing a challenge to democratic consolidation. However, in competitive party politics like India, national parties adopt different policies and strategies to tackle ethnonational politics to firm up their political hold. In such a desperate attempt to encounter the ERPs, the democratic consolidation gets mutilated.

## India’s Northeast as a Political Enigma

India’s northeast is known for its numerous ethnic communities and as a hotbed of ethno-regional mobilization, movements of various hues, and extremist activities. In contrast to mainland India, the regional politics in North East India (NEI) assumed a different dimension regarding ethnicity. In other words, ethnic identity and its political mobilization gave a new direction to regional politics, resulting in



the emergence of ERPs. The inhabitancy of a particular community in a particular territory enables ERPs to conduct electoral political mobilization. In NEI, regional politics assumed ethnic connotations as ethnic identity is mixed with regional identity and consciousness. The factors contributing to the growth of regional politics include social, ethnic, cultural, and geographic. Certain ethnic groups, such as the Mizos, Nagas, Khasis, and so on, were often identified within regions as different ethnic groups dominate these regions. For instance, Jaintias in Jaintia Hills, Garos in Garo Hills, Khasis in Khasi Hills, and Bodos in Bodoland identified their geographical location as their original inhabitation. Sometimes, the ethnic identity extends from one region to another, giving a different interpretation of ethno-regionalism. For instance, the demand for Greater Nagaland by the Nagas unifying the Naga-dominated regions of Manipur, Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, and some portions of Myanmar extends beyond the territorial location set up by the state. The ERPs often proclaim that they are the true custodians of ethno-regional identity from the social and cultural intrusion by “others,” thereby preventing larger mobilization by the national political parties.

The electoral politics and political parties in NEI assume distinctiveness due to the nature of the region’s social milieu, ethnic composition, cultural mosaic, and political infirmities. However, despite the initial wave of ethno-regionalism unleashed by ERPs, national parties such as Congress assumed center stage in many northeastern states. In Tripura, the Communist Party of India (Marxist) was able to swim across the wave of ethno-regionalism and bridge both the Bengalis and the Tribals. The national parties were often forced to champion ethno-regional issues and thereby reorient their ideology and strategies at the state level to take on the ERPs. In such situations, electoral behavior and electoral politics also assume an ethno-regional connotation. Despite their mass base and dynamic leadership, national parties like the Congress were often confronted by the forces of ethno-regionalism. Hence, the competitive ethno-regionalism practiced by the ERPs and the national parties influences the nature and behavior of electoral politics in the region.

### **Incredible Forte of the Congress Party**

NEI is considered a strong political bastion of the Congress Party, despite the highly volatile identity politics, ethnic assertions, extremist activities, and strong sense of alienation of some ethnic communities from the national mainstream. Although a number of ERPs sprang up at various points in time, the fortunes and the widespread presence of the Congress, however, have not been seriously challenged. As a “catch-all party,” the Congress could mobilize divergent social groups and categories to its fold and craft an art of governance as an inclusive mechanism. Even though it met adverse situations in mainland India, its mass base and electoral fortunes rarely dwindled in the NEI. The party’s constructed image of being the architect of many accords intended to bring peace and normalcy in the region and the sacrifice of its own governments in the aftermath of such accords always won the

people's imagination. The Congress governments at the Centre at various points of time made history in the region by signing many accords such as the Shillong Accord (1975), Assam Accord (1985), Mizo Accord (1986), Tripura Accord (1988), Darjeeling Accord (1988) and Bodo Accord (1993) by entering into peace talks with extremist elements within the constitutional framework. However, there were certain instances in the aftermath of the Assam Accord and Mizo Accord, the Congress lost power in Assam and Mizoram to the ethno-regional political parties such as the Asom Gana Parishad (AGP) and Mizo National Front (MNF), respectively.

The Congress Party was in power in all eight states in the NEI, often struggling with the ERPs to get space in electoral politics and wider recognition among the public at large. The ascendancy of the *Bharatiya Janata Party* (BJP) with its Hindu nationalist politics in recent years is a cause for worry for the ERPs and the Congress Party in the region. The second wave of regionalism<sup>2</sup> with communal polarization championed by the BJP eroded the mass base of the Congress Party in many states (Table 8.1). While the BJP adopted a multi-prolonged strategy according to the social and political chemistry in various Congress-ruled northeastern states, the Congress Party often became less defensive to the onslaught of the BJP's mobilization. As the BJP relies on a strategy of a concrete analysis of the concrete situation in these states—either by creating communal polarization, raising emotional issues, orchestrating defection and factional feuds, or highlighting the bogey of “development” (wherever it fails to mobilize based on above issues), the Congress Party is at the receiving end due to its own inner contradictions and complexities. In the recent past, when the BJP firmed up its presence in the region, Congress lost its power in Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Meghalaya, Manipur, and Mizoram. No doubt, the crisis of the Congress Party in northeastern states, like mainland India is disturbing, as it has a larger implication for the protection of the ethnic plurality and cultural diversity, social harmony, and national security of the northeastern states.

**TABLE 8.1** State-wide Vote Share of Congress Party in General Elections (in %)

Year	Assam	Arunachal Pradesh	Manipur	Mizoram	Meghalaya	Nagaland	Sikkim	Tripura
1991	28.49	68.92	38.38	38.08	56.62	44.34	-	82.83
1996	31.64	28.83	40.17	42.50	53.64	62.31	-	34.13
1998	38.97	23.90	18.60	34.86	47.62	86.70	33.11	42.12
1999	38.42	56.92	25.29	-	32.75	71.18	4.76	13.88
2004	35.07	9.96	14.88	-	45.55	25.78	27.43	14.28
2009	34.89	51.11	42.96	65.58	44.84	29.36	29.59	30.75
2014	29.90	41.60	41.91	49.33	39.02	30.22	2.36	15.38
2019	35.44	20.69	24.63	-	48.28	48.11	1.13	25.34

Source: Election Commission of India ([www.eci.nic.in](http://www.eci.nic.in)).

## BJP and Its Hindu Nationalist Politics

The BJP, which champions the cause of Hindu Nationalism, is a relatively new entrant in the politics of NEI, though the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), the Hindu nationalist organization, has been a much-reckoned force since the independence of India. The BJP's position remains limited in the electoral politics of the northeastern states due to the Congress Party's and other ERPs mobilization and aggregation of the interests of various ethnic communities. The Congress Party went a step further ahead to form its own governments in the states as the ethno-regionalism practiced by the ERPs like AGP in Assam and MNF in Mizoram declined over the years. However, the diminishing role of ERPs gave only a temporary advancement to the Congress Party, as the vacuum created by the ERPs and the ethno-regional issues championed by them were taken over by the Hindu nationalist forces to emerge as a formidable political force in the region. The BJP's newfound interest in the region cannot be seen as securing electoral support for the formation of a government at the center, as these eight northeastern states send only 25 members to the lower house of the Parliament. Beyond the arithmetical strength of these states in the Parliament, the BJP was attracted to this region with a predetermined agenda of dislodging the Congress regimes and thereby erasing the image of the Congress from the public imagination. Its alliance with AGP, Naga People's Front (NPF) and National People's Party (NPP) in Meghalaya and other smaller parties in the rest of the states can be seen in the context of its ulterior motive of implementing its agenda over electoral predilections.

## Multipronged Strategies and Mobilization

The emergence of BJP, whose ideology and programs often contradict the ethos of the region (as most of the states have Christianity as the predominant religion) as a potential political force has to be analyzed in the larger context of the decline of ERPs and the crisis of secular and progressive forces. By expanding its mass base in NEI, the BJP wanted to shed its image as a North-Indian Hindu nationalist party and to project its image as an all-inclusive political entity crosscutting caste, region, and religion, trying to occupy the vacuum created by the Congress and other regional parties. Although the BJP is a relatively new political force in the region and does not have mass leaders and a strong organizational structure in various states, over the last two decades, it adopted multipronged strategies to capture the people's imagination and thereby emerged as the potent force in the region.

Since the NEI is a region of distinct social and cultural identities, BJP realized that a common universal ideology was not applicable and adopted multiple mobilization strategies according to the political and social reality of the states. In other words, the BJP's regional policies and mobilization strategy differed according to the states' social, political, geographical, and demographic nature. The "party with a difference" has been adopting a strategy of a concrete analysis of the concrete situation in various states, keeping its hard-core Hindutva in its national agenda. Setting

aside the core issues such as religious conversion, ban on cow slaughter, and so on, which the BJP often raised and pushed through at the national level, the issues that gained prominence in its mobilization and campaigns in the region include development, security, corruption, illegal migration, youth empowerment, and so on.

Another reason for adopting multiple strategies in NEI is the party's compulsion for state-level leadership. Taking into account the socio-cultural specificity of the region, the issues raised at the national level by the BJP often go against its interests, as many regional leaders find it difficult to convince the common masses. For instance, when the belligerent BJP talks about banning beef, the great realization that dawned upon the party's leadership is that it would adversely affect its electoral prospects in the various northeastern states. Thus, the BJP found it difficult to explain its position on the beef ban in NEI, as most of the tribal population considers beef a staple food.

The multiple mobilization strategies do not confine only to the "political" but also larger socio-cultural strategies. First, the BJP also reached out to various communities, either appropriating cultural personalities and local icons or constructing alternative cultural narratives in the place of the existing dominant ones. It felt that the cultural symbols and local morality were ways that could attract the minor ethnic communities. For instance, in Assam, the party is appropriating the cultural legacy of Srimanta Sankardev, a medieval saint, and in Nagaland, the Heraka Movement and Rani Gaidinliu, Naga spiritual leader and freedom fighter; in Manipur, the Vaishnav tradition of ethnically dominant Meities, in Arunachal Pradesh, the Donyi Polo System of the indigenous people, and in Meghalaya the indigenous Sen Khasi faith. In Tripura, the BJP appropriates Maharaja Bir Bikram Kishore Manikya Bahadur, the last tribal ruler to the Hindu fold (Bijukumar 2017).

Second, in many states, the BJP adopted the politics of co-option and community balancing, offering different things to different people and thereby acquiring the loyalties of many communities. For instance, its aggressive campaign against illegal migration of Bangladeshi Muslims and the communal divide created by it between the Bodos, the dominant plain tribals in Assam, and the Muslim minority community in the Bodo areas of Assam consolidated the BJP's electoral base in the state. Further, its electoral alliance with the Bodo People's Front (BPF), the communal mobilization of Bengali Hindus in Barak Valley and the upper caste Assamese Hindus in Brahmaputra Valley on the rage of illegal migration gave many electoral dividends to the BJP and the rout of the Congress in the 2016 Assembly election. Further, the BJP could muster the tacit support of the Bodos, the Tiwas, and the Rabhas, which enabled it to make inroads in the tribal areas and thereby get projected as a tribal-friendly party. Moreover, the BJP's projection of Sarbananda Sonowal, who belongs to the plain tribal community of Kachari, as the chief ministerial candidate gave more tribal attraction to the party. As Misra argues that apart from its understanding with the AGP, the BJP leadership made another master move toward bringing the Tiwa and Rabha organizations within the fold of the BJP alliance. This gave the party a tribal-friendly face and helped its fortunes not only in Tiwa and Rabha areas but also in the hill constituencies of Karbi Anglong

and Dima Hasao. It virtually replaced Congress, which had held power for decades (Misra 2016, 21). Assam is a complex society that constitutes Assamese Hindus, Bengalis, migrant Bangladeshis, and a tribal population considered fertile ground for communal tensions. The Assamese Hindus dominate in Brahmaputra Valley, and the Bengalis dominate in the Barak Valley. Initially, the BJP's traditional stronghold was the Bengali-dominated Barak Valley. Srikanth argues that "although the BJP did not initially get the support of the Assamese Hindus, as early as in 1991, it could make a dent into the Bengali-dominated Barak Valley region, where it won parliamentary seats from Silchar and Karimganj constituencies (in 1999)" (Srikanth 1999, 3413). In the Brahmaputra Valley, the BJP also wooed the Assamese Hindus by raking up the issue of the illegal migration of Bengali Muslims and its impact on Assamese society. The BJP's promise to check illegal immigration presumably gained its wider acceptability among both the Assamese elite of caste Hindus and the Bengali elite of the state.

In ethnically polarised Manipur, the BJP utilized the ethnic divide between the Hill and Valley. Close to the Assembly election in 2017, the BJP allured the Hindu Meiteis community, who largely dominate in the Valley and constitute 40 percent of the state population, without antagonizing the interest of the Nagas, the dominant Hill tribe, and other smaller tribal communities such as Kukis, Mizos, and so on. In Tripura, the BJP was able to make a communal balance between the dominant Bengalis and the indigenous tribal community. Although the party is not a decisive political force in Mizoram, it could forge a social combination of the Mizos and other types, such as the Brus, Chakmas, and Hmaras. The Chakma area witnessed frequent tension between the ethnically minority Chakma and dominant Mizos. The BJP was able to capitalize on the political climate emerging from these ethnic tensions. Like Chakmas, the BJP remained attentive to issues of the Brus (Reang tribe) ethnic minority community practicing Vaishnav Hinduism and animistic beliefs in Mizoram. The Brus migrated and settled in the six relief camps in Tripura after the ethnic clashes with the majority of Mizos in 1997. The last two years witnessed the repatriation of displaced Brus to Mizoram through a tripartite agreement between the Government of India and the governments of Mizoram and Tripura. The BJP highlighted the Brus' issue in the electoral campaign. It also adopted a proactive stand on the issue of repatriation of Brus from Tripura and was critical of the Congress government's cold attitude to the repatriation issue. It alleged that the Congress government opposed the Brus' demands for creating an area development council for the Brus.

Third, the BJP's strategy of encouraging defection, toppling governments, splitting other parties, and poaching their leaders contributed to its emergence as a potent force in the region. The lack of a popular face to contest the election forced the party to encourage political migration from other parties. It attracted prominent leaders from other parties by encouraging defections and political inducement. The Congress and other regional parties got pushed to the receiving end, losing many state-level leaders and legislators who defected and joined the BJP. On many occasions, the BJP destabilized the Congress governments through defection and

allurement and prepared itself for its backdoor entry in some states like Arunachal Pradesh. In August 2015, in an embarrassment to the Assam state Congress, former Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma joined the BJP. Himanta, Chief Minister Tarun Gogoi's trusted aid, was disillusioned with the Congress as he felt that his political ambition to become the state's chief minister was dashed by the Congress, as Gogoi has been promoting his son Gaurav Gogoi. Sarbananda Sonowal, the Chief Minister of Assam, was the former leader of the All Assam Students' Union (AASU) and, subsequently, MLA of the AGP, who switched over to the BJP some time back, is a crusader against illegal migration of Bangladeshi in Assam. Sometimes, the BJP splits the regional parties, leading to leadership conflicts at the regional level. In Nagaland, the BJP split its long-time ally, the NPF, and facilitated the formation of the Nationalist Democratic Progressive Party (NDPP), thereby forming a government without NPF. In September 2016, Radhabinod Koijam, the former Manipur Chief Minister, who belonged to the Congress, and Okran Joy Singh, the former leader of the Manipur People's Party (MPP), joined the saffron party. To further boost the BJP's ambition in the state, on May 24, 2016, the four NPF legislators in the Manipur Assembly joined BJP.

Fourth, the development rhetoric and populist appeals of the BJP gave electoral dividends to the party in the region. Putting the real agenda under backburner, the BJP repeatedly talked about its "development plank" in this "development deficit"-region as the milieu for political mobilization. For instance, the developmental initiatives of the NDA government, such as the much-fancied Act East Policy and North East corridor project, were used for its mobilization strategy. Based on its regional specificity, the party has been able to prepare vision documents for each of the northeastern states. In Manipur, the document stressed the building of arterial roads, and in Meghalaya it focused on skills development. The BJP often cited the previous NDA government's efforts in the region's development, such as the creation of the Ministry of Development of North East Region (DoNER) and the launching of the Look East Policy during the Vajpayee regime. In another significant development on August 23, 2013, the BJP launched the North East India Sampark Cell (NEISC) to strengthen its emotional integration with other parts of the country. Among other things, the Cell aims to check the illegal migrants in the region as it challenges the development, security, and national integration of NEI (Bijukumar 2019).

Fifth, taking the bandwagon of ethno-regionalism from the ERPs, the BJP was able to champion ethnic and regional issues among certain disgruntled sections of society and succeeded in channelizing their anger toward Congress. The BJP also allied with smaller ethnic parties and often roused ethnic consciousness and sentiment among some marginalized regional communities. In building an alliance with the regional and smaller parties and fighting an electoral battle with their support, the BJP went a step ahead of the Congress. In many northeastern states, BJP is the dominant party, and its strong visible presence forced Congress to not have an alliance with the regional parties. Moreover, as a national party with a broader national agenda, Congress often was not ready to comply with the ethno-regional demands

of the smaller parties. The BJP, though a national party, takes a different approach at the state level and often reoriented its policies and programs to reap the electoral benefits. For instance, the BJP could deal with the Indigenous Peoples Front of Tripura (IPFT) in Tripura, NPP in Meghalaya, and NDDP in Nagaland.

Sixth, the BJP forged an electoral alliance and coalition building with non-Congress parties to strengthen its electoral presence in the NEI. Some ERPs were eager to align with the BJP, despite their reservations about its Hindutva agenda and sensitive issues such as beef, religious conversion, assault on Christian minorities, and so on. Such an alliance with the BJP was often seen to counteract the Congress in their state. The BJP even prepared to be a junior partner in the alliance and coalition government to show its influence in the state. For instance, in Meghalaya the BJP won only two seats in the Assembly elections held in 2018 and was a junior partner in the NPP-led government. The ERPs, which aligned with the BJP for fulfilling its political ambitions, gradually got swallowed by the BJP, as it used the alliance to reach out to the regional parties' political constituencies and thereby shrank their mass base. In other words, the regional parties were the worst affected in the alliance-building process, and the beneficiary always has been the BJP. The party also shared power with its alliance partners in Nagaland and Meghalaya. In Nagaland, the BJP extended its support to NDPP, led by former Chief Minister Neiphiu Rio, after dumping its long-time ally, the NPF. In Meghalaya, the two-member BJP in the Assembly was able to strike a deal with NPP and formed the government surpassing the Congress, which emerged as the single-largest party in the Assembly. The regional party, Sikkim Krantikari Morcha (SKM), controls political power in the Himalayan state of Sikkim. It is obvious that in some states, the ride of ethno-regionalism and Hindu nationalism go hand in hand, while in others, Hindu nationalism hijacked the agenda of ethno-regionalism of ERPs to expand its mass base and strengthen its electoral constituency. To ally with the regional parties, the BJP formed a wider platform of the North-East Democratic Alliance (NEDA), the northeast version of NDA at the center. The formation of NEDA and the appointment of Himanta Biswa Sarma, the former Congressman and the current BJP Minister in Assam, as its Convener boosted the party in the region. The alliance's objective was to strengthen the BJP's base in the region, but it outwardly claimed that the NEDA was on its agenda for the overall development of the region.

Seventh, the BJP's gain in the region depends on the activities of the RSS. Although the entry of the BJP in northeast India is a new phenomenon, especially beginning in the 1990s, the Sangh Parivar organizations have been actively engaged in their activities with a focus on education and social service in some pockets of the tribal areas. They are also involved in humanitarian assistance and the construction of roads in hill areas. Many Hindu organizations over the years were undertaking *ghar wapsi* (returning the proselytized communities to the Hindu fold). Over the years, Hindu organizations have been trying hard to bring the indigenous tribal communities, who are overwhelmingly animistic, to the Hindu fold. These organizations convinced the tribals that the Christian missionary endangered their cultural

values to a certain extent. The BJP's strategy of embracing minority communities and traditions is found in the entire region. Sometimes back, Hindu groups translated Bhagwad Gita into the Mizo (Duhlian) language and attracted some Mizo children out of the state into the RSS education system.

Finally, in addition to ethno-regionalism, the bogey of national security is used by the Hindu nationalist forces for their mobilization, and the BJP uses it as a strategy in the region along the border. In Arunachal Pradesh, BJP raises the Chinese claim on the state as a political mobilization strategy to strengthen its position. The vulnerability of the border states can be tackled by a strong government committed to nationalist values. In this context, migration is stopped to protect the nation's integrity.

### **Political Harvesting of the National Register of Citizens**

BJP's astute strategy of combining the project of Hindu nationalism and the rubrics of ethno-regionalism contributed to the growing strength and consolidation of the party in NEI. In Assam, for instance, illegal migration constituted a burning issue and became the political agenda of the AGP when it transformed from the All Assam Students' Union (AASU). In the recent past, the BJP made inroads into the regional parties' political constituencies by hijacking the AGP's ethno-regional agenda and strategically using communal polarisation in various states. For instance, in the National Register of Citizens (NRC) publication, the BJP went ahead with the AGP's politics of illegal immigration issue. Illegal immigration from Bangladesh was a highly inflammable issue in Assam's society and politics, which foregrounded the AGP's ethno-regionalism. The AGP was a vocal supporter of the NRC. The demand for updating the NRC of 1961 was first raised in 1980 when the AASU submitted a memorandum to the Government of India at the beginning of the Assam Movement. The NRC was initiated in 2010 as a pilot project in the state's two districts of Barpeta and Kamrup. The exercise began in September 2015 under the Congress government following the Supreme Court's directions (Kumar 2018). The first draft of the updated NRC was released on 31 December 2017, which found 40 lakh people, as illegal citizens in Assam. The BJP also claimed that the NRC would end the vote bank politics of the Congress in the state, and despite ruling many times, it could not implement the detention and deportation of illegal migrants according to the spirit of the Assam Accord. The NRC is often seen as discriminatory and exclusionary. The issue was, for a long time, championed by the AGP. However, the publication of NRC gave considerable leverage to the BJP's political strategy in Assam, as the party emerged as the self-styled custodian for protecting the cultural identity of the Assamese. The BJP had immense political calculations on the issue of NRC. The party thought that appeasing the middle class in Assam and extending NRC to other states over time would bring more political dividends to the party. It hoped to consolidate its electoral base in Assam and the northeast in general through the NRC.



## Citizenship Amendment Act and the Counter Strategy

The promulgation of the Citizenship Amendment Bill (CAB) altered the region's politics. However, the BJP diluted the earlier demand by amending the Citizenship Act by making provision for the migration of Hindus from neighboring states. According to the Citizenship (Amendment) Bill, 2016, citizenship rights should be granted to Hindus and non-Muslims who migrated to India from Bangladesh and other neighboring countries such as Pakistan and Afghanistan due to religious persecution. The CAB contradicts the provisions of The Citizenship Act 1955, which provides ways to acquire citizenship by birth, descent, registration, naturalization, and by incorporation of the territory into India.

The anxieties of ethnic communities on the CAB turned out as violent protests and growing resentment against the BJP. Ethnic organizations like students and youth and other civil society organizations (CSOs) in the region argued that the CAB would facilitate mass migration from the neighboring countries and thereby threaten their cultural identity and material life. The BJP often accused Congress of instigating violence during the CAB protests to promote its vote bank politics, and it viewed that illegal migrant as the vote bank to Congress. Amidst the mounting resentment and protest, the BJP thought it would badly affect electoral prospects in the 2019 general election. In order to counter the growing resentment against the BJP during the election, it resorted to adopting development rhetoric (Bijukumar 2019). The general election in 2019 brought many cheers for the BJP in the region as it was not only able to counter the resentment arising out of CAB but also improved its electoral prospects in the region. The BJP and its alliance parties bagged 14 and three out of the 25 seats, respectively, spread across eight states.

The new avatar of the old CAB was reintroduced in Parliament as CAB 2019. Unlike the previous Bill, the new one made provisions for safeguarding the people of the region. The government was categorical that CAB won't apply to areas under the Sixth Schedule of the Indian Constitution, which deals with autonomous tribal-dominated regions in Assam, Meghalaya, Tripura, and Mizoram. In other words, the CAA exempted certain areas in the Northeast from its provisions, and it would not apply to tribal areas of Assam, Meghalaya, Mizoram, and Tripura. This effectively meant that Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland, and Mizoram, along with almost the whole of Meghalaya and parts of Assam and Tripura, would stay out of the Act. However, despite protective mechanisms, protests by the ethnic organizations in the northeast continued unabated.

The widespread protests in the aftermath of the CAA caused worry for the BJP as it viewed that it would erode its support base in the region. The ethnic organizations, civil society, and opposition political parties in the northeast were critical of the BJP's sinister design to dilute the region's cultural identity. The BJP ventured into chalking out a counter-strategy to tackle such a situation. The first move was to extend ethnic protectionism through the Inner Line Permit (ILP).<sup>3</sup> The ILP exists in states like Arunachal Pradesh, Mizoram, and Nagaland. At various points in time, other states like Manipur, Meghalaya, and Assam demanded the extension of ILP.

Moreover, in the wake of the CAA, there was a surge in demand for ILP extension in the entire region. However, the Government of India extended ILP only to the BJP-ruled state of Manipur, where the demand was acute in the last four years. By extending ILP to Manipur, the party thought it could divide and dilute the protests in the region and wanted to create an image that it would not sacrifice the cultural and demographic distinctiveness of the region in the context of extending citizenship to non-Muslims in the neighboring states.

Along with the counter-strategy of ethnic protectionism in the form of ILP, the BJP also ventured into the process of manufacturing elusive peace in the NEI. The Union government was instrumental in signing the Bru and Bodo Accords to bring peace to the region. The quadripartite agreement signed between the Government of India, the state governments of Mizoram and Tripura, and the representative of the Brus communities on 16 January 2020 was described as the historical initiative to end the 23-year-old Bru refugee crisis in Tripura and Mizoram. By facilitating such an agreement, the BJP also constructed an image among the public in the region that it stands for protecting the interest of the marginalized ethnic communities and overall peace and stability in the region.

The tripartite Bodo Peace Accord 2020 (January 27) was signed by the Government of India, the Government of Assam, and Bodo groups such as the All Bodo Students Union (ABSU) National Democratic Front of Bodoland (NDFB). The signing of the Accord is often viewed as a political victory for the BJP—BPF alliance government in the state, which has come under public ire in the wake of the anti-CAA agitations. The BPF is an important ally of the BJP, and the party is gaining strength in the Bodo area. The BJP had many successes in convincing the Bodos that their deteriorating conditions were due to the Muslim immigrants. There was an allegation that the Muslim population outnumbered the indigenous tribal population creating a demographic imbalance and cultural improvement of the tribal people.

## General Election 2014 and Its Aftermath

In the 2014 general election, like the rest of India, the BJP followed an alliance strategy of ‘go it alone’, wherever it had the strength and forge an alliance with regional forces wherever it was not a decisive force to counter the Congress. For instance, it allied with NPF in Nagaland, and in Meghalaya, it extended support to the NPP of P.A. Sangma. In Mizoram, BJP formed a coalition of eight state parties under the United Front led by the MNF to fight against the Congress candidate of the lone Parliamentary constituency of the Christian-dominated hilly state.

The election brought mixed developments in the politics of NEI. Of the 25 Lok Sabha seats spread across the region, the Congress could win only eight seats, while the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) secured ten seats (BJP -8, NPP -1, NPF -1). In the 2009 election, of the 25 seats in the region, the Congress secured 13 seats, BJP - 4, CPIM - 2, Asom Gana Parishad (AGP) - 1, AIUDF - 1, Bodo People’s Front - 1, NPF -1, SDF -1, and Nationalist Congress Party (NCP)-1.

Apart from winning seats in Assam and Arunachal Pradesh, in other NE states like Manipur, Meghalaya, Sikkim, and Tripura, the party's candidates secured 11.98 percent, 9.16 percent, 2.39 percent, and 5.77 percent votes, respectively (Table 8.2).

The performance of the BJP in the 2014 general election is not an isolated event, and it has to be put in the right perspective. Since the general election in 1991, the BJP has been improving its electoral strength in various states in NEI. Apart from emerging as a major force in Assam and Arunachal Pradesh, the saffron party could intrude in many other states, posing a challenge to Congress, regional parties, and the Left parties. In some states, the opposition space vacated by the regional parties got filled by the BJP, making inroads into their social base. The BJP took over the regional agenda of many regional parties, and the party approached new social groups and communities with renewed regional agendas. In the recent past, it could attract leaders from various political parties and ally with many regional players (Table 8.3).

The astounding victory of the BJP in the 2014 general election under Narendra Modi's leadership boosted the party as it decided to expand its mass base beyond

**TABLE 8.2** Party-wise Seats and Vote Share in Northeast India, 2014

<i>State</i>	<i>Total Seats</i>	<i>Voter Turnout (%)</i>	<i>Party</i>	<i>No. of Seats Won</i>	<i>Vote Share (%)</i>
Assam	14	80.12	Bharatiya Janata Party	7	36.86
			Indian National Congress (I)	3	29.90
			All India United Democratic Front	3	14.8
			Independent	1	9.62
Meghalaya	2	68.80	Indian National Congress (I)	1	39.02
			National Peoples Party	1	22.84
Manipur	2	79.75	Indian National Congress (I)	2	41.91
Arunachal Pradesh	2	79.12	Indian National Congress (I)	1	41.60
			Bharatiya Janata Party	1	46.20
Tripura	2	84.92	Communist Party of India (Marxist)	2	64.77
Mizoram	1	61.95	Indian National Congress (I)	1	49.33
Nagaland	1	87.91	Naga People's Front	1	68.84
Sikkim	1	83.64	Sikkim Democratic Front	1	53.74

Source: Election Commission of India ([www.eci.nic.in](http://www.eci.nic.in)).

**TABLE 8.3** State-wide Vote Share of BJP in General Elections in NEI (in %)

<i>General Election</i>	<i>Assam</i>	<i>Arunachal Pradesh</i>	<i>Manipur</i>	<i>Mizoram</i>	<i>Meghalaya</i>	<i>Nagaland</i>	<i>Sikkim</i>	<i>Tripura</i>
1991	9.60	6.11	8.10	-	6.89	3.00	-	2.99
1996	15.92	17.41	5.25	-	9.13	-	-	6.5
1998	24.47	21.75	12.61	2.94	9.01	-	-	8.19
1999	29.84	16.30	1.02	-	9.45	5.12	-	12.82
2004	22.94	53.85	20.65	-	8.63	-	-	7.82
2009	16.21	37.17	9.49	-	-	-	1.77	3.38
2014	36.86	46.62	11.98	-	9.16	-	2.39	5.77
2019	36.05	58.22	34.22	5.75	7.93	-	4.71	49.03

Source: Election Commission of India ([www.eci.nic.in](http://www.eci.nic.in)).

its traditional stronghold of the Hindi heartland. In the renewed strategy of the BJP, NEI emerged as the focal point of mobilization and further consolidation. In the aftermath of the 2014 election, the party desperately entered into an alliance with smaller regional parties and orchestrated defections in the major regional and national parties, thereby destabilizing the Congress-ruled state governments.

### General Election 2019 and its Impact

The verdict of elections to the 17th Lok Sabha produced a thumping victory for the BJP and its regional alliances in the states of the northeast. The Modi wave swept mainland India in the election and has not evaded India's northeast. The onward march of the BJP in mainland India was added by its spectacular performance in the region. Of the 25 seats spread across eight states, the BJP bagged 14 seats, while its alliance partners won three. The Congress could manage only four seats. Of the eight states, the BJP is currently in power in Assam, Tripura, and Arunachal Pradesh, with its regional allies in Meghalaya and Nagaland. The Congress, which dominated the politics of the northeast for a long time amid virulent forms of ethnic assertions, identity politics, extremist activities, and mobilization and ascendance of ERPs, is virtually not holding power in any of the states in this region (Table 8.4).

The BJP used the CAB issue to consolidate Hindu votes in various states and to tackle the ethnic anxieties created by the CAB by emphasizing developmental issues. It emphasized infrastructure development, like constructing roads and bridges and accelerating connectivity. Over the last five years, the BJP succeeded in projecting the northeast as the emerging development hub, especially with its much-hyped Act East Policy with border area development, connectivity, and infrastructure development. After its ascendancy in the Centre, the NDA government renamed the Look East Policy into Act East Policy, aimed at promoting the country's economic cooperation and cultural ties and developing a strategic relationship with countries in the Asia-Pacific region through continuous engagement at bilateral, regional, and multilateral levels. It also intended to accelerate road and railway

**TABLE 8.4** Party Seats and Vote Share in North-East India 2019

<i>Assam - (Total Seats – 14)</i>		
<i>Party</i>	<i>No. of Seats Won</i>	<i>Vote share (in %)</i>
Bharatiya Janata Party	9	36.05
Indian National Congress (I)	3	35.44
All India United Democratic Front	1	7.80
Independent	1	2.62
<b>Meghalaya - (Total Seats – 2)</b>		
Indian National Congress (I)	1	48.28
National Peoples Party	1	22.27
<b>Manipur - (Total Seats – 2)</b>		
Bharatiya Janata Party	1	34.22
Naga People's Front	1	22.48
<b>Arunachal Pradesh - (Total Seats – 2)</b>		
Bharatiya Janata Party	2	58.22
<b>Tripura - (Total Seats – 2)</b>		
Bharatiya Janata Party	2	49.03
<b>Mizoram - (Total Seats – 1)</b>		
Mizo National Front	1	44.89
<b>Nagaland - (Total Seats – 1)</b>		
Naga Nationalist Democratic Progressive Party	1	68.84
<b>Sikkim - (Total Seats – 1)</b>		
Sikkim Krantikari Morcha	1	47.46

Source: Election Commission of India ([www.eci.nic.in](http://www.eci.nic.in)).

infrastructure and air connectivity. As part of the Act East Policy, the government took the initiative to construct a 1,360 km long India-Myanmar-Thailand trilateral highway to be completed in 2020, which claimed to boost the regional economy within the northeast and ASEAN countries.

### **Erosion of Ethno-Regional Parties**

The ascendancy of the BJP also led to the erosion of the ERPs. As discussed earlier, since the BJP has been a new political entrant in these states and does not have popular leaders and strong party organizational units, it entered into an electoral alliance with the ERPs and, through them, reached out to the people. However, once it forged alliances, it gained political benefits at the cost of the dwindling support base of the ERPs. For instance, in Assam, the BJP allied with the AGP to take on the Congress Party. In Meghalaya, the party entered into an electoral deal with the NPP and other smaller regional parties against the Congress. In Mizoram, the BJP extended support to the MNF, which was made a constituent of NEDA, the counterpart of NDA at the Centre. Since Arunachal Pradesh does not have powerful regional parties, the BJP encouraged defections in the Congress and poached its

leaders into the party. In the Communist Party-dominated Tripura, the BJP entered into a deal with the IPFT, a regional outfit of the tribal communities. In Manipur, the BJP emerged as the foremost political force to the Congress, adopting a balanced strategy of appeasing the hill tribes and the Meities in the Valley. In Nagaland, in a bid to dislodge its long-trusted ally, the NPF, they encouraged defection and split, leading to the formation of the new regional outfit called the NDPP, and extended support to it to form government dumping NPF. In the 2018 Assembly election, though the NPF emerged as the single-largest party winning 26 seats in the 60-member assembly, the BJP dunned NPF and preferred to join hands with the NDPP, which secured 18 seats, and the BJP, with 12 seats, formed the government. In Sikkim, the BJP made inroads in a piecemeal manner by hobnobbing with the ruling SDF. However, in the 2019 Assembly election, SKM, a new regional outfit, secured 17 seats against the 15 seats of the SDF. Although the BJP could not get a single seat in the Assembly, it developed a cordial deal with the SKM. The strategy of entering into an electoral alliance with the regional parties enabled the BJP to reach its ideology and programs to the people.

Moreover, in most cases, such alliances not only strengthened the BJP but also weakened the ERPs. In states like Nagaland and Sikkim, it weakened the predominant NPF and SDF and extended support to new regional parties, such as the NDPP and SKM, which they felt served their interests more than the dominant regional parties. Perhaps, the best example of the erosion of the ERPs in the region with the ascendance of the BJP was the AGP in Assam. By allying with the regional political outfit, the BJP gained politically and electorally, finally acquiring political power for the first time in the state and securing maximum seats in the Lok Sabha elections of 2014 and 2019.

Perhaps, the exciting example of the erosion of the ERPs was of the AGP. The erosion of ethno-regional nationalism championed by the AGP in the 1980s went to the advantage of the BJP. The Assam Movement (1979–84) sowed the seeds of ethno-regionalism, which witnessed the emergence of AGP making inroads into state politics eroding the Congress mass base. Over time, the AGP, which came into power with the cause of “Asomiya Nationality” and the issue of illegal migration, diluted its stand on Illegal Migrants Determination by Tribunal IM(DT) Act, 1983 due to compulsions of electoral politics. It is argued that “despite making its mark on the national political scene as ‘regional party with a national outlook’ and becoming a part of the ‘National Front’ coalition government at the Centre in the early 1990s, the AGP did not seem to satisfy the high expectations of the multitude that had voted it to power” (Sharma, Gogoi and Tripathi 2020, 66). As a result, there was a growing disillusionment among the Hindus against the AGP, which created a fertile ground for the BJP in Assam. Over time, the BJP used the issue of the illegal migration of Muslims to expand its mass base in the state. As Srikanth argues, “the politics of regional identity had kept Hindutva at bay in Assam for over two decades. But the AGP government’s poor performance and the bogey of Muslim fundamentalism led Bengali and Assamese caste Hindus to the BJP” (Srikanth 1999, 3412). As a result, the AGP, the prominent regional political force, declined its space in the state.

Moreover, AGP's alliance with BJP in the 2006 Assembly and 2009 Lok Sabha elections cost the AGP more. In the 2011 Assembly election, AGP got only ten seats, and in 2016, only 14 seats. In the 2021 Assembly election, the AGP contested the election with the BJP alliance, despite the brewing discontent of the Assamese against the CAA, won only nine seats, five less than its last election of 2016 though it contested 26 seats in alliance with the BJP. Even though AGP was the largest ethnoregional organization in the state, the party reduced its pre-eminence in state politics over the years. Like the 2016 Assembly election, the Party allied with the BJP amid the growing anti-CAA sentiments, and its manifesto interestingly did not talk about the CAA. Being part of the BJP alliance in Assam for two consecutive terms, the AGP is in power in Assam but losing its political pre-eminence in the state.

The BJP could grow at the expense of the declining political space of the AGP. It is argued that the traditional support base of AGP—the Assamese Hindus, the Assamese Muslims, and tribals—gradually shifted their allegiance to other political parties (Mahanta 2014, 20). The regional agenda of the AGP, especially the detection and deportation of illegal Bangladeshi migrants, were hijacked by the BJP. The BJP's efforts to strike the second wave of ethno-regionalism manifested in its vigorous approach toward the publication of the NRC. The BJP used the publication of the NRC for its political expansion in Assam, raising the bogey of identity threat to native people, primarily the Assamese (Table 8.5).

**TABLE 8.5** Performance of the AGP in Assembly and General Elections

<i>Year</i>	<i>No. of Seats Won</i>	<i>Percentage of Votes Secured</i>
<b>Assembly Elections</b>		
1985	63	34.54
1991	19	18.36
1996	59	29.70
2001	20	20.02
2006	24	20.39
2011	10	16.29
2016	14	8.00
2021	09	7.91
<b>General Elections</b>		
1991	1	18.60
1996	5	27.20
1998	0	12.70
1999	0	11.92
2004	2	19.95
2009	1	14.61
2014	0	3.87
2019	0	8.23

Source: Election Commission of India ([www.eci.nic.in](http://www.eci.nic.in)).

## Conclusion

The ascending role of the BJP and its Hindu nationalist politics created a crisis for the Congress Party in mainland India but also the peripheral region of the north-east. Apart from the Congress, the ERPs are also at the receiving end of the BJP's project of right-wing politics in India. While part of the problem faced by the Congress in the NEI is due to the larger part of its crisis in mainland India, the crisis of ERPs is due to the problem created by the BJP for its expansionist politics in the region. Although Congress lost power to the BJP and regional parties in all north-eastern states, it remains a politically reckoned force, and its presence is felt in almost the entire region. Perhaps, the dwindling space of ERPs is due to BJP's consciously crafted strategy, taking into account the states' political, demographic, and regional specificities. By championing the cause of the second wave of ethno-regionalism, the BJP beat both the Congress and the ERPs and weaned away their support base to the party. Moreover, the ascending role of the BJP proves that it not only chalks out strategies but also counter strategies whenever the former confronts challenges in harvesting political dividends to take on the Congress and the ERPs.

The ethno-regional mobilization and the assertion of ERPs in democracies are considered a way forward to democratic consolidation as they reached out to the marginal communities left out by the national parties and their programs. The BJP's newfound interest in ethno regionalism of the NEI leads to faulty democratization. Instead of consolidating the democratization process and reaching out to various communities, the second wave of ethno-regionalism patronaged by the BJP produces exclusionary tendencies and intercommunity conflicts. The emerging trends of bigoted party politics in NEI under the Hindu nationalist mobilization using the bogey of ethno-regionalism create strain in not only the legacies of the movement-party politics but also the process of democratization as a whole.

## Notes

- 1 The term popularized by Benedict Anderson in his study of nationalism. For details see Anderson 1991.
- 2 The first wave of regionalism was propagated by ethno-regional parties to counter the centralising tendencies of the alleged exclusion of certain ethnic communities in the national politics.
- 3 The ILP is an official travel document issued to a person who is visiting to the states that come under Sixth Schedule. It is considered as a mechanism to restrict the flow of outsiders to the states and thereby protect the rights of the indigenous people.

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# 9

## SRI LANKA'S BIPOLARIZED MULTIPARTY SYSTEM

### Democratizing the Selection of Rulers, Not Their Rule

*Pradeep Peiris*

#### **Introduction**

Amidst an unprecedented economic crisis, the responsiveness of Sri Lankan political parties has come under close public scrutiny. For the first time in its post-independence history, the people of Sri Lanka came out to protest against their rulers, completely autonomous from political party mobilization. Demonstrating their utter dismay at the political culture, people demanded that the Rajapaksa family and the entire Parliament step down. The young protestors managed to attract millions of Sri Lankans to protest the ruling Rajapaksa family, who were accused of large-scale corruption and mismanagement that led the country to bankruptcy. The non-violent protest campaign has brought the powerful Rajapaksa family rule to an abrupt end. President Gotabaya Rajapaksa, who came to power with a massive electoral mandate three years ago, fled the country. The crisis demonstrated a severe deficit in the government's economic policies and its political classes' complete lack of accountability. The people's reactions to the crisis revealed that parties are no longer the institutions that can organize public dissent.

A large part of this chapter was written well before the current economic crisis erupted, examining Sri Lanka's political party system. In the aftermath of the recent upheavals in the country, it has become more pertinent today than ever before to understand the political roots of the current crisis. How political parties organize and function affords invaluable insights into the true nature of the country's democracy. How do political parties mediate between the state and society? What kind of representation do parties facilitate? This chapter attempts to answer these questions and consists of two broad parts: first, it discusses how the political party system evolved into the present system since independence, and second, it describes how political parties, especially the main ones, organize themselves and mobilize the electorates. The first part will draw insights from the existing literature

on Sri Lankan politics and society. The second part will be primarily based on semi-ethnographic research conducted from 2010 to 2014 and in 2020<sup>1</sup> in the electorates of Weligama, Dedigama, and Kelaniya.

## The Sri Lankan Political Party System

The Sri Lankan political party system is one of the oldest in South Asia. As in many colonized countries, the colonial rulers decided to introduce democracy which resulted in the emergence of the political party system in Sri Lanka. In anticipation of a transfer of power to the locals, the British colonial government introduced a universal franchise in 1931, 17 years before independence. Since then, political parties have proliferated over the past seven decades as democracy has proven to be the “only game in town.” Currently, 70 parties are registered with the Election Commission of Sri Lanka, and about 13 parties constitute the current 9th Parliament.<sup>2</sup> They represent many ideologies—liberal, Marxist, socialist, ethnonationalist, and even extremist religious stances. Since the introduction of the Proportional Representation (PR) electoral system, smaller parties have increased in the country, and their representation in Parliament has also increased. Interestingly, almost all the post-independence governments have been made up of coalitions.

The United National Party (UNP) and the Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP) used to dominate the political party system in the country, acting as “coalition centers” until the 2020 Parliamentary election. Against the backdrop of two-party competition, both parties have relaxed their ideological and policy commitments in favor of catch-all strategies. Despite the ever weakening ideological and policy gulf, these two parties represented an overwhelming majority of the Sinhalese electorates. However, the hegemony of these two parties met with an abrupt end in 2020. Two new parties—the Sri Lanka *Podujana Peramuna* (SLPP) and the *Samaḡi Jana Balawegaya* (SJB)—emerged to continue the decades-old two-party tradition by replacing the old parties that led the coalition governments alternatively. With this backdrop, this chapter examines how the “bipolarized multiparty system” remains intact, despite two new parties that have emerged to replace the old “coalition centers.”<sup>3</sup> Further, this chapter inquires how the nature of the party system has influenced the form of democracy that has come to define the dynamics of the current politics in the country.

### *Birth of the Party System*

In anticipation of the Donoughmore reforms that would culminate in elections, the local elites who enjoyed positions of power under the colonial rule rushed to set up political parties to remain influential in politics. A. E. Goonesingha, a leading trade unionist, formed the country’s first party-like organization, the Labor Party, in 1928. Sir Solomon Dias Bandaranaike, Head Mudaliyar and the aide-de-camp to the British Governor of Ceylon formed the Unionist Party the following year. To press for constitutional reform E.W. Perera, a prominent figure in the independence

movement started the Liberal League in 1931. However, the *Lanka Sama Samaja Party* (LSSP), a party that was founded in 1935 by some Marxist students who returned from England in the early 1930s, was the first modern political party in Sri Lanka (Jupp 1978). Later, policy differences and doctrinal disputes led to splits within the LSSP, resulting in three Marxist parties—the *Lanka Sama Samaja Party*, the Communist Party, and the Bolshevik-Leninist Party of India (Woodward 1975, 459). In the lead-up to independence, in 1946, under the leadership of DS Senanayake, the core section of the Ceylon National Congress (CNC) formed the UNP. The CNC was established in 1919 by a loose alliance of individuals and political groups drawn from local Westernized elites who spearheaded mainstream political mobilization movements before independence.

According to Woodward, the period from 1931 to 1947 was the heyday of the political notables in Sri Lanka as they were completely autonomous political units (1974–75, 455). As a result, at the second election held on the eve of the independence in 1947, two parties and many independent notables who were unaffiliated to political parties contested. However, though political notables dominated the early Parliament—then Legislative Council—later, they were absorbed into political parties whose character reflected what may be termed “Parties of Notables.”<sup>4</sup> Woodward claims that this absorption of notables to parties was facilitated by notable-determined party structures that existed until 1956 (Woodward 1969, 271). The UNP absorbed some of the leading independents who were returned in 1947, and others who the UNP alienated joined the SLFP formed in 1951 by SWRD Bandaranaike and other prominent dissidents (Uyangoda and Ariyadasa 2018, 136). The SLFP traces its origins back to the *Sinhala Maha Sabha* (SMS) established by Bandaranaike in 1937 or indirectly to the Buddhist revivalists of the early 20th century like *Anagarika Dharmapala* or *Piyadasa Sirisena* (Jupp 1978, 63). The formation of the SLFP in 1951 ended the UNP's hegemony in Sri Lankan politics. The Sri Lankan political party system has primarily emerged by aggregating and representing the interests of elites, most of whom maintained relationships of a feudal nature with average citizens. Therefore, from the outset, the central role of political parties has been to mobilize elites at the national and regional levels, which can influence voters' choices.

### ***The Two-Party System***

With the emergence of the SLFP in the 1950s, the Sri Lankan electoral landscape began to experience Westminster-style two-party competition with frequent regime changes. In this new political constellation, the SLFP became a parallel leading party with several smaller secondary parties. As Uyangoda notes, “in Sri Lanka's overall framework of party system, both the UNP and SLFP have evolved as competing catch-all parties” (Uyangoda 2012, 163).<sup>5</sup> He further describes this new configuration where the government is formed by either of the two leading parties in collaboration with smaller parties as a binodal framework of coalition politics. According to Woodward, a pioneering scholar of Sri Lankan political parties in the

1960s, Sri Lankan Parliamentary elections have been a “pre-eminently two-way contest” and the party system a “bi-polarized multiparty system” (Woodward 1969, 252). Further, this triggered a process of moving the political epicenter from “notables” towards “rural elites.”

### ***Impact of the First-past-the-post Electoral System***

Duverger’s law, now a classic in political party theory, argues that a plural electoral system will likely gravitate towards a two-party system (Duverger 1957). Under the First-past-the-post electoral system (FPP), candidates had to contest for single-member seats that favored ruling or dominant parties except for a few multi-member electorates. Up to 1977, winning coalitions secured disproportionate majorities in Parliament under FPP. The FPP produced stable governments with clear Parliamentary majorities, but minor parties such as ethnic, religious, or caste-based parties did not stand a chance to be represented in Parliament. Although the rationale of multi-member seats was to enable such representation, patronage politics often subsumed group identities (Uyangoda 2012).

During this period, the UNP and SLFP managed to maintain relatively clear ideological differences despite their patronage politics (Kearney 1973, Wilson 1970, Wilson 1975, Jupp 1978). In addition, both parties widened their electoral bases while maintaining relatively distinctive electoral organizing structures at the electorate level. As a result of the electoral mobilization of these two parties, Sinhalese villages were divided along party lines, and these rivalries often came to the fore around the time of elections (Table 9.1).

**TABLE 9.1** Political parties that contested with UNP- and SLFP-led coalitions in selected elections held from 1956 to 2015

<i>Election Year</i>	<i>Parties in the UNP Coalition</i>	<i>Parties in the SLFP Coalition</i>
<b>1956</b>		Sinhala Language Front, Sri Lanka Freedom Party, Viplavakari Lanka Sama Samaja Party
<b>1970</b>		Sri Lanka Freedom Party, Lanka Sama Samaja Party (LSSP), Communist Party of Sri Lanka (CPSL)
<b>1977</b>	Ceylon Workers’ Congress, United National Party	
<b>1989</b>	Ceylon Workers’ Congress, United National Party	

(Continued)

TABLE 9.1 (Continued)

<i>Election Year</i>	<i>Parties in the UNP Coalition</i>	<i>Parties in the SLFP Coalition</i>
1994	Ceylon Workers' Congress, United National Party	Sri Lanka Freedom Party, Communist Party of Sri Lanka, Desha Vimukthi Janatha Party, Lanka Sama Samaja Party, Sri Lanka Mahajana Pakshaya (Later joined) Sri Lanka Muslim Congress, and One independent member
2001	United National Party, Ceylon Workers' Congress, Democratic People's Front, Sri Lanka Muslim Congress, Up-Country People's Front, (Later Joined) Sri Lanka Muslim Congress	Sri Lanka Freedom Party, Communist Party of Sri Lanka, Desha Vimukthi Janatha Party, Lanka Sama Samaja Party, Mahajana Eksath Peramuna, National Unity Alliance, Sri Lanka Mahajana Pakshaya
2004	United National Party, Ceylon Workers' Congress, Democratic People's Front, Sri Lanka Muslim Congress,	Sri Lanka Freedom Party, Communist Party of Sri Lanka, Desha Vimukthi Janatha Party, Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna, Lanka Sama Samaja Party, Mahajana Eksath Peramuna, National Muslim Congress, National Unity Alliance, Sri Lanka Mahajana Pakshaya
2010	United National Party, Citizen's Front, Democratic People's Front, National Union of Workers, Sri Lanka Muslim Congress	Sri Lanka Freedom Party, All Ceylon Muslim Congress, Ceylon Workers' Congress, Eelam People's Democratic Party, Jathika Hela Urumaya, Mahajana Eksath Peramuna, National Congress, National Freedom Front, Up-Country People's Front, Socialist Alliance, Communist Party of Sri Lanka, Democratic Left Front, Lanka Sama Samaja Party, National Liberation People's Party, Sri Lanka People's Party
2015	United Left Front, All Ceylon Makkal Congress, Democratic National Movement, Jathika Hela Urumaya, Muslim Tamil National Alliance, National Front for Good Governance, Sri Lanka Muslim Congress, Tamil Progressive Alliance, Democratic People's Front, National Union of Workers, Up-Country People's Front, United National Party	Sri Lanka Freedom Party, Ceylon Workers' Congress, Citizen's Front, Democratic National Front, Democratic People's Congress, Liberal Party, Mahajana Eksath Peramuna, National Congress, National Freedom Front, Pivithuru Hela Urumaya, Socialist Alliance, Communist Party of Sri Lanka, Democratic Left Front, Lanka Sama Samaja Party, National Liberation People's Party, Sri Lanka People's Party, Tamil Makkal Viduthalai Pulikal, United Citizens' Front

Source: Author's own.

### ***Impact of the Proportional Representation Electoral System***

The introduction of the PR system through the 1978 Constitution introduced by the J.R. Jayewardene government brought radical changes to inter- and intra-party politics. However, the binodal politics mentioned previously also continued. Under the FPP electoral system, the candidate must only obtain the highest votes within a relatively small territorial constituency to be elected. Critiques argued that the FPP was not democratic because even where all oppositional candidates receive more votes than the winning candidate, the latter is nevertheless elected (Welikala 2008, 12). Further, as Welikala points out, the FPP system tended to grossly distort the expressed will of the people since the winning party got a higher percentage of Parliamentary representation than the percentage of votes they won in the election.

The central objective of the PR system was to ensure that representation in political institutions was as proportionate as possible to the percentage of votes obtained by each party or group that contested an election (Welikala 2008, 13). Under this new electoral system, the total number of electoral constituencies was increased to 196, and another 29 seats were allotted to National-List candidates. Unlike in the previous system, electoral competition occurs at the district level instead of at the smaller electorate level. Any party that obtains more than 5% (earlier, 12.5%) of the district vote is entitled to a seat in Parliament to provide space for smaller parties and parties representing minority communities. In addition, preferential voting—each voter can select three candidates from the list of the party one decides to vote for—under the PR system enabled cultural and ethnic minority groups to elect their members while voting for their party at the election. As a result, smaller parties such as EPDP, PLOTE, SLMC, *Jathika Hela Urumanya* (JHU), and its forerunner *Sihala Urumaya* received an opportunity to represent in Parliament despite having failed to win even a single electoral seat (Uyangoda 2012, 172). In addition, the PR system allowed smaller parties to enter electoral coalitions with significant parties and secure greater representation than they would have had they contested alone. The CWC, SLMC since the 1980s, and the *Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna* (JVP), its offshoot, NFE, and JHU are some smaller parties that have benefited disproportionately from this facility.

However, some analysts criticize the PR system for creating unstable governments. It is difficult for a single party to obtain a majority in Parliament, hence leaving smaller parties with the power to demand material benefits and favorable policies from the larger parties in power. Additionally, candidates with more resources to invest in the election campaign began to enjoy a more significant advantage in the new system. This fact not only proliferated corruption and exploitation of public resources but also promoted intra-party rivalry and electoral violence.<sup>6</sup>

### ***Under the Executive Presidency***

J.R. Jayewardene introduced several radical changes through the 1978 Constitution and the new electoral system. Amongst them, the introduction of the all-powerful

“Executive Presidency” was salient as it shifted the focus of political power from Parliament to an elected President. The President is the Head of the Executive, Head of the Government, and Commander-in-Chief of the armed forces. The powers of the President are extensive and virtually unlimited (Welikala 2008, 17). The rationale for this monolithic authoritarian structure was that it created political stability to facilitate rapid economic development.

However, even though the desired economic growth fell far short of expectations and many elections were won with the promise of abolishing the Executive Presidency, once elected to office, no government has made a sincere effort to fulfill the promise. Although the *Yahapalana* regime that came to power in 2015 has reduced the power of the Executive President significantly under the 19th Amendment to the Constitution, the position was later retained in 2020. However, under the 20th Amendment, the SLPP regime reinstated all the powers of the position. Under the PR system, as citizens vote for the candidates put forward by the party, it effectively strengthens the party machinery instead of the local power bases. Consequently, it strengthens the powers of the Executive President as well (Welikala 2008, 18). Since the party institution of catch-all parties like the UNP and SLFP is weak (this will be visited in detail later in the chapter), the PR system tends to consolidate power in the hands of the Executive President, who, in effect, *becomes* the party. Therefore, for a politician to thrive within the party and in electoral politics, one must be seen as a person loyal to the President rather than the party institution or its policies (Peiris 2010).

The role of the all-powerful Executive President as the leader of the ruling coalition makes it possible to negotiate MPs' support from other parties. Hence, parties in the opposition continuously suffer from defections, and the Opposition leadership becomes weak and unpopular. Consider the examples of Anura Bandaranaike during the UNP regime and Ranil Wickremesinghe during the SLFP-led People's Alliance and United Peoples' Freedom Alliance regimes. The presidential tenures of Gotabaya Rajapaksa (2019–2022) and Ranil Wickremesinghe (2022 to date) further confirm that the President can hold significant powers over MPs despite the loss of popularity among the people. Even when Gotabaya Rajapaksa fled under the pressure of popular protest, he enjoyed his party's support. Since being elected as the eighth Executive President, Ranil Wickremesinghe, so far, has shown that he can control the MPs in Parliament despite him having entered Parliament as a national list MP. Therefore, under a powerful Executive Presidency, parties tend to lose their autonomy and become weak institutions.

### ***Waning Ideological Distinctions***

The emergence of Sri Lankan political parties was more a tool for a functional democracy than the result of social demands and pressures. During the initial days of their formation, one saw them reflecting the long-existing local power structures or the “rule of notables.” The most salient feature in this period was that parties were not divided along ethnic lines but on ideological grounds. The LSSP and the



UNP both represented and received support from all ethnic communities until the formation of the SLFP in 1951, which appealed to the Sinhala majority. This new political climate paved the way for the emergence of two—dominant yet loosely defined—ideological camps led by the UNP and SLFP. Different attitudes towards ethnic and religious minorities, market vs. nationalist economy, Western world, and Westernized vs. vernacular educated classes essentially characterized each party's ideological position. However, both parties failed to maintain their ideological positions consistently over time, converging in their acceptance of the liberal market economy irrespective of their electoral rhetoric.

### *Distinct Ideological Positioning*

Although the UNP was formed by a group of Westernized missionary-educated urban elites, it managed to maintain an image in which many ideologically opposing groups felt at home. However, the UNP lost this unique image when Bandaranaike, a minister of its government, defected to form the SLFP in 1951. The SLFP, supported as it was by various Buddhist organizations, emerged as the rightful bearer of the Sinhala Buddhist ideology. The electoral alliance with the Marxist parties helped the party be branded as “socialist” even before it began to pursue economic policies. Therefore, the UNP and SLFP represented two distinct ideological camps at the beginning of two-party electoral politics in Sri Lanka.

*Pluralist and market liberalist:* The UNP mostly catered to the English-educated classes of Ceylon's plural society while being authoritarian and paternal towards the non-English-educated and underprivileged classes (Wilson 1974, 8). Associations such as the Ceylon National Congress, the *Sinhala Maha Sabha*, the All Ceylon Muslim League, and the All Ceylon Moor Association provided the chief ancillary bases for the UNP in 1946 when it was formed. Wilson describes the UNP as a party that enjoyed the confidence of business interests, large sections of the middle classes, administrative grades in the public services, and the higher echelons of the Buddhist clergy (Wilson 1975, 8). Though the Sinhalese dominated the UNP, it included several prominent Tamils and had the support of influential sections amongst the Christians and Muslims. Until the defection of Bandaranaike and his team, the presence of the SMS, which espoused Sinhala Buddhist religio-linguistic nationalism, made the UNP acceptable to Sinhala Buddhists (Coomaraswamy 1988, 31).

From independence until the election of 1956, the UNP government pursued economic policies like those that prevailed during the final decade of British colonial rule (Winslow and Woost 2004, 32). They promoted private enterprise and, outside of agriculture, the free play of market; they avoided creating state industries and, in fact, sold off a few that existed; and they concentrated government investment on infrastructure and peasant agriculture (Athukorala and Jayasuriya 1994, 9–10). Therefore, at its outset, the UNP clearly stood for an ideological and policy position that is a Western-friendly, ethnically pluralist, and pro-market liberal economy.

*Sinhala nationalist socialist camp:* The creation of SMS in 1937 drew Bandaranaike away from the Ceylon National Congress and the dominant Senanayake group. His support for socialism, his opposition to Indian commercial penetration and immigration, his belief that the majority community should have majority representation, and his support for national languages over English while he was a cabinet minister of the UNP later characterized the ideological identity of the SLFP (Jupp 1978, 63).

The SLFP accommodated the aspirations of many notables that the UNP either alienated or failed to accommodate in its membership. These included Sinhala nationalist elites and politically inactive groups such as Buddhist monks, local vernacular teachers, Ayurvedic doctors, and peasants, and they challenged the one-party dominance of the UNP. In addition, as Wilson (1975) states, the MEP was an assorted collection of sundry social and economic groups who rallied around the SLFP against their common enemy, the UNP. Former Samasamajists Phillip Gunawardana of the *Viplavakari* (revolutionary) LSSP and Dahanayake from *Samastha Lanka Bhasha peramuna* were the main partners in this coalition, in addition to the notables who had left the UNP. The *Eksath Bhikkhu Peramuna*, too, played a significant role in this landmark election to bring MEP to office. The “Sinhala Only” policy that the SLFP adopted in 1955 provided a common platform for all these diverse and sometimes conflicting forces.

Observing the influence of 1956 on economic policies, Deborah Winslow states that the election in 1956 ushered in far-reaching economic changes that altered the direction established by the UNP by increasing the size of the public sector and thereby directing government intervention in economic practice (Winslow and Woost 2004, 35). According to Abeyratna (cited by Winslow and Woost 2004, 35), the MEP faced the same foreign exchange problems as the UNP. Still, instead of trying to increase exports, they stepped up controls on imports and encouraged the development of domestic, import-substitution industries. They also nationalized foreign-owned companies and took over locally-owned enterprises like the bus system, ports, and domestic banks while continuing with consumer subsidiaries (Athukorala and Jayasuriya 1994, 11–12).

Therefore, the emergence of the SLFP formed a new ideological rival axiom that defined the nature of mainstream political mobilization among the majority Sinhalese community. In essence, groups from the landed wealthy classes, Westernized elites, business, and urban communities, and minorities were attracted to the UNP. In contrast, vernacular elites, rural people from intermediate and peasant classes, and workers felt that the SLFP represented them. Although the existence of two ideological camps was apparent by the late 1950s, their differences became increasingly hazy.

### *Growing Inconsistencies and Convergences*

Wilson has somewhat sarcastically pointed out that maintaining democracy for the UNP implied a return to a mixed economy with greater emphasis on the private

sector (Wilson 1975, 32). Hence, when it returned to power, the UNP continued to pursue its old economic policies by expanding the private sector, selling off state enterprises and promoting capital-intensive “green revolution” agriculture (Lakshman 1997, 172). When it came back to power in 1965, it introduced vigorous measures to attract foreign private capital. By 1968, the rise of private sector investment was almost double that in the government sector (Wilson 1975, 33). Consequently, the UNP’s economic policy was regarded positively by the United States and the West in general and hence stood to benefit from international agencies like the IMF, IBRD, and IDA (Wilson 1975, 33). On the contrary, the SLFP-led coalition continued to believe in the nationalization process, and, consequently, their economic policy became unfriendly, if not hostile, towards foreign enterprises. After nationalizing private commercial banks, the SLFP regime directed them towards assisting local enterprises more than in the past. In 1961, the People’s Bank was opened, and branches were set up to ensure wider distribution of rural credit facilities (Wilson 1974, 22). Peasant cultivators were given some security with the enactment of the Paddy Land Act in 1958. The SLFP continued its strict import-subsidiary and social welfare support system. However, due to the import dependency in the backdrop of the world oil crisis in 1973, the SLFP’s economic control became weaker, leaving rich and poor alike standing in lines to buy essential commodities (Winslow and Woost 2004, 36–37).

However, the ideological differences between the UNP and SLFP have gradually become somewhat fuzzy at the national level and almost nonexistent at the electorate level. Scholars commenting on the two parties in the 1970s classified the UNP as a center-right party and the SLFP as a center-left party (Wilson 1975; Jupp 1978; Kearney 1973). However, in response to the political context, mainly due to the nature of electoral competition, the ideological positions of the UNP and SLFP have transformed significantly from their original positions. Commenting on party coalitions and the “bipolarized multiparty system in Sri Lanka,” Uyangoda states that “the development of two coalition centers, along with a host of small parties, led to the outcome that required a great deal of ideological and personal adjustment” (2012, 189).

The UNP, a party, considered to be a “non-sectarian Centre-Right party whose leadership comprised of the comprador elites that represented landed aristocracy, bureaucracy and big businesses” (Jayasuriya 2000, 97), experienced shifts in its ideology following the 1977 victory. The Sinhala Buddhist nationalist ideology of the state under the United Front coalition, led by the SLFP from 1970 to 1977, continued under the leadership of J.R. Jayewardene. When introducing the Second Republican Constitution, the UNP regime retained the clause that grants Buddhism the “foremost place.” It stated that it is the duty of the state to protect and foster the Buddha Sasana (Constitution of Sri Lanka, 1978, Article 9). J.R. Jayewardene, in fact, “tried to cloak himself as a ‘righteous’ (*dharmista*) ruler and promised a ‘righteous society’ (*dharmista samajaya*) under his leadership” (Richardson 2005, 342). According to the 1977 election manifesto of the UNP, “The UNP is not only a democratic party: it is also a socialist party ... Our policy is to ... terminate the

exploitation of man by man” (Venugopal 2011, 91). As Jayasuriya observes, under the leadership of R. Premadasa, the UNP managed to appeal to the rural peasantry with its populist strategies and programs, such as the Mahaweli scheme and the colonization of dry zone farming areas (Jayasuriya 2000, 106).

Under the leadership of Chandrika Kumaratunga, the People's Alliance (PA) continued the UNP's free market economic policy, shifting from the SLFP's closed-economic policy. The PA regime did not reject the market economy of the UNP, despite being severely critical while in the opposition. It continued under the banner of a “free market economy with a human face.”<sup>7</sup> In the 1990s, both the SLFP and UNP moved away from Sinhalese ethnic politics and began to make political appeals across ethnic identities (Uyangoda 2010, 42). Both the UNP and SLFP leadership, since the 1990s, believed in a negotiated settlement to the country's ethnic conflict and repeatedly embarked on peace talks with the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) despite numerous failures. Both parties, under the leadership of Ranil Wickremesinghe and Chandrika Bandaranaike Kumaratunga, despite fierce resistance from Sinhala nationalist groups, agreed to explore a federal system to share powers with minority communities. Therefore, by early 2000, both parties advocated almost the same policies for the country's two most pressing issues—managing the economy and ethnic conflict.

Confirming that party ideology is very much a product of party leadership, the SLFP shifted its ideological position back to the old Sinhala Buddhist nationalism following the leadership change to Mahinda Rajapaksa in 2005. Under the pressure of smaller coalition partners such as JVP and JUH, Mahinda Rajapaksa changed the SLFP's policy on the ethnic problem and advocated a military solution that eventually ended the 30-year war between Tamil rebels and government forces. This Sinhala nationalist position and his military success elevated him to arguably the most popular Sinhalese leader in Sri Lanka's post-colonial history. Under Mahinda Rajapaksa's regime, the SLFP shifted radically towards Sinhala Buddhist nationalism while pursuing the UNP's neo-liberal economic policies (DeVotta 2022). This ideological position was further consolidated under his brother, Gotabaya Rajapaksa. Unlike Mahinda Rajapaksa, Gotabaya Rajapaksa openly announced that he stands for Sinhala Buddhist interests (News.lk 2020). Ironically, following his flight out of the country, the same party, the SLPP, had to support and bring Ranil Wickremesinghe to power as their next President, the leader who pursued completely opposite ideological policies. Therefore, the difference between the ideological positions of these two parties (or two main political camps) has continued to be vague and contingent upon the party leadership.

### *Smaller Ideological Parties*

Since the beginning of the party system, smaller parties have continued to represent identities and ideologies that were either excluded or did not receive adequate prominence in the politics of the two main parties. For instance, the Northern and Eastern electorates that Tamil dominates (e.g., TNA, TC, EPDP, TELO)

and Muslim (SLMC, NUA, and APMC) parties, and trade union-based estate Tamil parties (e.g., CWC, UCPE, and NUW) function in the Central, Uva, and Sabaragamuwa Provinces to represent the plantation communities. Except for a few, all these parties have, at one point or another, joined either the UNP or SLFP to form governments and secure cabinet portfolios, thereby representing the identity interests and the material interests of their respective communities.

Old Leftist parties such as the LSSP, CP, NSSP, and DLF have lost the appeal they once had against the backdrop of the rise of ethnonationalist politics in both Sinhalese and Tamil societies (Uyangoda 2018, 175). The MEP, a Leftist Sinhala Buddhist Nationalist party, consistently performed well compared to other traditional Leftist parties. However, these Leftist parties have managed to secure only a few Parliamentary seats and ministerial portfolios by being part of SLFP-led electoral coalitions. The JVP re-entered electoral politics in 1994 and won a seat after two failed armed uprisings in 1971 and 1988/9. Since then, the JVP has enjoyed Parliamentary representation either as a coalition partner or alone. Although the JVP has emerged as a rural radical left party, they derive their electoral support mainly from the semi-urban Sinhalese classes (Dewasiri 2018, 192). The JHU was formed in 2004 to represent urban Sinhala Buddhist constituencies in a situation where both the UNP and SLFP had started distancing themselves from Sinhala ethnic-nationalist politics (Jayasuriya 2012). In addition, the NFF and PHU, breakaway factions of the JVP and JHU, respectively, also compete for semi-urban Sinhalese Buddhist votes.

On the one hand, the smaller parties challenge the main parties' politics while contributing to the perpetuation of the two-party hegemony in the country. These smaller parties play a crucial role in influencing the ideological position of the two main parties around the time of elections—especially towards minorities. The main parties find the alliance with smaller parties useful to reach out to identity-based constituencies that cannot be won solely through their patronage programs. However, smaller parties also enjoy unparalleled electoral advantages under the PR system with preferential voting. This explains to an extent how these two main parties continued their electoral domination in post-colonial politics without being challenged by a formidable third force for a long time.

## Party Organization and Mobilization

In the catch-all logic of the two main parties, alliance-building with smaller parties supplements another (perhaps more fundamental): the practice of party organization based on personal relations and networks. Over the past seven decades, the organizational structures and strategies of the two main parties have evolved as very efficient vote-collecting machines rather than channels through which citizens exercise democracy. Although democracy is unthinkable without political parties, the dynamics of party organization at the national and local levels confirm that they are hardly democratic institutions.

*National level:* From the outset, despite having formal party institutional structures and procedures, the leadership of the UNP and SLFP has been dominated by a few families. Senanayakes, Jayewardenes, and Wijewardanas dominated the party organization of the UNP, while the SLFP was under the control of the Bandaranaikes (Jupp 1978, Jiggins 1979). R. Pramadasa in the late 1980s and his son, Sajith Premadasa, in 2020, challenged the traditional UNP leadership, and in both instances, the party had to pay a huge price. After coming to power, Mahinda Rajapaksa challenged the Bandaranaike dominance in the SLFP, which later culminated in forming of a new party. Although both parties have formal party institutions and formal decision-making bodies such as central committees, politburos, and conventions, they are under the heavy influence of the party leader and their supporters. Therefore, while crucial decisions related to the party and country (if the party is in power) are made by a coterie of friends and relatives of the leader, other MPs, as well as regional and local organizers, are expected to execute these decisions in return for various perks.

Hence, like in the case of cartel parties (Katz and Mair 2009), the charisma of the party leader and his extensive networking ability determine to a large extent the strength of the national party organization. The ability to negotiate the support of media organizations, religious organizations, and other powerful associations in return for various clientelist goods makes the leader powerful in the eyes of the party's rank-and-file members.<sup>8</sup> The leader's charisma to appeal to the imagination of voters from multiple social, cultural, and economic backgrounds makes the party more popular than its policies or past performance.<sup>9</sup> As a result, a change of party leadership always leads to reconfiguring other leadership positions within the party by introducing individuals loyal to the new leadership. Therefore, although these two parties are the two main electoral pillars of Sri Lankans democracy, they do not practice internal democracy nor is there a clear demand from the party rank-and-file for intra-party democracy.

*Local level:* In the UNP and SLFP, the party organization regards the recruitment and managing of provincial and local leaders (village-level political leaders or community leaders) as more important than managing the general membership. Contrary to popular perception, closer scrutiny of the organizational dynamics reveals that party organization is neither formally institutionalized nor hierarchically well-defined within an electorate. Woodward (1969) notes this weakly institutionalized and personalized nature of the party organization even at the early stage of political parties. Commenting on the weak and personality-based party structure of the UNP, he states:

The UNP was the most successful party during this period, forming the first government of independent Ceylon and being returned to power in the election of 1952 with what was termed a "dictatorial majority". On paper, party claimed that it had over 200 branch associations, a youth league over 3000 members and a small but active women's union, all of which were brought to

bear at election time to disseminate party propaganda and to mobilise voters for the party. In practice, however, the UNP relied on a network of personal-influence structures which acted to discourage both the operation and the development of formal organisational link to the voter. One structure that consisted of the highly centralised government service: government agents, district revenue officers, and especially village headmen, were employed by the party to mobilise voter support for their candidates. This personal-influence was controlled by the cabinet, to whose pressure civil service and local government employees were especially sensitive.

(Woodward 1975, 461)

However, James Jupp observes that the party organization of the UNP and SLFP began to assume a more formal character after the mid-1960s (Jupp 1978, 109–10). By the late 1950s, according to Woodward, parties had moved from notable dependency to being based on mass voters (Woodward 1969, 275). By the 1970s, recognizing the change in the socio-political context, both parties felt the need for their party organization structures to reach the masses instead of depending only on followers of the notables (Kearney 1973, 125–6; Jupp 1978, 110). Hence, by the 1970s, under J.R. Jayewardene, the UNP began to set up village-level branch offices to strengthen its membership and loyalist bases against the ruling coalition led by the SLFP.<sup>10</sup> The SLFP also began its formal party organization at the village level, especially after the Sinhalese youth uprising of 1971 led by the JVP (Uyangoda and Ariyadasa 2018). Although these two parties expanded their bases by setting up village-level branches, appointing officials, authorizing ancillary organizations—youth and women wings—and expanding party membership, they hardly contributed to the setting up strong institutional structures for these parties to function as democratic entities (Peiris 2018). Further, Peiris argues:

that party structure at the electorate level is extremely feeble and, at best, rather loosely organized. As a result, the organizational structure of the UNP and SLFP contradicts the traditional understanding of party organization, which is thought to be built on an institutionalized and formal party hierarchy. Furthermore, this chapter has suggested that the party organizational structures of the UNP and SLFP remain largely dormant and are generally activated only as an election nears.

(Peiris 2014, 177)

This relaxed organized nature is a common feature of most political parties in Sri Lanka, irrespective of whether they are liberal, socialist, ethnic, or religious. This flexible, loosely-knit network-based party organizing structures of the UNP and SLFP function on a few key actors—electoral organizer, members of the inner circle, different levels of local political actors, and voters.

### ***Party Organization Based on Local Political Actor Networks***

The organizer is the most critical element of the party organization at the electorate level. Examining the electoral history of the UNP and SLFP in the electorates of Weligama, Dedigama, and Kelaniya, Peiris (2014) argues that the electorate organizers do not necessarily belong to the community in the electorate. Neither do they necessarily rise from the rank-and-file of the party organization in a particular electorate. The national leadership of the party selects and appoints the electorate organizer. Therefore, loyalty to the party leadership is the most important qualification to be a party organizer. All other skills and capabilities are of secondary importance when measured against allegiance to the party's central leadership. Based on his ethnographical research, Peiris argues that it is not the social structural profile (such as caste or religion) but rather how the electorate organizer manipulates and addresses the social structural conditions of the electorate that determines success as an organizer (Peiris 2014).

The electorate organizer attempts to represent the social structural cleavages in the electorate by recruiting effective and efficient local political actors from each cleavage group to their party organizational network. The organizer achieves this by approaching the local political actors individually or by connecting to the existing cleavage-based network in the electorate. An average Sri Lankan electorate comprises many villages representing various ethnic, religious, caste, and kinship groups. Within and between villages, these groups are organized under multiple local-level associations such as funeral societies, debt societies, religious societies, farmers' societies, and so on. The local leaders of these groups seek access to the powers at the electorate level and beyond to meet their community's material and identity interests.

A successful electorate organizer can win the support of the majority of such village-level political actors. Since the beginning of the two-party competition, both parties have expanded into the bases of each other to maximize their vote base. Both the UNP and the SLFP, by the 1970s, managed to link with all the diverse groups in each Sinhalese electorate by recruiting village political actors (Hettige 1984; Gunasekara 1992; Moore 1985; Silva 1992; Jayanthi 1992). When in power, both parties strengthen their village leaders by opening up financial avenues through village-level development programs and granting various patronage benefits to the villages through their local political actors. As Kitschelt and Wilkinson argue, politicians distribute patronage through their mediators to ensure the maximum electoral return (Kitschelt and Wilkinson 2007, 19).

At the early stage of the two-party competition, influential individuals of the village, such as caste leaders, monks, indigenous doctors, and government servants, such as teachers and postmasters, played the role of mediators (Jupp 1978; Kearney 1973; Wilson 1975; Jayanthi 1992). However, the two-party rule over the past 70 years has transformed the nature of the mediator class from those with cultural and economic capital to ones with mainly social capital (Coomaraswamy 1988;



Jayantha 1992; Peiris 2014). Currently, local contractors and businesspeople constitute the most effective mediators of these parties. However, Buddhist monks and other notables with cultural and economic capital also continue to play the role of mediators.

This new brand of mediators often holds positions in Local and Provincial Councils and runs the local election campaign on behalf of their electoral organizers. These mediators have become very influential locally as both parties have channeled all their patronage programs and local development initiatives through them (Jayantha 1992; Peiris 2014). When the relevant party is in power, these mediator networks become almost a parallel governing structure, as the bureaucracy has been subject to the powers of political authority since the 1970s. Although at the early stage of the two-party competition, these mediators were clearly identified with their party identity, later under the PR system, and especially in the context of electorate organizers crossing over to their rival party, the personal identity of these mediators has become more salient than their party identity.

Under FPP, the PR system has drastically changed the relationship between the electorate organizer and their constituency (Peiris 2014). Since the election campaign takes place within a much bigger district electorate, the PR system has encouraged a flexible and less emotionally charged relationship between the organizer and local mediators. In this relationship, organizers with a high capacity to deliver patronage goods and mediators with a high capacity to deliver votes are in high demand. Politicians close to the Executive President, who has an ultimate say in the distribution of state resources, are perceived as powerful by the local mediators.

As a result, to stay politically relevant, politicians of both the UNP and SLFP desire to be in the government regardless of whether their party is actually in power (Peiris 2010). In addition, politicians with direct access to state resources are hugely attractive to the local-level political actors irrespective of the party line. Therefore, party organizational dynamics of both the UNP and SLFP oscillate from being an active and enlarged body while in power to an inactive, deflated, and informal group when the party is out of power (Peiris 2018, 87). The network of village political actors that previously existed as a relatively stable structure of the party organizational mechanism within the electorate has been weakened under the PR system (Peiris 2018, 94). However, local political actors hardly join smaller parties; instead, crossovers often happen between ruling parties (Peiris 2010).

To summarize, the UNP and SLFP party organization at the national and electoral levels is built upon individuals rather than rules or procedures. On the one hand, this personal-based party organization strategy enables them to be efficient vote-gathering machines. Still, on the other, it also allows them to form broad coalitions with parties based on rival ideologies and policies. Under this organizational structure, local and national political actors who represent a particular party may be viewed as *the party* by voters.<sup>11</sup> Therefore, the UNP and the SLFP appear to the voters as the party representing their ideas and interests through their local political actors. This way, the main parties (there is no reason to believe that others are very different) have contributed to turning the *citizen* into mere *voter* who wakes up once

every few years from their deep slumber at the time of the election to engage in the politics of the country.

## Emergence of Two New Coalition Leaders

The dominance of the UNP and SLFP saw an abrupt end at the 2020 Parliamentary election, demonstrating a radical shift in the constellation of party politics in Sri Lanka. Having formed just three years before the election, the SLPP won the highest number of seats in Parliament, completely decimating the SLFP, the party it rose from. Further, having formed simply three months before the election, the SJB obliterated the UNP to win the second-highest number of seats in Parliament.

By the 2015 presidential election, Mahinda Rajapaksa was *the party* (the SLFP) for his supporters in the cabinet, Parliament, and the electorates.<sup>12</sup> Losing the party leadership immediately after the defeat of the presidential election dealt a double blow to the Rajapaksa family and their cronies. With Mahinda Rajapaksa gone from the leadership seat, not only were they destined to lose their powers within the SLFP and its broader coalition, but their powerful image in the eyes of the constituency was also to be dwarfed. Therefore, leaders of the coalition parties that backed Mahinda Rajapaksa, including Wimal Weerawansa, Vasudewa Nanyakkara, Denesh Gunawardana, and Udaya Gammanpilla, as well as their senior loyalists, devised plans to ensure MR's return. A countrywide campaign called *Mahinda Sulaga* (Mahinda Wind) was instrumental in getting rid of the defeatist psyche of their supporters and uniting them against the *Yahapalana* government.<sup>13</sup>

Although Maithripala Sirisena managed to force Mahinda Rajapaksa to hand over the party leadership of the SLFP to him, he did not have a comprehensive strategy or the necessary charisma to unify the rank-and-file members of the party. In this context, out of 95 Parliamentarians elected through the SLFP-led coalition (the United People's Freedom Alliance), 52 members decided to function as the Joint Opposition (JO). Not only did Sirisena fail to win back the support of the Rajapaksa faction of the party, but he also did not make any meaningful attempt to attract the local-level political actors who were loyal to the Rajapaksa family. Capitalizing on this weakness of Sirisena's electoral vision, Basil Rajapaksa approached the local leadership to organize their supporters for the upcoming elections,<sup>14</sup> which eventually culminated into a formidable political force in the country.

In late 2016, Mahinda Rajapaksa loyalists officially established the SLPP. Basil Rajapaksa, the mastermind of this new political formation, instructed these loyalist local political actors to recruit one million members to the newly formed party.<sup>15</sup> Within each ward, a party branch was created, and ten families were assigned to each party supporter to monitor and report information to win their votes. Each local political actor (formally referred to as a "party branch") operated under the supervision of a national-level politician and the district coordinator of the SLPP. Despite the many odds, the SLPP claimed a resounding electoral victory and managed to secure power in 231 of 340 local councils across the country,<sup>16</sup> with a total of 3,436 members being elected.

The organizational structure and strategy of the SLPP were hardly different from the ones traditionally maintained by the SLFP and UNP. The SLPP also relied more on loosely-knit collectives of political actors who used their private residence or a business place as the party branch office instead of formal institutionalized mechanisms. Additionally, core office bearers often happened to also be family members of close friends of the local political actors of the party. Pulasthi Gunasekera,<sup>17</sup> a secretary of the SLPP from Weligama, narrated how his party branch functions thus:

As part of a one million membership drive, we were asked to recruit people to the party. One person from one family can get the membership by purchasing a Rs. 20 ticket. However, we do not maintain a membership registry or host regular meetings as we were instructed by Basil Rajapaksa, the national organizer. Technically we should have Youth and women organization meetings in addition to branch meetings, but it is only during times of elections do we hold these meetings. In fact, we have not yet had a single meeting since the Parliamentary election.

The governance failures of the “*Yahapalana* regime,” rivalry between the President and the Prime Minister, the Easter Attack, and anti-Muslim tensions further boosted SLPP’s popularity after the 2018 local government victory. A strong national-level campaign, supplemented by the support of Buddhist monks, private media enterprises that were favorably disposed towards it, and various nationalist civil society organizations (technocratic groups such as *Viyath Maga* and Sinhala Buddhist extremist organizations such as *Ravana Balaya*, *Bodu Bala Sena*) that provided added legitimacy, further strengthened SLPP’s local-level voter mobilization for the presidential election.

### ***Mobilizing the New Party for Presidential and Parliamentary Elections***

As usual, presidential candidates from both new parties tried to entice their support bases by making popular patronage promises during their national-level propaganda campaigns. The “Vistas of Prosperity and Splendor” manifesto of Gotabaya Rajapaksa promised priority for security and to build an efficient, disciplined, and modern society.<sup>18</sup> In addition, he promised 50,000 jobs for unemployed graduates and 100,000 jobs for low-income earners.<sup>19</sup> Further, speaking at his inaugural campaign rally in Anuradapura, he promised free fertilizers for farmers, a good fixed price for rice on the market, and storage facilities for the farmers. He further stated that “[farmers] can sell their product without selling them for a lesser value or without a middle man (sic),”<sup>20</sup> and promised to cut off all the micro-credit loans and any other loans of farmers for good.<sup>21</sup> Sajith Premadasa, SJB’s candidate, also promised numerous patronage goods, including housing for the poor, which was intended to be perceived as an extension of his father, R. Premadasa’s main patronage program. However, Premadasa’s manifesto carried little weight despite the failure of the *Yahapalanaya* regime to honor their patronage promises during their four years

in power. A strong former UNP supporter from Dedigama who was interviewed for this study said they “cannot even ask our own party supporters to come for a meeting as our government did not do anything during the past four years.”<sup>22</sup> He further stated that supporters of the *Pohottuwa* party (the SLPP) know they will be looked after if Mahinda (Rajapaksa) comes to power. In addition, the tug-of-war between the leader of the party and the UNP's presidential candidate made the UNP's electoral promises even less credible.

The other major factor that added to the strength of the national-level campaign of the SLPP and the New Democratic Front (that later became SJB) was the support they received from various political and civil society organizations. The SLPP was backed by 11 political organizations of a spectrum of ideologies ranging from socialist to capitalist, nationalist to pluralist, and parties representing ethnic minorities to parties representing the ethnic majority. In addition, many civil society organizations, including the technocratic and nationalist *Viyath Maga* and extremist Buddhist organizations such as *Sinhala Raavaya* and *Bodubala Sena*, backed Gotabaya Rajapaksa's candidacy.

The campaigns for the Presidential and Parliamentary elections allowed the SLPP to further consolidate their electoral grip at the local level by eating into the bases of the SLFP. Due to the desertion of most of its supporters, the SLFP branches at the local level had been inactive at the time of the 2019 presidential election. A local political actor of the SLFP from Weligama, Nalika Galahitiyawa,<sup>23</sup> stated that she and her friends had to canvass individually using their own funds during the 2018 local council election since the local party organization was in no position to do so. Even though the SLFP supported the candidate of the SLPP in the presidential election campaign, both parties carried out their campaigns independently and separately. According to Nimal Ranjith, from Watthegedara, Dedigama,<sup>24</sup> though the SLFP worked to elect Gotabaya Rajapaksa at the presidential election, the local organizers of the SLPP excluded SLFPers from their election campaign activities in the area. This attitude toward SLFP members is not surprising, given the rivalry between the two groups. According to Karunanyaka, at the local council of the area where the SLPP holds power, SLFP council members regularly experience discrimination. He further said that during the Parliamentary election campaign, the SLPP local political actors in his ward openly campaigned against SLFP candidates, despite both parties having signed an electoral alliance. Therefore, the 2019 presidential and the 2020 Parliamentary elections helped the SLPP establish itself as the ruling party and undermine the remaining power bases of the SLFP at the electorate level.

The weak presidential election campaign of the UNP at the local level was mainly a result of the infighting at the national level. The last-minute acceptance of Sajith Premadasa as the party's presidential candidate did not allow enough time for the party to formulate a unified and powerful campaign at the national or local levels. Not all the parliamentarians and district leaders of the UNP made a genuine effort to campaign for Sajith Premadasa.<sup>25</sup> However, for the Parliamentary election, almost all the local political actors started supporting the SJB, the alliance led by

Sajith Premadasa. Jayampathy Ekanayake,<sup>26</sup> a longstanding UNP local political actor from Dedigama, said that they did not feel they were supporting a different party because, in the 2020 Parliamentary campaign, they were working for the very same politicians they have been supporting through the past few decades and working with the same groups in the electorate that they have been organizing election campaigns with, also for decades.

The SLPP has clearly consolidated its position as the most dominant party among Sinhalese voters through these two election campaigns. Although the SLPP emerged as a new party, the nature of the local-level party organization and its electoral campaign process indicate that it is the same as the old SLFP, only under the leadership of the Rajapaksas. The electoral success of the SLPP was chiefly dependent on Mahinda Rajapaksa's popularity and the Rajapaksa family's electoral-engineering skills. Similarly, local-level party organization and electoral mobilization strategies confirm that the SJB is nothing but the same old UNP minus Ranil Wickremesinghe. At the Parliamentary election, both the new parties contested with the traditional coalition partners of their old parties—the UNP and SLFP. Therefore, the birth of two new parties has only taken off the name tag and the family dynasty from the two old parties that acted as the coalition centers of the seven-decade-old two-party system.

## Conclusion

This chapter examined how the bipolar multiparty system continues in Sri Lanka, despite the changes that electoral politics has experienced over the past 70 years. The Sri Lankan party system has traditionally comprised two main parties with the potential to lead electoral alliances and several smaller parties. From the outset, the two main parties were heavily dependent on persons and were weakly institutionalized. The UNP and SLFP expanded their electoral bases by forming loosely-knit networks of political actors representing regions, localities, ethnicities, religions, castes, and kinship groups. These networks were organized as complex webs of relationships strengthened mainly through patronage networks. Although these parties exhibited some ideological and policy differences during the early days of the two-party system, the distinction became further blurred as both parties infiltrated into the opposite camp's bases to maximize their votes. Although the SLPP and SJB have now emerged as the two main coalition leaders, they simply denote a change of names from the old SLFP and the UNP at the local level. Therefore, the emergence of these two new players has not changed the logic of the main political parties. They have been forming electoral alliances with smaller parties to win over identity-based (mainly ethnic and religious) votes. As a result, over the past decades, state policies primarily aimed at expanding welfare and patronage in addition to ethnic particularization.

Although parties claim to have party branches across the country, formally they are nothing more than a collective of local political actors who function based on personal loyalty to their senior political actors than the party rules. Due to this

weak link between the party and its local-level representatives, when these parties are out of power, their local party organization suffers badly due to the desertion of supporters. Since the two main parties (coalition centers) employ patronage network-based party organizations to collect votes, it has allowed them to be less accountable to their constituencies and refrain from longer-term commitments to any policy or ideological position. This political culture has paved the way for politicians to ignore the financial crisis that has been forming for decades and continue to deceive their voters for electoral gain. Furthermore, decades of two-party rule have transformed their supporters from citizens to voters who do not actively participate in the ruling. Therefore, it would not be entirely inaccurate to argue that over the past seven decades, these two catch-all parties have made the selection of rulers democratic, but not their rule.

## Notes

- 1 The initial phase of the field research was conducted for my doctoral research and the second phase was conducted exclusively for this chapter.
- 2 Parliament of Sri Lanka. <https://www.parliament.lk/members-of-parliament/political-parties>
- 3 In his seminal scholarship on “The Growth of a Party System in Ceylon” Calvin Woodward described the party system of the 1960s as a “bipolarized multi-party system.” He described the UNP and the SLFP as the “centers” of the two competing coalitions (1969, 253).
- 4 As conceptualized by Max Weber (1958) in his analysis of the evolution of political parties.
- 5 Kirchheimer (1966), observing a major transformation of Western European parties and party systems, argues that parties of mass integration were transforming themselves into ideologically bland catch-all parties. Bowing to the law of the political market, parties were abandoning previous efforts at “intellectual and moral encadrement of the masses,” downplaying or abandoning ideology, bidding for the support of interest groups, emphasizing the qualities of their leaders, and seeking support wherever it could be found.
- 6 PR Voting system creates intra party rivalry—PM, Sandesan Marasinghe, Daily News, March 7, 2020,
- 7 Economic Review, December 2008. [http://dl.nsf.ac.lk/bitstream/handle/1/14327/ER-34%20\(9\)-43.pdf;sequence=2](http://dl.nsf.ac.lk/bitstream/handle/1/14327/ER-34%20(9)-43.pdf;sequence=2)
- 8 Field interviews conducted during 2010–13, and June to October 2020 in Dedigama, Weligama and Kelaniya electorates.
- 9 Field interviews.
- 10 All the old rank and file members of the UNP and the SLFP interviewed in this study agreed on the point that formalization of the party organization in their electorate began only in mid-1970s.
- 11 Field interviews with hundreds of votes in the three selected electorates suggest this point.
- 12 Since 2005, Mahinda Rajapaksa loyalists have systematically built his image as leader of the nation undermining the image of the party.
- 13 The term “*Yahapalana* government” popularly refers to the government that was formed in 2015 on the principles of good governance.
- 14 First Mahinda Rajapaksa loyalists were organized for minor election for Cooperative Societies then for Local Council election held in 2018.
- 15 Interviews with the SLPP local political actors in all three electorates, conducted from May to August 2020.

- 16 Election Commission of Sri Lanka, Local Authorities Election Results, 2019. [https://elections.gov.lk/en/elections/results\\_lae\\_E.html](https://elections.gov.lk/en/elections/results_lae_E.html)
- 17 Pseudonym. Interview at Weligama. September 15, 2020.
- 18 Manifesto of Sri Lanka Podu Jana Peramuna (SLPP). <https://gota.lk/sri-lanka-podujana-peramuna-manifesto-english.pdf>
- 19 Manifesto of Sri Lanka Podu Jana Peramuna (SLPP). <https://gota.lk/sri-lanka-podujana-peramuna-manifesto-english.pdf>
- 20 Economynext.com. 2019. "Gota, Sajith election promises, freebies, to boost Sri Lanka state spending." October 14, 2019. <https://economynext.com/gota-sajith-election-promises-freebies-to-boost-sri-lanka-state-spending-28258/>
- 21 Economynext.com, "Gotha, Sajith election promises ..."
- 22 Interview with Kulasiri Meepaga, in Dedegama. October 10, 2020.
- 23 Pseudonym. Interview at Kuhunugamuwa, Weligama. October 8, 2020.
- 24 Pseudonym. Interview at Kuhunugamuwa, Weligama. October 8, 2020.
- 25 For example, according to the field interviews, Champika Premadasa, the Dedigama Parliamentarian, as he had already decided to quit politics, did not contribute to the UNP's campaign at the Presidential election. Kabir Hasim, a senior UNP district leader had to bear that responsibility instead.
- 26 Pseudonym. Interview at Wathdeniya, Dedigama, September 15, 2020.

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# 10

## CONCLUSION

### Movements, Parties, and Asian Democracies Against the Odds

*Julio C. Teehankee*

#### Summary

This collection sought to emphasize the role of political parties as agents of collective action and democracy promotion in the Asian region. Political parties are primarily acknowledged to have an essential role in democratic consolidation. However, there is much disagreement in the literature over how to explain party formation and change, how much structure matters, and how much space it gives parties to engage as active agents (Hellmann 2011). Taking on the challenge raised by Bermeo and Yashar (2016) to assess the role of structural and conjunctural factors in the role of political parties in creating democratic institutions beyond Europe, the country cases in this volume adopted a historical institutional approach to investigate the conjunctural moments which opened the political opportunity structure for political parties to “democratize” politics in Asia. Each chapter mapped out path dependencies and examined how the democratization process impacted the level of party institutionalization in each country. Moreover, it identified critical points of potential policy interventions to strengthen parties and increase their level of institutionalization.

Applying a mechanism-process approach inspired by the works of Charles Tilly and Sidney Tarrow (2015) on contentious politics, each chapter delineated the context and conduct of political parties and social movements in Asia. Specifically, each chapter attempted to highlight the following: (1) describe the initial conditions by which cleavages are organized into competing coalitions of movements and parties within the institutional legacies of colonial and postcolonial antecedent regimes; (2) define the cultural and ideational frames adopted by party elites to mobilize political support; (3) determine the type of parties that emerged and the level of party system attained; (4) delineate the strategic challenges of coordination and competition among these parties; and (5) trace the interaction between domestic politics and foreign interests.

The case studies also delineated the structural context and the agential conduct of Asian political parties. Following Hellmann (2011), the volume also took a dialectical approach to the link between structure and agency, allowing for integrating current theories of party organization into a more comprehensive narrative. The key to elucidating the complementary relationships between the three types of factors identified by theories of party organization—internal, external, and agential factions—was to recognize that actors can develop distinct strategic responses to strategically selective contexts. The following sections will summarize the findings drawn from the eight country case studies and present implications for understanding political parties and democracy in Asia.

### Initial Conditions

The role of political parties in enhancing (or constraining) democracy may vary significantly from one country to another (Rustow 1970). It is also important to note that the initial conditions that birthed Asian political parties differ from their Western counterparts. In acknowledging the pivotal role of parties in democratizing Asia, the chapters endeavored to “reading history forward” to determine the impact of structural and conjunctural factors in democratic institution-building (Capoccia and Ziblatt 2010, 943). This volume understands the imperative for a “regional turn,” taking a critical view on the applicability of the European democratic experience beyond Europe since “developing-country democratizers face challenges that cannot simply be inferred from the Western European cases and patterns of capitalist development” (Bermeo and Yashar 2016, 14).

Because most of the developing world in Asia is historically formed by colonialism and economically structured by patterns of dependence, the participation of international actors has a lot more weight organically. Additionally, the content (or scope) of democracy has evolved with time for early and later democratizers. For most developing countries, democracy as an outcome and democratization as a process has been qualitatively different than for Europe’s early adopters. Unlike in the European experience, where parties were the “prime movers,” political parties in Asia share the heavy lifting with various forms of social movements that operate in a much more crowded and complex political arena that may include nationalist, religious, indigenous, and other movements. Democratization processes in developing countries, particularly during the third wave, are frequently more temporally compressed. Thus, the requirements for (and impediments to) establishing a “passable” democracy are far greater today than they were in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries when democratic institutions were constructed in episodic fashion and frequently by different contenders seeking inclusion consecutively (Bermeo and Yashar 2016).

The Asian country cases in this volume represented various polities at different levels of democratization and political party institutionalization. South Korea and Taiwan are Northeast Asian countries that have successfully transitioned from authoritarian regimes and achieved high economic growth and development amidst

intense party competition. As Jung Hoon Park stated in his chapter, a family of pro-democracy parties that grew out of the New Korea Democratic Party (NKDP) and has traditionally preserved the *minjoo* (democracy) label was critical in supporting and preserving contemporary democracy in South Korea. The founding of the NKDP and its surprisingly strong performance in the 1985 legislative election, which took place despite harsh authoritarian intimidation, gave significant momentum for establishing a well-organized anti-government front that eventually gained a political opening in 1987. Taiwan's democracy has also proven resilient, as seen by the stability of its political parties and party system, which is more vital than other democratic nations in Northeast Asia, such as South Korea and Japan. Tommy Chung-yin Kwan traced this stability to the "balance of power" of the Kuomintang (Nationalist Party, KMT) and Democratic Progressive Party (DPP). The People's Republic of China often overshadows a de facto democracy, Taiwan's political system. The authoritarian KMT ruled for 38 years, from 1949 to 1987. The DPP (formed by former activists) narrowly defeated a split KMT in the presidential election of 2000. The two largest parties have taken turns to win the presidency every two terms (or eight years) since the beginning of the 21st century. Mongolia is a post-communist society that is still attempting to forge a fragile democracy. It has been a curious case of democratization, given the absence of structural characteristics outlined in the literature to support democratic governance when the communist system fell in the nation in 1990. According to Delgerjargal Uvsh's chapter, parties have emerged as a vital institutional mechanism facilitating democratic transition and consolidation. Parties aided Mongolia's democratic transition and consolidation by offering institutional mechanisms to coordinate and aggregate preferences, present alternative visions and policies to voters, and hold institutions accountable.

Antecedent political conditions determine who mobilizes and how. Colonial legacies and authoritarian regimes define various collective action pathways to democracy in ways that are not always consistent with Europe's gradual—if occasionally violent—shift from feudal monarchies (Bermeo and Yashar 2016). In Southeast Asia, for example, colonial legacies have impacted the formation and nature of political parties and party systems. In Arjan Aguirre's view, the Philippines' first democratic experience with party politics during the colonial 1900s was aimed at placating and taming the political interests and excesses of the Filipino elites—from local to national levels. Since then, "the Philippines has had some of the most bizarre combinations of qualities, attributes, and conditions that shape her democratic experience since the beginning of the twentieth century" (see Chapter 7). For Noory Okthariza, the relative stability of the Indonesian party system stems from the ingrained historical precursors that carry over to the present. This stability can be traced to the presence of political *aliran* (stream), which allowed the party system in Indonesia to form around distinct socio-cultural and religious cleavages. This *aliran* emerged during the early periods of modern Indonesian history from the 1950s to 1960s, in which three significant ideologies—nationalism, Islamism, and communism—intensely competed for power. This party competition was

placed on hold during the authoritarian New Order era from 1966 to 1998. The political *aliran* has since been resurrected since democratization in 1999. In the case of Malaysia, British colonial policies (from the late 18th century to the mid-20th century) have accentuated intense cultural and regional diversity. As Muhammad Nadzri's chapter explained, because of the population's extreme diversity and political divisions, no one party has the power to win national elections without establishing a coalition with other parties.

Colonialism also played a significant role in shaping political parties in South Asia. It is commonly viewed that India's founding party—the Congress Party—mobilized nationalism to attract active and direct support across class lines in response to the historically unique imperatives of colonial rule. For the nationalist cause to remain united and strong, it had to create a public arena where caste, class, and religion were rejected categorically (Tudor and Slater 2016). According to V. Bijukumar's chapter, however, the Congress Party, which ruled in the early decades following India's independence, was initially hostile to ethnic regionalism, possibly due to its exposure to Western modernist principles of nation-building. The case of Sri Lanka closely follows the experience of most colonized countries in which the colonial rulers' decision to promote democracy led to the formation of the political party system. The British colonial authority implemented a universal franchise in 1931, 17 years before independence, in preparation for a transfer of power to the locals. Since then, political parties have flourished throughout the last seven decades, as democracy has established itself as the “only game in town.” As Pradeep Peiris's chapter explained, the Sri Lankan political party system arose from the aggregation and representation of elite interests, most of whom had feudal ties with ordinary citizens. So, from the start, political parties' real job has been to organize national and regional elites who may influence voter choice.

## Cultural and Ideational Frames

Aside from the institutional footprints of a colonial and authoritarian past, different levels of democratization and political party institutionalization were shaped not only by economic development and class configurations but also by cultural and ideational factors. The founding narratives of a nation are equally critical assets for democracy, and when such narratives rank citizens hierarchically, the resulting citizenship disparities can be just as dangerous to democracy as material inequalities. The character of a country's foundational national narrative influences both democratic possibilities and the likelihood of regime collapse (Tudor and Slater 2021). To build democracy long-term, ideologically inclusive nationalist parties must be well-organized enough to gain majorities and fend off forces aiming to impose authoritarian exclusions based on class, ethnicity, region, language, caste, or religion (Tudor and Slater 2016).

This was evident in the Indonesian case in which *politik aliran* marked the dynamics of party politics. The 1955 elections gave rise to major political parties that flowed from the ideological stream of the *aliran*, namely the Indonesian National

Party or PNI (nationalist), the *Masyumi* and the *Nahdlatul Ulama* party (Islamist), and the Communist Party of Indonesia or PKI (Communist) (Ufen 2008). The dominant PNI could not establish the requisite political organization and leadership structures to translate its inclusive nationalist ideology into viable democratic institutions. This left Indonesia's political class fractured and incapable of organizing the solid majorities required to stabilize democracy through constitutional and coalitional concessions during the country's first decade of independence (Tudor and Slater 2021). However, as Okthariza presented in his chapter, the *politik aliran* was resurrected after the fall of the "New Order" and has been the structuring force for the stability of party competition in the post-*reformasi* elections. The first four consecutive elections in post-Suharto Indonesia were dominated by different political parties (*Partai Demokrasi Indonesia Perjuangan* or PDI-P in 1999, *Golongan Karya* or *Golkar* in 2004, *Demokrat* in 2009, and PDI-P in 2014).

In the case of South Korea's transition, *minjoo*, or democracy, became a discursive tool for structuring post-authoritarian electoral and party politics. As Park noted in his chapter, a family of pro-democracy parties that stemmed from the New Korea Democratic Party (NKDP) and has customarily retained the *minjoo* label plays a vital role in promoting and sustaining contemporary democracy in South Korea. The NKDP's establishment and the surprise result in the 1985 legislative election provided significant momentum for constructing a well-institutionalized anti-government front that achieved political openness in 1987. Despite the NKDP's dissolution due to factional infighting and splits, the successor *minjoo* parties have institutionally curtailed authoritarian legacies and increased transparency in state agency decision-making. The smooth power transition following the presidential impeachment in 2016–17 showed that lawmakers from past and current *minjoo* parties were vital in preventing the political crisis from worsening. These parties, however, have not been able to solve the problems that have plagued the Korean party system for a long time, like low levels of institutionalization caused by a lot of party switching, party mergers, and party splits. Indeed, these conditions make Korean politicians far less accountable than those in advanced democracies, which slows down the growth of democracy. Park ascribed this to a "commitment disparity," a term that refers to a disconnect between commitment to democratic contestation and accountability. The *minjoo* parties have effectively articulated their unwavering commitment to democratic contestation, mainly free and fair elections. However, due to their inability to execute democratic accountability roles, the *minjoo* parties' contribution to South Korea's democratic completeness, defined as further democratic progress toward liberal democracy and beyond, is severely constrained. Hence, the level of party institutionalization is considered a critical element in sustaining democratization.

## Party Organization

In the literature on party system institutionalization, it is believed that a democracy with a well-established party system is more likely to survive than one without

one. Institutionalized parties provide a reliable means for social groups to harness their interests and citizens to keep the government accountable. Without parties to operate as a bridge between the state and society, social demands may overwhelm government institutions, eroding democracy. Institutionalized parties support democracy and its representative quality. But institutionalization matters for more than just democracy. Nondemocratic regimes can also benefit from it. Due to their stability, complexity, and adaptability, institutionalized parties may assist nondemocratic regimes to survive opposition, comprehend, and adapt to changing population preferences and handle factional conflicts within the dominant party (Hicken and Kuhonta 2014).

As Okthariza asserted, the Indonesian party system has been relatively stable and institutionalized compared to other countries in the region. He traces this stability to historical antecedents brought forward to the present political dynamics. The continuing influence of political *aliran* (stream) allowed the party system in Indonesia to follow the cleavage-based model as proposed by Lipset and Rokkan (1967). This relative stability and institutionalization of Indonesia's party system can be seen from the patterns of parties' votes, medium-term stability of parties' votes, electoral volatility, and the party's ideological position in the five legislative elections from 1999 to 2019. Nadzri characterized Malaysia's hybrid party system as moderately institutionalized. Political party institutionalization involves two distinct processes. "Partinization" (structuralization) leads to well-instituted parties, whereas "individualization" leads to weak ones. In hybrid party systems, these two processes typically run hand in hand, not constantly harming but complementing each other. Neither parties nor individuals are dominant in this somewhat organized system. Parties can lose popularity because of their leadership, and vice versa. In other words, hybrid parties are more than just personal vehicles for individuals, even though some tend to dominate/personalize them. In a hybrid system, leaders and parties are often interdependent. Since its independence, the dominant party United Malay National Organization (UMNO) governed Malaysia as an authoritarian electoral state for nearly six decades until its defeat in the 2018 General Election.

Pradeep Peiris's chapter on Sri Lanka investigated how the "bipolarized multiparty system" has remained intact despite the emergence of two new parties to replace the old "coalition centers." Until the 2020 Parliamentary elections, the United National Party (UNP) and Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP) dominated the country's political party structure, serving as "coalition centers." Faced with two-party competition, both parties have weakened their ideological and policy commitments in favor of catch-all strategies. Despite the weakened ideological and policy chasm separating them, these two parties retained an overwhelming majority of Sinhalese electorates. However, these two parties' reigns ended abruptly in 2020. Two new parties—the Sri Lanka Podujana Peramuna (SLPP) and the Samagi Jana Balawegaya (SJB)—have emerged to continue the country's decades-long two-party setup by supplanting the previous parties that alternated in leading coalition governments. The two traditional parties were weakly institutionalized and heavily

reliant on individuals from the start. Both the UNP and the SLFP grew their electoral bases by building loosely connected networks of political actors representing regions, locales, ethnicities, religions, castes, and kinship groups. These networks were structured as complicated webs of interconnections primarily supported by patronage networks. However, these parties had some ideological and policy differences in the early days of the two-party system, the lines between them became blurred and hazy as both parties entered the bases of the opposing camp to increase their vote totals. Meanwhile, they have formed electoral alliances with minor parties to win votes based on identification. As a result, official policies have principally benefited the majority of Sinhalese in recent decades, while pre- and post-election coalition-building dynamics have shaped policies regarding the ethnic conflict.

### Strategic Challenges

Social movements and political parties are the collective agents that can mobilize dominant regime preferences across elite and mass lines and channel these preferences toward a democratic trajectory. Aside from democracy, many organizations have mobilized for and against a range of other cleavages and ideas, such as ethnicity, religion, nationalism, and liberalism, among others. Democratization necessitates groups that can tap into democratic movements and rise above furious mobs, greedy elites, offended public intellectuals, religious authorities, and the like. In a deeply polarized society, democratizers representing opposing cleavages must signal to each other (and the military) that the risks of democracy are more acceptable than autocracy (Bermeo and Yashar 2016).

Social movements are essential for opposition parties and coalitions to get support. Long-established social movements make democratization more likely because even spontaneous, large-scale protests need internal coordination to unite different people's interests, get them to act, build solidarity, coordinate responses, and set rules for action and state positions. Many of the most influential parties in the developing world, like the ANC in South Africa, the Congress Party in India, and UMNO in Malaysia, have their roots in nationalist, religious, and other movements. Parties are pivotal actors in formal institutions, just as social movements are often pivotal actors on the street. Parties are often tasked with rapidly establishing democracies that are completely inclusive, meaningfully competitive, and recognized as broadly legitimate. Political parties are crucial to at least three aspects of the democratization process: (1) coordinating, negotiating, and designing regime change; (2) engaging in competitive elections; and (3) creating voter support for democracy before and after elections. As Bermeo and Yashar (2016, 24) assert, "social movements and political parties play compensatory roles in the creation of democracy against the odds."

The Philippines and Mongolia offer interesting comparative, albeit contrasting, examples of the strategic challenges of democratization. Parties play an essential role in managing political expectations and forging democratic commitment by extending the runway for their voters, allied movements, and international supporters to



foster a competitive level field where elite and mass players feel part of an iterative game (Bermeo and Yashar 2016). During the transition period, Mongolia had at least one viable party that coordinated (and constrained) social movements. The Philippines, however, failed to engender institutionalized parties to consolidate its democratic gains.

As Aguirre explained, parties and movements were present at some of the most crucial moments in Philippine history. Parties are a political mechanism to enter power during local and national elections and a conventional approach to engage in policymaking and manage the government at the local and national levels. Movements have been the impetus of the struggle for independence, especially during the latter part of the Spanish colonial rule; an organized guerilla force against the Japanese forces; mass organizations for the peasants during the crucial years of the aftermath of World War II; a vocal critic of western imperialism and called for the protection of the nation's interest in the early 1970s; and later, a plethora of civil society groups, NGOs, and church-based movements against the Marcos dictatorship. Since the restoration of democracy in 1986, parties and movements in the Philippines have worked with and against each other to achieve short- and long-term political goals. During this time, powerful dynasties with populist tendencies, patronage politics, and cartel parties began consolidating power in the Philippines. Weak opposition party politics, passive movement mobilizations, and widespread political disinformation facilitated this coordination failure.

On the other hand, Mongolia's transition to democracy after the demise of the Soviet Union and its development of democratic norms and institutions was unexpected since it lacked the structural factors that foster democratization. Mongolia was technically an independent state under Soviet times, but politics, business, and society were all Sovietized. At the time of the transition, Mongolia was a lower-middle-income country that depended on agriculture and natural resource extraction, as well as its relationship with other Soviet economies. Mongolia's democracy was inhibited by its authoritarian neighbors, Russia and China. Hence, Mongolia's democratic choice made it an "oasis of democracy." As Uvsh argued, political parties in Mongolia have mostly fulfilled three purposes during the democratic transition. First, it created organizational channels for coordinating diverse preferences. Second, parties enabled political candidates to provide cohesive policy options to voters. Third, parties evolved into a vehicle for holding people in authority accountable. Nevertheless, party competition in Mongolia still faces several organizational and programmatic challenges that may threaten the quality of democracy. Political parties became the dominant institution of political struggle in Mongolia during and after the democratic transition. Throughout Mongolia's 70 years as a Soviet satellite state, its communist political party, the Mongolian People's Revolutionary Party (MPRP), was pervasive. Prominent social organization units, including herder collectives (*negdels*), professional unions, and youth organizations, were directly controlled by the MPRP until 1990. In Mongolia, as the Soviet social and political structure dissolved in 1990, alternative modes of association, preference aggregation, and state-society relations were absent. Hence, parties were

the natural institutional choice to organize political preferences and competition around Mongolia during its democratic transition.

## Multilevel and International Domains

In channeling and mobilizing support for democratization, parties and coalitions must coordinate and control their domestic and international elements while competing with other actors (including the state itself). Frequently, these coordination and competition challenges can only be tackled by organized forces in the form of movements and parties (Bermeo and Yashar 2016).

In many nations today, multilevel governance (MLG) is the catchword for multiple government levels having a voice in the adoption of political decisions and distribution of resources. There are numerous examples, from robust federal systems to regionally decentralized governments. MLG is essential for representing the increasingly collaborative and complex nature of public decision-making in federal and non-federal systems, especially in the age of global competition (Lachapelle and Oñate, 2018). Moreover, collective action in the developing world cannot be sealed in a domestic vacuum but is often influenced by the international context. Whether covertly or overtly, international actors have tipped the scales in favor of an incumbent regime or the opposition, through indirect actions like providing incentives for the adoption of specific strategies or the foreclosure of some windows of opportunities, to the direct (sometimes military) force to ensure an outcome (Bermeo and Yashar 2016). Hence, multilevel governance can be seen as a centripetal force that influences the political actions of movements and parties. At the same time, international factors provide a centrifugal force oriented towards the global arena—both shape the coordination and competition challenges for regimes, movements, and parties.

In India, for example, Bijukumar asserted that Ethno-Regional Parities (ERPs) are frequently the result of ethno-regional movements. It is believed that the most notable characteristic of ERPs is their demand for a political reconfiguration of the national power structure or some form of “self-government.” Ethnic and regional aspirations have always been a part of party mobilization based on languages such as Kannada, Tamil, Telugu, Marathi, Punjabi, and the like. However, the conventional wisdom in India holds that cleavages threaten national unity and regime stability. The regional expression of ethnic feelings frequently undermines the nation-state and the establishment of democracy. Even while political decentralization is assured, resentment towards the centralizing tendencies of the national government frequently compels ethnic communities to demand ethnic decentralization. Ethnic decentralization facilitates access to political power. It is based on an exclusive group identity that demands recognition and independence. In addition to negotiating with the federal structure, it requires ethno-protectionism and autonomy. Northeast India is noted for its many ethnic communities and as a hub of ethno-regional mobilization, diverse movements, and some extremist activities. National parties like the Congress Party and the *Bharatiya Janata Party* (BJP), despite

their mass base and dynamic leadership, were often confronted by the forces of ethno-regionalism. In recent years, however, a second wave of ethno-regionalism fueled by Hindu nationalism has enabled the BJP to defeat the Congress Party and the ERPs in Northeast India.

In the case of Taiwan, Kwan observed, political parties in Taiwan, formed alongside competing Taiwanese and Chinese identities, serve the needs of the Taiwanese people so long as the question of “unification with the mainland or the independence of Taiwan” remains unresolved and is regarded by the public as being of the utmost importance. In terms of the relationship between political parties and democracy, a stable party system is a factor in the consolidation of democracy and a consequence of a robust democracy. Taiwan’s stable party system has benefited from the relatively stable equilibrium of national identities. When the equilibrium was upset, the respective political parties’ power would likewise alter. Hence, the primary cleavage in Taiwan’s society, the national identity, has been captured and represented by two dominating parties and their coalition allies: the *Kuomintang* (KMT) with its “Pan-Blue Coalition” and the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) with its “Pan-Green Coalition.” The Pan-Blue Coalition favors Chinese over Taiwanese identity and deeper integration with the PRC across the strait. The Pan-Blue Coalition opposes Taiwan’s independence but not unification with China. On the other hand, the Pan-Green Coalition represents the preference for Taiwanese identity over Chinese identity. It supports Taiwan’s independence. Of course, China did not sit idly by, as the two parties in regular elections were contesting the future of Taiwan. It has a long history of interference in Taiwan’s domestic politics and, more recently, is at the forefront of the propagation of disinformation, particularly on social media (Kurlantzick 2019).

## Democracy against the Odds

The countries profiled in this volume significantly represent “democracies against the odds.” They are countries that have become or continue to be democratic despite persistent challenges. They face various problems, including rising socio-economic disparities, the rise of extremist/separatist movements, economic deterioration, and geopolitical threats. These poor performances demand some longing for the “good old days,” when authoritarian predecessors accomplished “miracles” at the expense of democratic principles. Democracy has nonetheless taken root in these countries, at least on an institutional level.

However, much has transpired between the writing of the chapters of this book and as it went to the press. Three countries profiled in this volume have since faced major democratic setbacks. In Malaysia, the fall of the *Pakatan Harapan* (Alliance of Hope, PH) government to a political coup after only 22 months in power has dampened the initial enthusiasm toward the democratizing prospects of Malaysian politics. The dynamics of Malaysia’s party system institutionalization, as Nadzri observed, are neither poorly organized nor well established. In contrast to the dichotomized trend of partisanship in well-institutionalized systems, and personalism in weakly institutionalized systems, hybrid party systems usually have a dynamic combination of interactions and uncertain developments between party

structures and their leaders. Their relationships are not necessarily antagonistic but are frequently synergistic. Thus far, Malaysia has had three prime ministers since the May 2018 elections that brought veteran politician Mahathir Mohamad to office. Muhyiddin Yassin became prime minister after the coalition fell in February 2020. As the COVID-19 pandemic spread, his government collapsed in August, allowing Ismail Sabri Yaakob to take charge with UMNO back in power. On October 10, 2022, Ismail Sabri dissolved Parliament and called for a snap election (Al Jazeera 2022). PH won the most seats in the 15th General Elections, held on November 19, 2022, with 81, but faced a hung parliament with no coalition gaining a simple majority. Soon thereafter, longtime opposition leader Anwar Ibrahim successfully formed a “unity government” with the UMNO-led *Barisan Nasional* and newly acquired allies in Sabah and Sarawak (Chin 2023).

In Sri Lanka, political parties are under careful examination amid an unprecedented economic crisis. Sri Lankans protested their rulers without political party mobilization for the first time since independence. People urged the Rajapaksa political dynasty and Parliament to resign over the crisis. Young demonstrators rallied millions of Sri Lankans against the governing Rajapaksa dynasty, who were accused of corruption and incompetence that brought the country to bankruptcy. The nonviolent protests brought the Rajapaksa’s regime to an end. President Gotabaya Rajapaksa fled the nation three years after winning a landslide election. The crisis exposed a fundamental lack of accountability in government economic policy and political elites and the inability of Sri Lankan parties to mobilize popular protest. In the end, Preis concluded that Sri Lanka’s bipolarized multiparty system had democratized the selection of rulers but not their rule.

In the Philippines, Ferdinand “Bongbong” Marcos, Jr., the late dictator’s son and namesake, was proclaimed the 17th president of the Republic of the Philippines on May 25, 2022. It was astounding that he won the presidency by such a large margin 36 years after his family was forced out of the palace by a military-backed people-power uprising. Bongbong is also the first president to win a majority of the vote in the post-Marcos period. He won a record-breaking 31,629,783 votes (59 percent) and was almost 31 percent ahead of his closest rivals. His successful presidential campaign was based on a myth that the Marcos dictatorship was a “golden age” of peace and prosperity. This contrasted with the long-held and well-documented stories of a violent, corrupt rule that left the country poor. This myth was spread on social media and actively supported by a large portion of the public, both young and old. The rise of Rodrigo Duterte’s strongman populism in 2016 set the stage for the Marcos restoration in 2022, but the public’s preference for authoritarian politics has been on the rise since the mid-2000s. The consolidation of democratic gains has been hampered by the inability to deal with the legacies of authoritarianism and to make democracy work. As Aguirre detailed, a broad Center-Left alliance of movements and parties that supported the presidential candidacy of Vice President Maria Leonora “Leni” Robredo failed to challenge the formidable alliance between Marcos Jr. and Davao Mayor Sara Duterte, the equally feisty daughter of the populist president. The Marcos-Duterte formed the “UniTeam” backed by all the major traditional political parties. What was more

distressful was democratic parties or parties that struggled against the Marcos dictatorship (i.e., Partido Demokratikong Pilipino-Lakas ng Bayan, PDP-Laban) or were founded in its aftermath to consolidate democratic gains (Lakas Christian Muslim Democracy, Lakas CMD) decided to support the Marcos-Duterte tandem fully. Whether Marcos Jr. will follow his father's path remains to be seen, but his presidency might also highlight democratic resilience in the country—Filipino democracy against the odds.

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