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Trends in Southeast Asia

PARTIES IN THE PERIPHERY:
ORGANIZATIONAL DILEMMAS IN
INDONESIA'S KEPRI PROVINCE

ULLA FIONNA

ISEAS YUSOF ISHAK
INSTITUTE

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FOREWORD

The economic, political, strategic and cultural dynamism in Southeast Asia has gained added relevance in recent years with the spectacular rise of giant economies in East and South Asia. This has drawn greater attention to the region and to the enhanced role it now plays in international relations and global economics.

The sustained effort made by Southeast Asian nations since 1967 towards a peaceful and gradual integration of their economies has had indubitable success, and perhaps as a consequence of this, most of these countries are undergoing deep political and social changes domestically and are constructing innovative solutions to meet new international challenges. Big Power tensions continue to be played out in the neighbourhood despite the tradition of neutrality exercised by the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN).

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Parties in the Periphery: Organizational Dilemmas in Indonesia's Kepri Province

By Ulla Fionna

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- Political parties in Indonesia's Kepri (Kepulauan Riau, or Riau Islands) Province suffer from low organizational capacity. The set-up of their branch offices is barely adequate, with cadres and volunteers acting as the main administrators, while activities, funding and recruitment remain erratic, insufficient and disorganized.
- Rather uniquely, the province's capital Tanjungpinang is not its commercial centre, resulting in discrepancies in the organizational priorities of political parties present there. Instead, it is Batam, the commercial capital, that receives greater attention and is more attractive as a location for crowd-intensive events.
- Electoral trends and the parties' lack of organizational capacity have allowed for local figures to exercise greater influence, particularly during elections. In contrast, the parties themselves take a back seat during elections while their ground teams take charge.
- The parties' organizational incapacity in Kepri Province also translates into failure at the local level, and not much change can be expected in the near future.

Parties in the Periphery: Organizational Dilemmas in Indonesia's Kepri Province

By Ulla Fionna¹

INTRODUCTION

This paper investigates political parties in Indonesia's Kepulauan Riau (Kepri) Province, as a case of local politics occurring in decentralized Indonesia's periphery. As one of Indonesia's outermost provinces, Kepri Province's political dynamics are a significant indicator of how parties are faring in localities with typically limited infrastructure and little attention from central party offices.

Although case studies of local politics and elections in Indonesia have proliferated since the commencement of decentralization (e.g., Erb and Sulistiyanto 2009), the investigation of parties in this particular region has so far been limited mainly to Choi Nankyung's work (2007, 2009). In her study on Batam elections, she pointed to the weaknesses of the parties, particularly regarding recruitment and election management. This *Trends* issue examines the parties' overall organization at the provincial level, with particular attention being paid to how their activities are managed, and uses the 2015 gubernatorial election as a case study.

The political and economic gaps between the provincial capital of Tanjungpinang and the commercial centre of Batam have created problems in organizational capacity for political parties in the province. While branches in Tanjungpinang co-ordinate the overall organization in Kepri, there is a strong need for the parties to focus their attention on the more populated and vibrant Batam. The provincial branches

¹ Ulla Fionna is Fellow in the Indonesia Studies Programme, ISEAS – Yusof Ishak Institute, Singapore.

have consequently become largely inactive and undermanaged, and their activities infrequent and erratic. Local politics have thus come to be dominated by local figures who — although having party affiliations — gain popularity and public standing, first and foremost as individuals instead.

KEPRI PROVINCE: SMALL YET STRATEGIC

Kepri Province was established in 2002 as Indonesia's 32nd province (under Law No. 25, 2002), following increasing demands for secession from Riau Province. The idea had strong opposition from the provincial government in Riau at first for fear of loss of revenue from manufacturing, tourism, and natural resources (Amri 2016). Indeed, it was the combination of resentment caused by the inadequate size of revenues from local resources that were redistributed back to the region, dissatisfaction with the Riau provincial government in general, along with Malay cultural subnationalism, which inspired the idea to form a new province (Kimura 2010, p. 437).

Kepri Province consists of five rural regencies (Bintan, Karimun, Lingga, Anambas, and Natuna) and two cities (Batam and Tanjungpinang). Although it only hosts 0.71 per cent of Indonesia's population² and its area is only 0.43 per cent of the country's size,³ its importance is due to several factors. Primarily, it has a strategic geographic location which has been beneficial to its economic profile. One of its main cities, Batam is an industrial hub and the population centre of the province. It

² Data based on the 2010 census, see Penduduk Indonesia per Provinsi Tahun 2010 (Indonesia's Population by Province 2010 (Sensus) <<http://informasipedia.com/kependudukan/penduduk-indonesia-sensus/penduduk-indonesia-per-provinsi-sensus/172-penduduk-indonesia-per-provinsi-tahun-2010-sensus.html>> (accessed 25 September 2017).

³ See "Luas Daerah dan Jumlah Pulau Menurut Provinsi, 2002-2015" [Area and Number of Islands by Province, 2002-2015], Badan Pusat Statistik <<https://www.bps.go.id/linkTabelStatistik/view/id/1366>> (accessed 26 September 2017).

is located only 20 km from cosmopolitan island-city-state Singapore (by comparison it is about 894.6 km from the Indonesian capital of Jakarta), and has attracted sizeable foreign investments which made it a significant destination for Indonesian job-seekers. The province was ranked eighth most competitive province in Indonesia according to an index based on variables such as macroeconomic stability, government and institutional setting, financial, business and manpower conditions, and quality of life and infrastructure development.⁴

Given its strategic location and economic potential, political parties in the province have tried to tap into local aspirations and to integrate themselves into local politics.⁵ Parties have the function of link voters to government/state by bringing the interests of the former to the attention of the latter. In contrast, the absence of parties leads to segregation between public aspiration and government policies which, left unmanaged, may create resentment and even unrest. The more votes parties receive the greater the parties' say in local politics. The peripheral uniqueness of Kepri Province makes the party branches an appropriate study of how decentralization affects a local polity.

INVESTIGATING PARTY CAPACITY

Parties are crucial to democracies for several reasons. They are important means of political participation and free elections (de Tocqueville 1945; Dahl 1998; Huntington 1991), the main “mediators between the voters and their interests” (Gunther, Montero and Linz 2002, p. 58), as well as the “main agent of political representation” and “virtually the only actors

⁴ Tan Khee Giap et al., *2014 Annual Competitiveness Analysis and Development Strategies for Indonesian Provinces* (Singapore: World Scientific Publishing, 2015).

⁵ Parties in Indonesia are notorious for corruption, primarily as party politicians act as brokers and decision-makers for projects which involve kickbacks for their individual pockets. For an extensive discussion on this matter, see for example Marcus Mietzner, “Dysfunction by Design: Political Finance and Corruption in Indonesia”, *Critical Asian Studies* 47, no. 4 (2015): 587–610.

with access to elected positions in democratic politics” (Mainwaring and Scully 1995, p. 2). While it is strongly agreed that parties are compulsory for democracies, there are variants in measuring parties’ success and capacity. Essentially, parties need to have a “presence at the local and national levels”, “somewhat stable roots in society” (Mainwaring and Scully 1995), and remain active beyond election periods (Duverger 1964, p. xvi). As such, local branches are an accurate indicator of their capacity, as they manage daily grass-roots operations and activities (Janda and Colman 1998), and local elections. Ideally, parties’ local branches should be staffed by professional administrators (Katz and Mair 1994; Szczerbiak 1999; Webb and Kolodny 2006) and have stable sources of funding (Webb 1995). Another key function for the branches is to serve as the first point of contact for potential members (Katz and Mair 1994, p. 14; Vanhanen 2000; Mair and van Biezen 2001). Recruiting members is important if the parties are to prove themselves “viable channels of political representation” (Katz and Mair 1994, pp. 14–15).

While these are the ideals, political parties in Indonesia have generally struggled to perform most of these functions, mainly because of their organizational limitations. Parties had organizational and ideological freedom following the 1945 independence period, but conditions as a newborn country were challenging for most of them in establishing a well-organized network of branches. This freedom proved short-lived, as the Sukarno and subsequently Suharto governments began to severely curb the influence of political parties.⁶ When Suharto stepped down in 1998, parties (re)gained freedom but had no experience in building well-functioning branches. Worse still, decades of political repression had created parties adjusted to a patronage system and an electorate that was deeply disillusioned.⁷

⁶ For detailed discussion on these issues, see, for example, Herbert Feith, *The Decline of Constitutional Democracy in Indonesia* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1962) and David Reeve, *Golkar of Indonesia: An Alternative to the Party System* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985).

⁷ For discussions on various aspects of democratic transition, see, for example, Hanneman Samuel and Henk-Schulte Nordholt, *Indonesia in Transition: Rethinking “Civil Society”, “Region”, and “Crisis”* (Yogyakarta: Pustaka

Meanwhile, pressure for more governmental reforms mounted. Under Suharto's New Order (1966–98), Indonesian development had been focused on the centre, and demands for better (re)distribution of revenue to the regions underlined the campaign for decentralization. The centre–periphery divide generated by the “centripetal power” (Malley 1999, p. 72) system was justified by the argument for national unity and integrity. Consequently, the championing of local interests were deemed threatening and were generally discouraged and/or repressed (Walker, Banks and Sakai 2009, p. 2). In contrast, under decentralization, local identity and aspirations were given tremendously more space to grow. At the same time, demands for greater transparency and attention for local interests quickly led to more scrutiny of local governments and local politics.

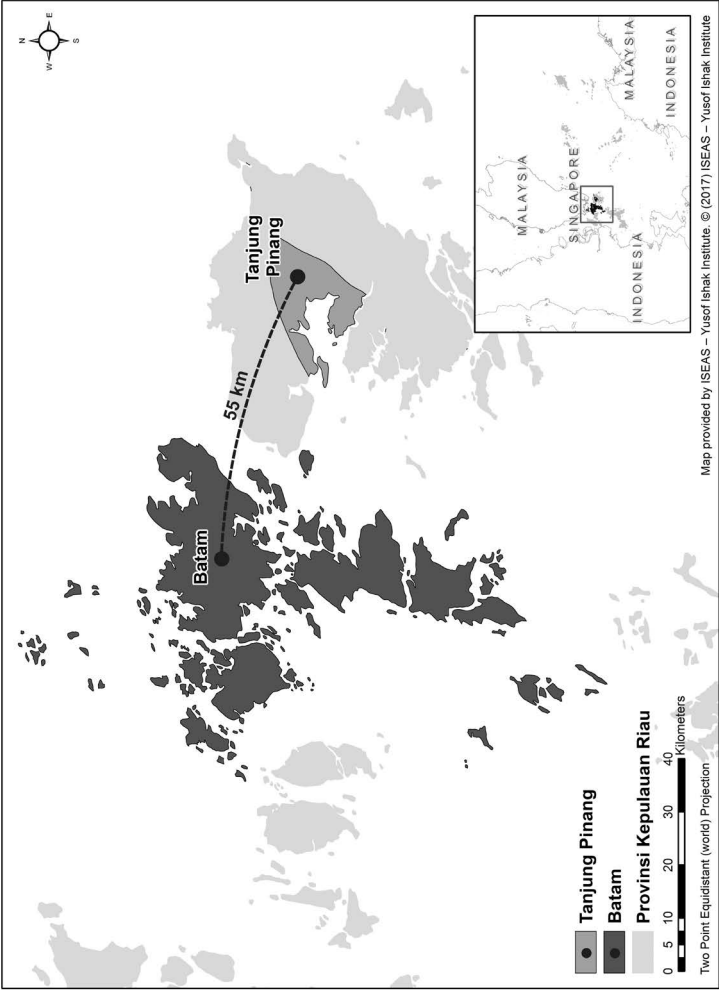
Political parties now had to build branches across the archipelago, and deal with local elections. Such tasks are no small feat in Indonesia. While the barrier of entry for new parties is low, the organizational requirements to compete in elections are increasingly arduous. To compete in the 1999 elections, parties had to have regional chapters in 50 per cent of all provinces and 50 per cent of districts/municipalities in the province. Those requirements have been increased in 2014. Parties now have chapters in 100 per cent of the provinces, 75 per cent of the districts/municipalities, and 50 per cent of sub-districts. Furthermore, many of these parties have limited resources and funding.⁸

Placing the requirements for solid organizations and the historical and institutional challenges that parties face side by side, this study

Pelajar, 2004); Marcus Mietzner, *Military Politics, Islam and the State in Indonesia: From Turbulent Transition to Democratic Consolidation* (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2009); Marco Bunte and Andreas Ufen, eds., *Democratization in Post-Suharto Indonesia* (London: Routledge, 2009).

⁸ As state funding is limited and membership dues and contribution are hard to enforce, parties have had to resort to unlawful and corrupt practices. See Marcus Mietzner, “Party Financing in Post-Suharto Indonesia: Between State Subsidies and Political Corruption”, *Contemporary Southeast Asia* 29, no. 2 (2013): 238–63. For a discussion on the operational challenges of enforcing membership dues, see Fiona (2013).

Figure 1: Tanjungpinang and Batam Cities in Kepri



identifies several indicators for party organizational capacity. These are by no means exhaustive. The focus of this study are the branch offices — primarily their organizational structure and processes, including: the physical buildings; the general upkeep; staffing issues; and overall management. The range of activities carried out as well as how they are initiated and managed are also analysed. Most specifically, the 2015 gubernatorial elections are examined to provide detailed insights into these matters.

METHODOLOGY

Three fieldwork trips were conducted to observe the conditions of party branches in the province first-hand — to Tanjungpinang in November 2016 and March 2017 and to Batam in July 2017. Local party politicians (also from the major parties) and political observers were interviewed. The foci of the visits to party branches were on finding out how they are administered in general, specifically in relation to office set-up, staffing, and the overall condition of the branches. Interviews with local staff about meetings and activities were also used to gauge the financial situation of the specific branch — something that parties do not usually give information on voluntarily.

Other than these first-hand data, previous research on the organization of political parties in Indonesia, with specific attention on earlier works about Kepri Province, was consulted. Data on local politics and local elections were obtained from the Election Commission (Komisi Pemilihan Umum, KPU), previous reports and analyses, and also from interviews with observers.

PARTY (DIS)ORGANIZATION IN KEPRI: COMMERCIAL CENTRE VS PROVINCIAL CAPITAL

Except for those with solid financial management, parties rely a lot on the loyalty of local cadres to man their branches. As these cadres often do not possess sufficient administrative skills, such arrangements translate into a direct lack of professionalism. They tend not to have any clear

operational system, nor any filing and record-keeping mechanisms. The staff's minimal administrative skills also means that their capacity in handling correspondence tends to be poor. These unpaid cadres have to manage daily operations, and some parties let them reside in the offices in lieu of compensation. Initiatives for activities are also often lacking as party officials usually prioritize their public positions (as members of the legislature or local heads) and thus rarely visit the branches. Instead, it is the individual cadres who wish to improve their popularity who would organize activities. It is only during election periods that there is a greater frequency of activities, but at other times, the branches are inactive (Fionna 2013).

Locationwise, the branches in Kepri Province generally choose to be around the city centre of Tanjungpinang. They are usually either dormant or managed by cadre-volunteers without professional administrative skills. The handful of staff who man the offices seem to have minimal tasks to do, and they usually socialize with each other while manning the office. Furthermore, not all branches are open every day, and many have sporadic office hours. Only the Golkar Party employed staff with some professional skills, who would man the branches and carry out administrative tasks. Overall, the offices have acceptable working conditions, with telephones and desktops, and they typically have designated rooms for meetings, and separate offices for branch leaders. In those cases where there is no full air-conditioning, it is the designated offices for leaders and meeting rooms that are provided with the facility. Golkar, Indonesian Democratic Party – Struggle (PDI-P) and Democrat Party (PD) are three parties that have shop houses serving as their branches, while Nasdem Party's (National Democrat Party, or Partai Nasdem) office is a residential house.⁹ During the fieldwork visits, the office of Nasdem Party was closed and no one was manning the office. The offices of the Golkar Party, PD and PDI-P are open daily, but party

⁹ Case studies in Malang suggest that while most parties (except Partai Golkar) rent their offices, the better organized parties are able to manage the constant moving and stay active, while the less organized ones may have a long hiatus of not having an office in between the moves (Fionna 2013).

officials were not present during our visits. Instead, it was the cadre volunteers who were manning the offices who attended to the public and to visitors.

The disorganized nature of these party branches suggest not only that it is hard for these parties to sustain an active appearance, but also that being non-active outside of election periods is normal and accepted. With such administrative limitations, office hours are kept to a bare minimum. On the rare occasions when activities were held, much typically depends on the initiative of a handful of leaders to function. These activities are normally not part of the yearly agenda, but are instead organized on an ad hoc basis.

The dependence on particular cadre(s) or leader(s) for these activities is usually quite apparent. Typically, banners put up for these events clearly carry the name of these cadres, who will normally make a speech during the event to boost their recognizability among voters.¹⁰ This suggests that funding for these events comes from these candidates, who were hoping to improve their standing for coming elections, and that it is these figures in the parties and not the parties themselves as organizations, who initiate and organize these events. Rather than taking charge and utilizing these events to promote themselves, the parties allow the active individuals promote themselves instead. This dependence on local figures leads easily to the domination over party branches by certain cadres and personalities.

There is a condition unique to Kepri that aggravates the lack of capacity at the party branch level. In most provinces in Indonesia, the capital would usually be the biggest city in both economic and demographic terms. In Kepri Province, although Tanjungpinang is the provincial capital, Batam is its primary city.¹¹ For one thing, Batam's population (approximately

¹⁰ Author's observations in Tanjungpinang, January 2017.

¹¹ To note, Batam was the temporary capital of Kepri Province when it was first established in 2004. (See Francis Hutchinson, *Mirror Images in Different Frames? Johor, the Riau Islands, and Competition for Investment from Singapore* (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2015), p. 103 for details. For full discussion on the history of the establishment of the province, please see

1.2 million) is about five times that of Tanjungpinang's (approximately 200,000). Batam's economy also dwarves Tanjungpinang's,¹² and the former is also more prosperous in general than the latter.¹³ In political terms, Batam also has more voters and proportionally takes up more than half the seats in the provincial parliament. As a matter of fact, Batam's number of voters is far higher than in other regions, such that even with the lowest election turnout in the province, it still manages to register the highest number of votes (see Appendix B).

For these reasons, Batam makes a more attractive anchor point for the political parties. Meanwhile, the Tanjungpinang branch offices — while formally the provincial coordinator of party activities — maintain minimal levels of organization and are generally inactive and disorganized. These discrepancies are clearly demonstrated by how the major parties in the province choose the sites for their events.

Partai Golkar, which won the most votes in Kepri in 2014 at 20.57 per cent, has held various activities throughout the province in the past few years. As the New Order legacy party, it still conducts Safari Ramadhan, a series of trips aimed at exerting its presence and influence across the region. During the New Order period (1966–98) this strategy was effective in maintaining the party's popularity, intimidating voters into casting their votes for Golkar, particularly as the other two parties

Mulya Amri, "A Periphery Serving Three Cores: Balancing Local, National, and Cross-Border Interests in the Riau Islands", in *The SIJORI Cross-Border Region: Transnational Politics, Economics, and Culture*, edited by Francis E. Hutchinson and Terence Chong (Singapore: ISEAS – Yusof Ishak Institute, 2016).

¹² Revenues received by Batam in 2015 were about S\$226,645,000 and Tanjungpinang's were S\$85,885,000 — making the former about 2.64 times bigger than the latter's. See "Provinsi Kepulauan Riau Dalam Angka 2015", 2016 <http://kepri.bps.go.id/website/pdf_publicasi/Provinsi-Kepulauan-Riau-Dalam-Angka-2016.pdf>.

¹³ At 10.40 per cent in 2013, Tanjungpinang's poor was double those of Batam at 5.2 per cent. See Badan Pusat Statistik Kepulauan Riau, *Indikator Utama Kepulauan Riau 2015* (Main Indicators – Riau Islands 2015), p. 31 2015 <http://kepri.bps.go.id/website/pdf_publicasi/Indikator-Utama-Kepulauan-Riau-Semester-I-2015.pdf>.

allowed (PPP and PDI) had to play by a much stricter set of rules when campaigning.¹⁴ In Kepri, Partai Golkar has scheduled these trips across all the regencies and municipalities, with the provincial chairman Ansar Ahmad himself leading the scheduled trips.

While the Safari trips covered the province, the party's other provincial activities were largely focused around Batam. For instance, in July 2016, the inauguration of party officials for Kepri Province was conducted in Batam. Although the provincial branch is located in the capital, Tanjungpinang, the election of provincial chairman in 2015 was done in Batam, and so was the inauguration of the provincial staff in 2016 when Setya Novanto, the party chairman himself, came to inaugurate the new staff line-up. The occasion was also utilized as an outreach event, as Novanto participated in a relax walk (*jalan santai*) across the city together with around 30,000 Batam residents. Notably, it would be quite difficult to attract the same size of crowd in Tanjungpinang.

Similarly, Batam has a certain appeal as location for activities for PDI-P, the winner of the 2014 elections. Its previous provincial meeting for both Kepri and Riau province was held in Batam in 2015, clearly signifying Batam's strategic importance, which outweighs Tanjungpinang — despite the latter's status as provincial capital.

PD showed a more balanced approach in their latest major activity in the province. Fresh from his defeat in the Jakarta gubernatorial election, Agus Yudhoyono (son of former president Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono, PD's main patriarch), visited Kepri Province. The party organized various activities around his four-day visit, which were distributed equally between Tanjungpinang and Batam. Kepri Province holds a special place for PD because the party has been exceedingly successful there, winning the gubernatorial position, the Bintan regency, and Batam mayor position (although mayor Rudi who was elected in 2015, then left for Nasdem Party). During his visit, the young Yudhoyono inaugurated the provincial office and the staff, launched a book, jogged (*lari bersama*) with a crowd of supporters, and gave talks at various events.

¹⁴ For example, the other two parties had much shorter campaign periods and were allowed smaller funding.

During an interview, a Kepri PD official revealed that the defection to Nasdem Party of chairman Rudi, who is also mayor of Batam, has left the municipal branch office in the hands of a temporary chair (*pelaksana tugas*, PLT/task officer). This seems to have destabilized the PD in Kepri, and even its municipal branch office has been taken over by Nasdem.¹⁵ The reliance on local figures means that the branch will now have to find a replacement of equal stature. Organizationally however, the official being interviewed insisted that Tanjungpinang has always been the coordinating centre and that there has been no major shift or disruption in party organization caused by the defection.¹⁶

Among the parties that were less successful in the last legislative elections, there is a clearer prioritizing of Batam over Tanjungpinang. Gerindra Party (Partai Gerakan Indonesia Raya, or Pan-Indonesian Movement Party), which gained three seats in 2014, held crowd-drawing activities but also low-key ones such as communal breaking of fast and a domino tournament, in Batam. Hanura Party (Partai Hati Nurani Rakyat, or People's Conscience Party), the winner of two seats in 2014, centred the commemoration of its tenth anniversary in 2016 in Batam. The party also set up a new provincial branch in Batam.¹⁷ A party official explained that although the party's office is in Tanjungpinang, they hold many (more) activities in Batam. With its new three-storey office, the party aims to "improve their work mobility" (*mobilitas kerja*), and the co-ordination of all provincial-level organizational matters. The PKS

¹⁵ "Penampakan Kantor Demokrat Batam Digusur DPW Nasdem Kepri" [The Appearance of Demokrat's Office Being Replaced by Nasdem Kepri's Municipal Branch], *Batam News*, 6 September 2016 <<http://batamnews.co.id/berita-16054-penampakan-kantor-demokrat-batam-digusur-dpw-nasdem-kepri.html>> (accessed 2 August 2017).

¹⁶ Interview with Democrat Party's Kepri Province secretary, Husnizar Hood, July 2017.

¹⁷ "Segera Diresmikan, Kantor DPD Hanura Kepri Bakal Dilengkapi Café" [Inaugurated Soon, Hanura Kepri's Provincial Office will House a Café], *Tribun Batam*, 2 March 2017 <<http://batam.tribunnews.com/2017/03/02/segera-diresmikan-kantor-dpd-hanura-kepri-bakal-dilengkapi-cafe>> (accessed 2 August 2017).

(Partai Keadilan Sejahtera, or Prosperous Justice Party) also held their provincial coordinating meeting (*rapat koordinasi wilayah, rakorwil*) in Batam. Nasdem Party was another that swore in a new line-up of provincial staff in Batam, while also holding various activities celebrating its anniversary there.

Perindo, a new party founded in 2015 and led by media mogul Hary Tanoesoedibjo, conducted the inauguration of its staff in Batam, opened a clinic in a Batam mall, and held a chess competition in the same city. Berkarya Party, established on the fame of former president Suharto's son Tommy, lists a Batam address as its provincial branch and has chosen to hold its provincial coordination meeting in Batam. Notably, the last two parties mentioned have not competed in elections yet, but have already sidelined Tanjungpinang.¹⁸

Although the activities listed here are by no means exhaustive, there is an emerging pattern among the parties which strongly points to Batam as a worthy choice for activities. As a Partai Golkar official said, Tanjungpinang is not attractive as a site for activities. There are obvious reasons behind Batam edging out Tanjungpinang for party events. With an airport that is bigger and has more frequent flights to Jakarta compared to Tanjungpinang's, inviting national leaders or figures to Batam is easier. Sharing the agenda of Partai Golkar's provincial office, this official listed three major events for the party this year — two of which were held in Batam, and one in Tanjungpinang. Batam is also a better location for crowd-intensive events such as long marches, staged entertainment and political rallies. Batam's status as a more rewarding site is so prevalent

¹⁸ The fact that two parties have successfully registered and have their organizational requirements verified by the Elections Commission to compete in the 2019 elections suggests that they may have ended up registering their Tanjungpinang Branch as the provincial branch for registration and verification purposes. See "Ini 14 Parpol Calon Peserta Pemilu 2019, Rhoma Irama Gagal Lagi, 2 Partai Lama Gugur" [Here Are the 14 Political Parties Competing in the 2019 Elections, Rhoma Irama Fails again, Two Old Parties Fell], *Tribun Timur*, 18 October 2017 <<http://makassar.tribunnews.com/2017/10/18/14-partai-fiks-calon-peserta-pemilu-2019-2-parpol-lama-tak-lolos-ini-daftar-lengkapnya>> (accessed 26 October 2017).

among parties that they disregard the fact that many of Batam voters are temporary residents who may not cast their votes there during polling day.

As such, while coordination meetings (*rapat koordinasi, rakor*) are at times still held in Tanjungpinang, activities that demand large crowds are likely to be held in Batam. Yet, national laws regarding political parties state that they must have a coordinating branch in the provincial capital. In this sense, Tanjungpinang's role as the location for coordinating offices will not be replaced. Since the Election Commission (Komisi Pemilihan Umum, KPU) inspects these branches before every general election, parties have to ensure that the provincial branch remains to some extent active. The Commission also verifies the structure of official staff in the branches to ensure that the parties are operational, and this means that party officials and leaders will have to be present at the branches more often than was observed during the fieldwork visits done for this study. However, nothing is stated about verifying whether the provincial branch indeed coordinates activities across the relevant province. This means that the parties can keep juggling between the two important cities, and continue to have Tanjungpinang as the official provincial branch, while concentrating their activities to Batam instead.

THE 2015 GUBERNATORIAL ELECTION IN RIAU ISLANDS PROVINCE

This article thus far has pointed to the difficulties parties in Kepri face. Meanwhile, the introduction of direct local elections in 2005 has presented more challenges in the form of candidate management and campaigning. Yet, instead of focusing on their internal organization to improve recruitment, parties have generally been adopting ways to recruit individuals from outside to run as their candidates.¹⁹

¹⁹ With some exceptions as in the case of PKS (Partai Keadilan Sejahtera, or Prosperous Justice Party), which has been more disciplined in regular internal recruitment. See Fiona (2013).

The primacy of candidates in Indonesia's elections has been increasing. This was most notable in 2014. Article 214 of the 2008 Law No. 10 on Parliamentary Elections brought about further changes. In the closed system implemented in previous elections, parties had more authority in the placement of candidates on the ballot paper, and voters chose political parties. Under the said law which eliminated the party ranking list, only the number of votes determine the candidates' success in winning a seat. As such, each candidate only has themselves to rely on for votes, and the ranking in the ballot paper no longer matters.²⁰ While the 2009 elections only saw the initial consequences of these trends, the 2014 rounds experienced the full effect, with the candidates strategizing even to compete against candidates from their own parties.

Law no. 8 of 2015 on local elections states that to nominate a candidate for local elections, a party or a coalition of parties needs to have at least 20 per cent of the seats in the provincial parliament (DPRD, Dewan Permusyawaratan Rakyat Daerah) or 25 per cent of votes collectively. For a pair of candidates to win, the accumulation of votes needs to reach a majority.²¹ As the electoral systems increasingly heighten the importance of candidates, the main focus of parties has been about finding the most electable/popular candidates. With provincial- and municipal-/regency- levels direct elections, parties are now required to manage candidate nominations for 537 local elections.²² The absence of recruitment processes means that parties have had to adjust certain strategies to manage the demand to nominate candidates as well as

²⁰ See Law no. 10 of 2008 at <<http://www.jdih.kemenkeu.go.id/fullText/2008/10TAHUN2008UU.htm>> (accessed 30 October 2017).

²¹ See Law no. 8 of 2015 at <<http://www.dpr.go.id/dokjdih/document/uu/1627.pdf>> (accessed 10 October 2017).

²² The Election Commission has scheduled the elections to gradually be synchronized for the first time across all 537 regions in 2027. See "Tujuh gelombang pilkada serentak 2015 hingga 2027" [Seven waves of simultaneous elections 2015 to 2027], *antaranews.com*, 17 February 2015 <<http://www.antaranews.com/berita/480618/tujuh-gelombang-pilkada-serentak-2015-hingga-2027>> (accessed 26 October 2017).

manage multiple local elections. The main strategy for parties now boils down to courting the most electable candidate to join them and to form a coalition with other parties to get enough seats for the nomination ticket.²³ Beyond these, parties do very little.

A close look at the 2015 Kepri gubernatorial election does show that parties have assumed a passive role in local elections. While parties usually lay idle outside election periods, the nuances and consequences of parties' dysfunction is worthy of further investigation. As with many other *pilkada* cases, the 2015 gubernatorial election in Kepri showed that parties did little beyond providing some political credentials for the candidates and acting as electoral vehicles.

Specifically, the combination between parties' organizational weaknesses and the electoral system has resulted in two prominent trends. First, while elections are largely powered by candidates, parties remain the predominant avenue for nomination as independent nomination is hard to obtain and largely less successful than as party candidates.²⁴ Beyond the nomination process, it is the candidates who have to attract votes. As such, local elections are mostly about candidate popularity, and parties merely act as their logistical vehicles and their providers of symbols.

Second, local elections worsen and perpetuate parties' lacklustre attempts at local recruitment. Parties find it easy to get away with their internal recruitment failure by choosing external candidates whom they deem electable or popular. And since the parties' electoral function has been largely taken over by candidates, their poor grassroots organization has no incentive to improve.

As can be seen in Kepri's 2015 gubernatorial elections, the candidates were local figures, though they were party politicians, who were better

²³ As the numbers of elections and potential candidates have made it difficult for parties to identify these individuals, surveys have proliferated as a somewhat reliable method.

²⁴ Independent candidates need to get the ID cards of 10 per cent of the constituency, and so far only less than 10 per cent of independent candidates have been successful.

known for their success in building up personal influence and popularity outside of their party. And it was the candidates' team (more commonly known as *tim sukses* or success team) that managed the campaigns.

There were two pairs of candidates in the 2015 gubernatorial election in Kepri. The first consisted of Muhammad Sani and Nurdin Basirun. Sani was governor (2010–15) and vice-governor (2005–10, under former governor Ismeth Abdullah) of the province. Nurdin was former regent of Karimun and chair of the provincial branch (DPW, Dewan Perwakilan Wilayah) of Nasdem Party in Kepri. Other parties joining the coalition and declaring support for this pair were Democrat Party, Gerindra Party, National Awakening Party (PKB), United Development Party (PPP) and the Golkar party faction led by Agung Laksono. The second pair comprised of Soerya Respationo and Ansar Ahmad. Soerya, the candidate for governor, was vice-governor under Sani (2010–15) and chair of the provincial branch of PDI-P. Ansar was a former regent of Bintan and chair of provincial branch of Golkar Party in Kepri. This pair also had the support of other members of the coalition: People's Conscience Party (Partai Hanura), Prosperous Justice Party (PKS), National Mandate Party (PAN), and Golkar faction led by Aburizal Bakrie. Notably, as with most if not all local elections in Indonesia, the coalition was not based on any particular agenda other than backing the candidate(s) that it thought had the better chance of winning.

As further testament to the primacy of individual candidates in elections, even securing candidacies was mostly the effort of the individuals themselves. They lobbied for support within the parties as well as outside, particularly making use of their positions as bureaucrats and public figures. Interviews with party officials on candidacy procedures also indicated the parties' limited involvement in selecting and managing candidates. They indicated that parties were mostly passive in choosing candidates, and also confirmed the lack of rigour in recruitment procedures. A Democrat Party official clearly indicated that it is up to the candidates to approach the party and to "obey the wishes of the party".²⁵ While this may seem to mean that parties are demanding,

²⁵ Interview with PD official, November 2016.

it more probably highlights the fact that parties are the only vehicles available to potential candidates, rather than any organizational capacity these parties may have per se.

One Golkar Party official framed the mechanism in securing candidacy by emphasizing the active role of the candidates. Focusing on the process as a “two-way communication” where both parties and candidates have similar interests, this official referred to the candidacy of Soerya and Ansar. In his opinion, the decision of his party was based on the fact that these individuals had solid grassroots support and that their programmes were “realistic”.²⁶

The role of parties largely diminished after the candidates were chosen. And it was the head of the “success team” that designed and organized campaign activities for the candidates. Funding was similarly the candidate’s and his team’s responsibility. In the words of an observer, the role of the parties during the campaign was “zero”.²⁷ While this remark may be an exaggeration, it is nevertheless a correct enough observation about the minimal role played by the parties during the campaign.

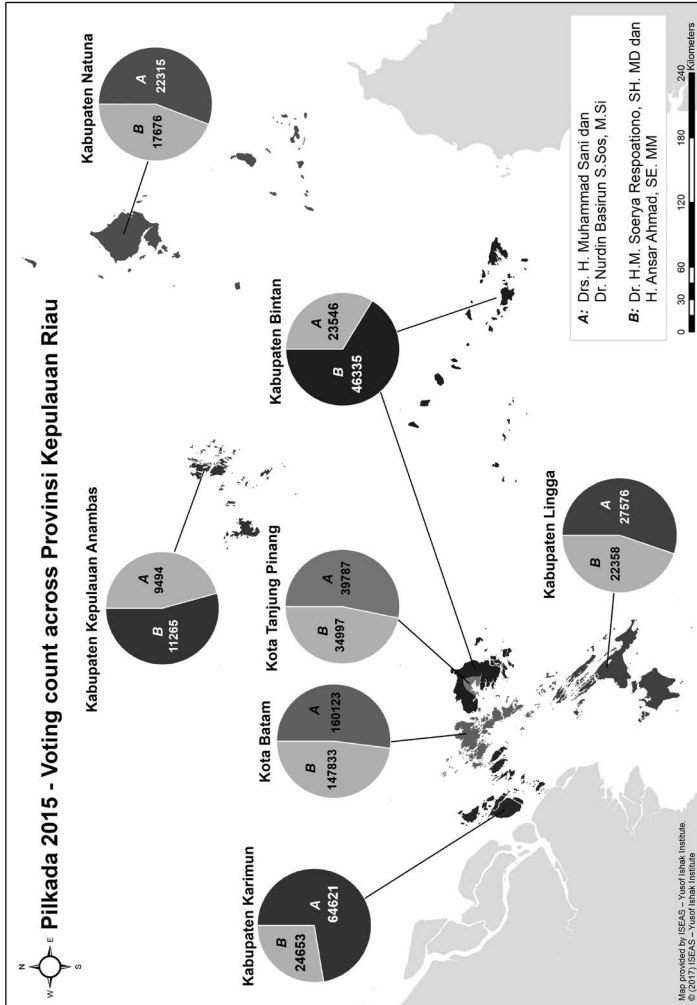
Much of the campaign dynamics also depended on the candidates’ assets. The four individuals made strategic use of their own standings in the campaign. Sani had run in three separate elections either as governor or vice-governor, and his success (he was vice-governor to Ismeth Abdullah in 2005–10) clearly indicated his electability. He was immensely popular amongst the indigenous Malays as *Bapak Melayu* (The Father of Malays) who often referred to themselves as “*anak Pak Sani*” (Pak Sani’s children). His age was however considered a disadvantage.

Although he came from outside Kepri (he is from Semarang in East Java), Soerya had been successful in creating a positive image as a hands-on and caring leader — acquiring the nickname “*Bapaknya Wong Cilik*”, or “The Father of Small People/Commoners”. However, he had

²⁶ Interview with Partai Golkar official, November 2016.

²⁷ Interview with Ady Muzardy, lecturer at Universitas Maritim Raja Haji Ali, March 2017.

Figure 2: Votes for Candidates by Regencies and Cities (2015 Gubernatorial Election in Kepri Province)



also gained a reputation as a *preman* (gangster) and leader of a “self-help” organization often employed to intimidate labour organizations.²⁸

In terms of programmes, the Sani-Nurdin pair (abbreviated as SANUR) ran a campaign that was formulated as an aspiration for “a prosperous Malay land that is noble in behaviour (*berakhlak mulia*), environmentally friendly, and successful in maritime affairs”.²⁹ Pair number two Soerya-Ansar Ahmad’s (abbreviated as SAH) platform was “(for) Riau Islands that is safe, prosper, modern, noble (*berakhlak*), and cultured, built on the principles of unity and cooperation”. An observer noted that SANUR’s platform was more attractive and catchy, and had resonance with President Joko Widodo’s own programme which also emphasized maritime development.³⁰ SANUR’s programmes resonated better with the locals also because of greater attention paid to issues such as the free trade zone and inter-regional connectivity — both of which were sensitive issues for voters worried about their own economic progress. These tactics proved successful as the first pair secured a total of 53.24 per cent of the votes, against the second pair’s 46.76 per cent.

Interviews with locals suggest that it would have been difficult for an outsider to win this election — a remark aimed at Soerya, who is Javanese.³¹ The first pair demonstrated their awareness of this sentiment and capitalized on it. A closer look at the results indicates that origin did

²⁸ See “Sani Versus Soerya: Pertarungan Putih versus Hitam (2)” [Sani Versus Soerya: The Battle between Black and White (2)], *kompasiana*, 9 May 2015 <https://www.kompasiana.com/oktavialubis/sani-versus-soerya-pertarungan-putih-versus-hitam-2_555310a06523bd490c16ff14>; also “Warga Batam Siaga Kerusuhan” [Batam Residents Alert for Riot], *kaskus* <<https://www.kaskus.co.id/thread/526726f4118b46200e000004/warga-batam-siaga-kerusuhan/>> (accessed 2 November 2017).

²⁹ “Inilah Visi dan Misi Muhammad Sani-Nurdin Basirun di Pilgub Kepri” [Here are the Vision and Mission of Muhammad Sani-Nurdin Basirun at Kepri’s Gubernatorial Election], *Indopolitika*, 3 September 2015 <<https://indopolitika.com/inilah-visi-dan-misi-muhammad-sani-nurdin-basirun-di-pilgub-kepri/>> (accessed 27 March 2017).

³⁰ Interview with Ady Muzardy, March 2017.

³¹ *Ibid.*

matter. The fact that Sani and Nurdin are Karimun natives seemed to have been a factor in their victory there. In addition, Sani's track record as governor of Tanjungpinang may have contributed to his victory. Conversely, Ansar Ahmad is from Bintan. Aside from Bintan, Anambas is the only region in Kepri where SAH won (see Figure 2).

If voter turnout is any indication, Kepri voters seemed very interested in their gubernatorial elections. The voter turnout in 2005 was 51.97 per cent. In 2010, it had gone up to 53.15 per cent, and in 2015, it had further improved to 55.41 per cent. However, a study has indicated that there is still some disappointment among voters over the lack of vigour and options in Kepri's local politics. Specifically, the study noticed a growing antipathy among locals over the lack of choices and over the smear campaign deployed by the candidates.³² Worth noting is the fact that the low turnout is far from being the lowest in Indonesia.³³

What is clear from Kepri's gubernatorial election in 2015 is that candidates and their teams have overwhelmed the role of political parties. Our discussion suggests that generally there is only a small pool of possible and electable candidates for local elections. The age of Sani (72 years) whipped up some resentment over the lack of alternative candidates, and his sudden death soon after inauguration did indeed leave the province without a vice-governor. Since Nurdin moved up as default successor. In rather similar fashion, the exit of Mayor Rudi from PD to Nasdem Party was deeply felt by PD in Batam, which now has to find a viable replacement to support in the next Batam mayoral election. Compounded by weak organizational capacity, dependence on figures

³² Beintan Boeskh Cakra May Hendra Putra, "Partisipasi Politik Masyarakat Kepulauan Riau pada Pemilihan Kepala Daerah Gubernur Periode 2015–2020" [Political Participation of Riau Islands Residents at the Gubernatorial Election for the 2015-2020 Period], *Jurnal*, Prodi Ilmu Administrasi Negara Fakultas Ilmu Sosial dan Ilmu Politik, Universitas Maritim Raja Ali Haji, Tanjungpinang 2016 <http://jurnal.umrah.ac.id/wp-content/uploads/gravity_forms/1-ec61c9cb232a03a96d0947c6478e525e/2016/08/JURNAL-BEINTAN-Copy.pdf>.

³³ The city of Medan recorded one of the lowest turnout in the 2015 pilkada, at 24.9 per cent.

has reduced the role of parties to a search for popular candidates. What this also reveals is the fact that the recruitment function of parties is limited, and they now snub grassroots recruitment and internal training as electoral mechanisms.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

It is clear that the current framework of electoral law, organizational requirements and voting trends demands a lot of the organizational capacity of political parties. The challenges are manifested in the unprofessional management found at the branch level, where the offices suffer from minimal staffing, and activities are erratic and dependent on the initiative of certain cadres. Rather unique to the province, the demographic gap between the provincial capital and main commercial city has created another bundle of challenges. Consequently, these organizational restrictions and the developing electoral dynamics that predominantly evolve around the candidates have reduced the role parties play to one about finding the most electable candidates. In turn, parties increasingly rely on the popularity and capacity of their chosen candidates to carry them through.

Although the ability of parties to sustain operations and to adjust to the realities of contemporary local politics should be noted, there have been negative impacts on Kepri's local politics that should not be downplayed. For one thing, individual leaders' administration and lifespan are usually shorter and less stable than those of well-institutionalized political organizations. Kepri Province certainly experienced this first hand with the death of Sani two months into his governorship. As governor Sani was elected based on his popularity, the implications of having a replacement who is less popular may result in a drop in the level of trust in the government. Such dissatisfaction may already be seen in the sense of disenfranchisement and the low electoral turnout.

Kepri Province being one of Indonesia's peripheral provinces with a relatively small population does not make it an important priority at the central offices of national parties.

With competition in much bigger electorates taking place closer to Jakarta, most prominently in Java, the central party offices would

naturally not be inclined to focus their attention on smaller and more far-flung provinces such as Kepri.

Overall, with the sorry state of their organization at the moment, it is highly unlikely that political parties in Kepri will be a game changer, even in local politics. They have grown reliant on a handful of individual leaders and are getting away with not doing much else.

APPENDIX A

Voting Result: Legislative Election, DPRD Riau Islands 2014

Parties	Votes	Percentage
Nasdem Party	2,365	2.50
PKB	3,846	4.05
PKS	5,520	5.83
PDI-P	19,442	20.55
Golkar	19,465	20.57
Gerindra	5,881	6.21
Demokrat	7,984	8.44
PAN	2,992	3.16
PPP	7,940	8.39
Hanura	15,741	16.63
PBB	1,711	1.81
PKPI	1,742	1.84

APPENDIX B

Comparison of numbers of registered voters and votes in Kepri Province's Gubernatorial Election 2015

Municipality/Regency	Registered Voters	Votes	Turnout Percentage
Bintan	99,424	72,973	73.40
Karimun	174,990	95,435	54.54
Anambas Islands	30,574	21,641	70.78
Batam	641,015	320,055	49.93
Tanjungpinang	146,211	77,961	53.32
Lingga	69,588	53,340	76.65
Natuna	51,995	42,459	81.66

Source: Election Commission (Komisi Pemilihan Umum, KPU).

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