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Electoral Patterns in Southeast Asia: The Limits to Engineering

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■ Introduction

Scholars of democratization and electoral reform have found fertile ground for inquiry in Southeast Asia, particularly over the past fifteen years or so. Democratization, de-democratization, and re-democratization, thoroughgoing or partial, might be considered something of a regional pastime. Even considering just changes to electoral institutions themselves—constituency delineation, voting rules, and the like—enough states in the region have experimented with both major and minor revisions of their electoral systems for Ben Reilly (2007) to write of an emerging, largely centripetal and majoritarian, ‘Asian model’. The objectives of such changes are generally some combination of reducing corruption, as by strengthening political parties and reducing the imperative of cultivating a ‘personal vote’; increasing accountability and representativeness; and facilitating more efficient, stable policy-making processes. Even bold amendments notwithstanding, aspects of these systems remain not only seemingly impervious to revision, but at odds with the aspirations of electoral engineers. If the end goal is a stable, representative, effective democracy, are Southeast Asian regimes on course to achieve that?

This paper will explore the potential and limits of electoral engineering, sketching briefly the levers available and commonly used, as well as the gaps in effort or amenability to ready improvement. Overall, I argue that since structures are more readily and measurably changed than behaviours, it is the former that receive more systematic attention and amendment. Nevertheless, how these rules function in practice varies with political culture, however amorphous a quality; with popular socialization towards an understanding of new modes of doing politics; and with the relative stakes, in terms of what elections actually decide. As such, if the region’s electoral systems require change, policymakers need to be more inventive in considering what to adjust

and how. A closer look at the actual process of elections on the ground in Indonesia with much-adjusted rules, and Malaysia, nearly impervious to structural change, with reference also to neighbouring states, will help to clarify what too-narrowly institutional approaches tend to miss.

■ Electoral Engineering: Tools and Objectives

By this point—after successive global waves of liberalization, authoritarian reversals, and institutional fine-tuning—electoral engineering really is a science. As a field, such engineering touches on a range of political institutions, particularly laws related to constituency structure, voting, and political parties. Its principle goals are to increase systemic stability, policy efficacy and efficiency, representation (or voter choice), inclusivity, and accountability. In practice, there tends to be a trade-off among attributes. For instance, a system of voting by proportional representation in multi-member districts may optimize the accurate translation of the percentage of the popular vote each party wins into the percentage of legislative seats each secures.¹ At the same time, that structure may leave a given voter uncertain to which representative to turn, should he or she require a legislator’s attention. Proportionally-elected, multi-member states facilitate inclusion of small parties, but complicate direct accountability of representatives to voters. Moreover, common measures of proportionality focus on ‘representation’ in procedural votes-to-seats terms, rather than in substantive terms, of proximity of specific preferences of voters and representatives, or in social or symbolic terms, of demographic correspondence between citizen and representative (Powell 2004). As for policy-making efficiency and government stability, veto player analysis (Tsebelis 1995; MacIntyre 2003) tells us that too many or too few empowered

¹ Croissant 2002: 329-33 details common mathematical formulae for calculating representativeness or disproportionality.

decision-makers may be a problem for passing and maintaining public policies. As such, policy efficiency may, for instance, run at cross-purposes with maximizing representation, should too many parties secure effective veto power.

The configuration Reilly identifies as taking root across much of East and Southeast Asia is mixed-member majoritarian: most representatives are elected from single-member districts and the rest, from a party list (Reilly 2007: 1354). Such rules are designed to be compensatory: the proportionally-elected share makes up for the disproportionality of the majoritarian segment. For instance, 80 per cent of seats in the Philippines' House of Representatives are elected via plurality (first-past-the-post) voting in single-member districts, generally representing catch-all (and largely interchangeable, weakly institutionalized) parties; the balance are chosen from a national list comprised of sectorally- or identity-defined parties (Reilly 2007: 1356). The aim is to boost representativeness with the party-list component, particularly of groups associated with People Power in the mid-1980s, while allowing Filipino voters to hold their territorially-designated legislators accountable at the constituency level. In 1997, Thailand introduced constitutional reforms with the same distribution of local constituency and national list candidates, although the parties both represent are more likely to overlap; the local members of parliament (MPs) were expected to focus on constituency service and development; the list MPs, on national-level issues (Reilly 2007: 1356).

Not all states in the region have adopted this general pattern. By introducing a system of Group Representation Constituencies (GRCs) in the mid-1980s, Singapore moved toward a substantially multi-member, rather than single-member, constituency system: most voters now elect a slate of candidates from one party, as a block. In practice, though, each member of that block has

primary responsibility for one ward (or prior single-member constituency, after accounting for some mutation of boundaries) within the multi-member GRC. Voting in this case remains majoritarian: the party that wins a GRC holds the full slate of seats, hence increasing rather than mitigating disproportionality. Recognizing that voters did want non-People's Action Party (PAP) voices in parliament, the PAP government moved instead to create non-electoral avenues to expand the range of parliamentarians. As a result, the top losers among opposition candidates are invited to serve as non-constituency members of parliament (NCMPs), while several leading lights from civil society, business, the arts, and other sectors are appointed nominated members of parliament (NMPs). NCMPs and NMPs may augment representativeness, but they offer no assurance of accountability. (See Tan 2013 for details and deeper analysis of these schemes.) The two states considered in depth here, Malaysia and Indonesia, employ the majoritarian component and the multi-member component of that 'Asian model', respectively, but not in the conjoint way the Philippines or Thailand does, allowing their implications to be probed separately.

However optimal in principle, in practice, well-functioning electoral rules rely upon institutionalized political parties, comprising a competitive, institutionalized party system (Mainwaring and Scully 1995; Randall and Svåsand 2002). If party lists are dubious, for instance, such as in a closed-list system representing the output of internecine payments and power-plays, voters may have good reason not to trust that the parties have selected and ranked the best possible candidates for the job—only the best-resourced or connected. Likewise, if one party is truly dominant, majoritarian single-member districts are prone to offer that party disproportionate benefit; in effect, incumbency advantage may be magnified by access to state machinery, media exposure, and other perquisites of long-term power. At a more basic level, if party loyalty

and/or discipline is weak, as is the case for most Filipino and Thai parties, rules that emphasize parties cannot be expected to play out quite as intended, either in terms of the degree of choice afforded to voters or in terms of the stability of outcomes achieved (e.g., if elected representatives are prone to ‘hop’ between parties or if winning coalitions are opportunistically fluid).

Electoral engineers have struggled to foster strong, cohesive, broadly inclusive parties in Asia, to supplant weak, fragmented, and/or narrowly framed parties, on the one hand, or on the other, unbalanced systems in which the authoritarian hegemon of the prior regime still has a leg up on contenders. Yet party institutionalization is difficult to force, whether for single parties or the party system as a whole. For instance, Indonesian reforms after the fall of the authoritarian New Order regime in 1998 required that all parties have branches and supporters in at least one-third of all provinces and in at least half the districts or municipalities in those provinces (Reilly 2007: 1362). Parties that fail to meet these requirements, or that then fail to meet an electoral threshold, are barred from contesting in subsequent elections. However, several have simply recombined and/or rebranded themselves to stay in the game.

Planners in both the Philippines and Thailand, too, have expressed preferences for reduced party fragmentation. However, the former state has done little to enforce that preference, beyond a threshold for party-list parties (those vying for the 20 per cent of seats elected proportionally nation-wide) to qualify for seats, whereas Thailand required cross-regional membership, a minimum number of members within six months of registering, a minimum period of party membership before an individual can stand for office under that party, and that any party seeking list seats pass a 5 per cent threshold (Reilly 2007: 1364-65). The Philippines has maintained its inchoate parties and ‘stubbornly under-institutionalized’ party system (Hicken forthcoming: ms519); Thailand has seen

multiple permutations of former prime minister Thaksin Shinawatra's personal vehicle (initially Thai Rak Thai; most recently Phua Thai), but only the Democrat Party can be said to be truly institutionalized otherwise (Kuhonta forthcoming). Arguably, more authoritarian features and the sequence of state and party development, rather than democratizing reforms per se, account for what strong party systems we do see in the region, as in Malaysia or the single-party-dominant Singapore or Vietnam (see the various contributions to Hicken and Kuhonta forthcoming). Such systems prioritize neither accountability nor representativeness, although they may take steps to ensure either or both, and they may still perform well in terms of policy efficacy and stability.

Perhaps most importantly, the final configuration to which these rules will give rise to is hard to determine or predict. Parties may be fairly distinct on certain issues, for instance, but converge on a common point with regard to certain policies, or a dominant personality may skew what seems structurally a depersonalized order. Malaysia's tripartite Alliance coalition, for example, represented a vertically-segmented, consociational approach to ensuring ethnic representation in its early days (Lijphart 2004). However, the coalition's expansion post-1969 into the many-party Barisan Nasional (National Front), followed by then-Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad's centralizing zeal in the 1980s-90s, fundamentally shifted the locus of decision-making power in practice even more than in principle (Weiss 2013). Moreover, the strength and autonomy of the bureaucracy may have at least as great an impact on policy efficacy as party system attributes do; for instance, consider Riggs's (1966) conceptualization of Thailand as a 'bureaucratic polity'. Not many voters behave in clearly 'rational' ways, at least understood in 'economic' or materialist terms, qua Downs (1957), particularly given uneven access to information, different degrees of integration into formal economic and political structures, and persuasive affective ties.

In other words, revised and refined rules and provisions are well and good, but they may not suffice to reshape accountability or representation to the extent intended. Extra-institutional dimensions—or attributes simply not readily addressed by engineering or by specific reforms commonly embraced—may undermine the potential to engineer away systemic failings. Two of the most salient of these dimensions are extra-party networks (or relationships subsumed within, but not intrinsic to a given party) and the various forms of material, sometimes-immediate inducements that may bolster support for a specific patron or political machine.

On a macro level, electoral engineers' efforts focus on shifting institutions, but not behaviour; the underlying assumption is that behaviour will follow structure. For that reason, these efforts' impact is necessarily constrained. Such implications are especially obvious when it comes to rules aimed at agglomerating or otherwise restructuring political parties. For instance, in Thailand, the Philippines, and Indonesia alike, parties have changed names to circumvent restrictions, politicians have hopped from one vehicle to the next, or coalitional dynamics have discouraged forms of differentiation. A better sense of what might represent a revised locus for attention requires a closer look at where rules and behaviour run askew.

■ Less Institutional Dimensions: Networks and Inducements

A more instrumental take would begin by asking why suboptimal parties and electoral systems matter: what difference would well-institutionalized parties and electoral rules calibrated appropriately to balance representativeness,

accountability, stability, and policymaking efficacy make to political life? Or to put that question differently: how much of representativeness, accountability, stability, and efficacy could a well-tuned electoral system ensure? A comparison of dynamics on the ground in Indonesia and Malaysia suggests where an overly institutional lens falls short.²

These two systems diverge in key ways: Malaysia has strong, institutionalized parties in a fairly well-institutionalized party system; Indonesia does not. In consequence, while the election effort is primarily party-driven in Malaysia, Indonesian candidates rely far more heavily on their own ‘success teams’ to run their campaigns. Indonesia has multi-member districts with open party lists and elections at multiple administrative levels; Malaysia’s are single-member constituencies, with elections only at state and federal levels. Indonesia’s president and vice president are currently directly elected, separately from the federal parliament (though the parliament itself used to select the executive; these elections will be simultaneous as of the next polls in 2019). Malaysia follows the classic parliamentary pattern of a prime minister and cabinet selected from among either elected MPs or appointed members of the less empowered upper house. Indonesia allows a fair amount of public scrutiny of the polling process and offers several channels for monitoring the process and

² This portion of the paper relies heavily on field research conducted by the author, several colleagues as core investigators, and a much larger extended team of field researchers during the 2013 Malaysian and 2014 Indonesian legislative election campaigns. Funding and administrative support came primarily from University of Malaya for the effort in Malaysia and from an Australian Research Council grant, with additional funding from the Canberra-based Centre for Democratic Institutions and logistical support from Universitas Gadjah Madah, for the research in Indonesia. Methods were largely qualitative, especially interviews (with candidates, campaign managers and members, election commission officials, and others) and observation of campaign events, coupled with targeted surveys and media (especially social/online media) analysis. The research is part of a larger, four-country study of political networks and ‘money politics’ in the context of Southeast Asian electoral politics.

contesting outcomes; Malaysia's elections are far less open to observation or challenge.

Regardless, what voters seem to look for, and what candidates tend to deliver, converges in the two cases, suggesting clear limits to how much rules matter. Both systems prioritize what is termed in Indonesia *figur* ('figure'): the candidate him/herself—even if the vehicle or equipment for communicating that persona and pursuing election differ. And both highlight, especially in legislative elections, *janji ditepati* ('promises kept'), as the BN slogan for the 2013 elections emphasized, or in Indonesia, *bukti bukan janji* ('proof not promises')—the material benefits the contenders have already provided signals what they are likely yet to deliver. As a result, in both these states, candidates emphasize the act of going to the ground (*turun padang*) and showing themselves to be both approachable and personally known (*silaturahmi*, befriending voters, is the term often used in Indonesia; President Joko Widodo's, or Jokowi's, signature *blusukan*, or low-key visits to mingle amongst the voters, exemplifies this approach).

These practices highlight the importance of political culture and prevailing norms: what voters look for, how they evaluate prospective representatives, and how those candidates present themselves may be shaped by deeply particularistic and personalized metrics, so long as electoral rules allow any leeway for a 'personal', as opposed to purely partisan, vote. At the same time, such practices both serve to uncover a map of political networks through which candidates navigate their target terrain, and may privilege or reinforce a fairly short-term time horizon, if they encourage, say, a one-time stocktaking or moment of claiming rewards.

Political networks

Even where parties are strong and well-rooted, candidates (and elected representatives, after the polls) rely upon a range of political networks through which to connect with voters/constituents. In both these states, the salience of ascriptive ethnic and religious identities in particular, and of networks structured along these lines, suggests the extent to which parties are only part of the story,³ and to which those aspects of party development easiest to regulate (e.g., the share of provinces in which a party must have a presence) may miss the point. At the same time, party-based networks and teams matter much more in Malaysia than in Indonesia, and structure mobilization and voters' choices in more thorough ways—not least since voters are rarely if ever asked in Malaysia to choose among representatives of a given party or even coalition.

Lastly, we see real differences in how electoral politics and the broader political sphere, including civil society, overlap. Women, for instance, feature differently, playing a more open role in Indonesia, one might argue, not least given their mandated 30 per cent representation on party ballots, but perform a more pivotal behind-the-scenes role for the core Malaysian parties. Additionally, because of the system of local elections, elected representatives include individuals fundamentally closer to the people in Indonesia than in Malaysia, perhaps accentuating the role of such local opinion-setters as the heads of neighbourhood associations (*rukun tetangga*, RT, and *rukun warga*, RW).

Indonesian campaigns are usually run by the candidate's *tim sukses* (success team, sometimes termed instead a volunteer team, winning team, or something

³ The core parties of Malaysia's BN are 'communal'—ethnic—in orientation, but no ethnic community is fully unified behind any one party.

similar). Ideally, team members would all be trusted loyalists, but in practice, some share of members are mere opportunists, and possibly unreliable (Aspinall 2014). In consequence, most candidates use a ‘verification’ or ‘shadow’ team, to cross-check the data collected and payments purportedly distributed by success team members. These teams generally mirror the administrative structure for the constituency, with a coordinator at each level (e.g., regency, subdistrict, village) where the lowest-level team members may be responsible for ten to fifty households. Team members are drawn from whatever networks the candidate has available, but the party is likely to be central only to local party luminaries, if at all. Rather, the Islamist mass organisations Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) or Muhammadiyah, occupation-based groupings for farmers or fishers, local religious institutions or schools, activists of various sorts, less conventional groupings like heavy metal fans and Vespa-riders, as well as extended family tend to structure the campaign effort. These networks overlap; for instance, some families put up multiple candidates, not necessarily under the same party. Moreover, nearly all candidates we met in West Java, for example, seem to rely upon their own slice of the NU network—but the sheer ubiquity of NU ties renders them indecisive. Also, candidates who had switched parties—which was not uncommon, given the similarly vague platforms and pitch of most parties—tended to bring their team with them, further signalling the paucity of party oversight.

Such a system is perhaps inevitably particularistic in orientation: what the party as a whole proclaims cannot be expected to feature heavily when the party per se is so peripheral to the campaign effort. Instead, candidates should be expected to style their promises to appeal to the specific local network. Such a system, designed to optimize both representativeness and accountability, may do rather little to augment either, being instituted prior to the solidification of meaningfully differentiated, solidly-grounded parties. Meanwhile, the rules

Indonesia crafted to foster such parties, focusing on geographic coverage, are arguably undercut by the overly candidate-centred leanings of electoral laws, which ultimately empower generally not territorially specific, extra-party networks.

In Malaysia, on the other hand, parties and pre-formed coalitions are central to the campaign effort. Nevertheless, voters overall still expect a notably clientelistic relationship with their elected representatives. While legislators grumble about popular expectations that their real job is to repair streetlights and unclog drains, rather than to legislate,⁴ not to mention being a fixture at endless weddings, funerals, and other festive or weighty events, such activities ultimately consume their campaign time and if they win, consume countless evenings and weekends thereafter. As such, candidates here, too, draw upon whatever networks they have available on the ground: various forms of non-governmental organisations, localized sub-ethnic-group organisations, resident associations, and so forth.

But the key conduit, especially for the largest and oldest parties (e.g., the core components of the BN, or Parti Islam SeMalaysia, PAS, on the opposition Pakatan Rakyat side) is grassroots canvassing, substantially by the parties' women's wings—approaching voters door-to-door, as well as (or in conjunction with) the candidate's own market walkabouts, mosque and temple visits, and

⁴ For instance, Democratic Action Party (DAP) MP Liew Chin Tong's reasoned lament, 'The role of an MP', *Malaysian Insider*, 27 Dec. 2013 (<http://www.themalaysianinsider.com/sideviews/article/the-role-of-an-mp-liew-chin-tong>). The occasional MP may be able to break the mould—for example, 30-plus-year veteran DAP MP Tan Seng Giaw in the Kuala Lumpur district of Kepong, who refuses to focus on repairing potholes and the like—but even he emphasizes his ready availability, any time, to his constituents, and how well he knows them personally after such long service (see Choong 2014: 27-29).

the like, much as in Indonesia. (See the contributions to Weiss 2014 for details.) Largely one-on-one contests allow parties to feature far more heavily in Malaysia than in Indonesia, meaning that while candidates in both states do campaign to at least some extent via extra-party networks, programmatic party messages should be expected to carry more resonance in Malaysia. The result may be a less narrowly-pitched representation, but higher-level accountability, since candidates have impetus to campaign (and may well be appraised) simultaneously on particularistic and more overarching grounds.

Material inducements

Macro-level programmes can be a hard sell among voters who need immediate relief or are seeking concrete payoffs. The channel through which a given candidate approaches voters is not the only relevant factor in a given voter's decision, especially when, as noted, choosing by affiliation may only narrow down the field, instead of identifying a single worthy contender. Rather, what the candidate specifically delivers and promises matters too, complemented far more in Malaysia than in Indonesia by what the party offers, which is more likely programmatic in nature. In both cases, it is the 'club goods'—meso-particularistic provisions targeted at a particular subset of voters (Hutchcroft 2014: 177-78)—and not individual vote-buying that seems to carry the expectation of changing votes. That pattern holds true even when individual payments are given, which is seemingly more common in Indonesia than Malaysia. In both cases, less-developed areas seemed more prone to attempted retail vote-buying than more middle- or upper-class areas. Perhaps that bias signals that past experiences of neglect has discouraged voters from getting their hopes up of significant investment after the elections. Or, the disparity may represent just the greater marginal benefit of a comparatively small payment in rural/poorer than urban/wealthier areas. The resulting time horizon

would simply encourage taking what is offered in the moment rather than counting on the fulfilment of promised rewards.

Given the different positioning of candidates vis-à-vis parties and the competition in Malaysia and Indonesia, it seems especially revealing that the sort of inducements offered in both were in fact quite closely parallel, even if the relative salience of each category varied. While material inducements were clearly central to both elections, the more candidate-centred system in Indonesia favoured more micro-level appeals than did the more party-centred Malaysian system. In either case though, this factor perverts expectations of accountability and representativeness tied to electoral rules per se, except inasmuch as Malaysia's single-member majoritarian system encourages parties to duke it out, rather than candidates within parties, as in Indonesia's multi-member proportional system.

For Malaysia, inducements fell into five categories. The first, expected and intended to do little more than build goodwill and name-recognition, were token 'sweets and treats', from t-shirts to water bottles and party flags, all of which double as party/candidate advertising. (In fact, Pakatan Rakyat campaigns often sold rather than gave away these items, effectively profiting from their own advertising, thanks to the faddish appeal of Pakatan trinkets and togs.) The second category was equally micro-particularistic (e.g., individual-level), but less about party branding per se: meals, consumable goods such as sacks of rice (albeit clearly marked with Prime Minister Najib's or another leader's visage), and transportation allowances for polling day, as well as hard-to-reproach assistance for the poor or needy (well-publicized, of course). Both coalitions relied heavily upon outside sponsors, whether to organize events or to contribute the items disseminated. The exercise thus also served to prove or cement the loyalty of local businesses, 'supporter clubs', and others.

Third, and generally expected to carry the most impact in terms of swaying votes, were meso-particularistic development projects, delivered (sometimes mid-campaign) or promised for the next term, in which the incumbent BN had a clear advantage: low-cost housing flats, irrigation schemes, public lighting projects, grants for community centres, and so on. These projects targeted both voters who might benefit from the developments and/or follow-on economic growth, and contractors who could expect a share in these projects. The fourth category were programmatic financial or developmental inducements, again delivered or promised—most notably, means-tested distributions under the BN government’s Bantuan Rakyat 1Malaysia (1Malaysia People’s Aid) scheme, or a spate of pro-middle class and pro-poor policies touted in Pakatan’s coalition platform. The fifth and final category, outright vote-buying, persists, but both observations and surveys suggest the practice was not widespread—and even where it happened (for instance, vouchers given to voters in Penang, redeemable for cash should BN win), this tactic was one among several, thus seemingly not expected to be all that independently potent (Weiss 2014a: 11-13).

In Indonesia, Aspinall identifies three core patterns for patronage distributed—and again, the electoral system there might be expected to deemphasize more programmatic, party-centred appeals, at least apart from presidential elections (Aspinall 2014: 104-6). As he notes, patronage distribution is overtly at the centre of most candidates’ campaigns under the present system. While similarly ubiquitous in Malaysia, distributions in the latter are more likely to be couched in programmatic language (e.g., as local evidence of a developmentalist ethos, rather than simply as what is termed elsewhere, ‘pork-barrel’ politics). Central to the efforts in Indonesia are success teams’ detailed lists of voters, including

not just contact information and relevant demographic details, but also those truly committed and/or what each has received.

The first category of patronage Aspinall notes as central are collective gifts, in cash or in kind, such as to local sports clubs, women's groups, religious bodies, or farmers' cooperatives. This category aligns most closely with the third category for Malaysia, above, development grants, but those were more frequently through (BN) government channels—not that Malaysian candidates were immune to on-the-spot, often out-of-pocket requests to support this or that school or mosque or sports event. (Indeed, such small, collectively-targeted payments may consume the bulk of state legislators' limited constituency development funds once in office, and take the form of near-entitlements.) Even candidates staunchly opposed to 'money politics' in Indonesia may stomach this sort of payment, both because it is collective rather than individual in form, and because of its function as community development assistance and/or alms. Regardless, as candidates themselves noted, such collective gifts, while expensive, may not yield an especially high rate of return in terms of votes, especially when given by already-well-known candidates (e.g., who could benefit less from simple name-recognition payoffs). Incumbents, though, who could point to an ongoing stream of collective projects and promise more of the same, benefited more from this sort of patronage.

Second are small *bingkisan*: token souvenirs to remind the voter of that candidate—either quasi-useful knick-knacks like keychains and calendars with the candidate's name, image, party, and perhaps an image of a ballot, to demonstrate precisely how to vote for that individual, or often specifically religious paraphernalia, from women's headscarves to prayer books, to invoke not just the candidate's image, but also a sense of specifically moral obligation to reciprocate his or her generosity. Among these gifts are the same sort of

consumables as in the second category for Malaysia—instant noodles, rice, cooking oil, personal care products, and the like, generally distributed by team members rather than candidates themselves (but packaged with a flier or trinkets signalling the gift’s provenance), as well as sometimes substantial ‘door prizes’ at campaign events.

The third category—aligned with the fifth in Malaysia, but far more ubiquitous—comprises of individual cash payments to voters, generally delivered in the final week of the campaign or even the morning of the election. While market rates vary by administrative level, relative wealth of the area and voter, and specific candidate, Aspinall notes an average for 2014 of approximately 100,000-150,000 rupiah (USD10-15) per voter. Candidates seemed more inclined to see these payments as morally/legally dubious (especially the polling day *serangan fajar*, ‘dawn attack’) than the trinkets noted above—which can be seen to fit within a culture of gift-giving. Even so, payments were common, and near-universal in some areas. Many of them were sufficiently small and targeted at core rather than swing voters that they probably functioned more to urge voters to turn out to vote than to actually change many votes, apart from perhaps parrying counter-payments from rivals.

Differentiating among candidates and parties

In general, a single-member-district-based, majoritarian system would seem especially conducive to the cultivation of a personal vote. Voters know ‘their’ representative; the real benefit of this system is the potential it offers for accountability. And yet Malaysia arguably offers a more party-centred system, allowing a greater role for ideology and programmatic goals, advanced and sustained by parties even if less by individual candidates as they shake hands and dispense petty largesse. The reasons for this disparity lie in the place of

Malaysian parties, on the one hand, and the specific nature of Indonesian voting rules, on the other.

Parties in Malaysia dominate the electoral process. On the one hand, the institutionalization of these parties means voters identify with and can distinguish among the different options on offer: parties offer (as they ideally should) something of a shortcut in parsing competing platforms, as it is not necessary for a voter to look too deeply into the policy stances of any specific candidate, beyond those of the candidate's party.⁵ For one thing, it is the parties that decide who stands for office and where they do so; these decisions are made via intra-party negotiations and in the course of inter-partner coalition negotiations. Once placed to contest, candidates rely heavily on their party, especially on the BN side, for material and logistical support for their campaign.⁶ In office, those candidates elected are subjected to a firm whip; party discipline and a high degree of centralization of decision-making precludes much in the way of policy innovation from the backbenches, even among BN MPs. Even so, while parties represent themselves in terms of ideology and policy, what candidates (especially, but not only, on the BN side) said and did during the campaign suggests that voters still make their decision largely on the basis of what the specific candidate does or will do on the ground.

⁵ Downs presents this function as a key one for parties, by simplifying the information available to rational, but information-deprived or -deluged voters. Party ideologies, he suggests, help the voter 'focus attention in the differences between parties; therefore, they can be used as samples of all the differentiating stands' (1955: 141).

⁶ Malaysia's Election Commission keeps tabs only on what each candidate spends him/herself. At least for BN candidates (rarely for Pakatan or prior opposition parties), the party's financial contribution may be more substantial—and especially for Pakatan candidates in 2013, so were donations from (often anonymous) supporters. Those expenditures are hardly tracked, making actual and relative extent of financial dependence on party machines hard to gauge with certainty.

Meanwhile, changes within the last decade in Indonesia's electoral system have served, perhaps perversely, to weaken parties' sway. Indonesia's 2004 elections saw a closed list multi-member system; while a candidate could be elected directly by securing sufficient individual votes to meet the quota required for a seat (determined by the number of seats available versus the total votes cast), only two candidates did so. The rest were elected via votes for the party, with seats distributed per *nomor urut*, or each candidate's rank order on the ballot. Just before the 2009 elections, that system changed. Voters could now mark their ballot for a party, an individual, or both (so long as from the same party), but the party's ranking was essentially meaningless: whichever candidates on the list garner the highest numbers of personal votes get the party's seats, still determined by the same quota. This open-list system held for the 2014 elections, but this time, candidates had had time to prepare, cultivating individual rather than party support.

On the one hand, parties scramble to find sufficient candidates to fill their ballots—not least because one in three candidates were required to be women—often requiring payment from would-be candidates and generally offering little or no campaign assistance. That opportunism within most or all parties virtually precludes a coherent party position or image (though Parti Keadilan Sejahtera, the Islamist-oriented Prosperous Justice Party, is generally considered more cohesive and programmatic than its rivals, and one could identify distinctions between, for instance, 'pluralistic' and nationalist versus Islamist parties). On the other hand, most candidates assured us that their stiffest competition was from members of their own party. A locally strong party might expect to win, say, three seats in an eight-seat provincial legislature, yet will field its full complement of nine candidates there, so as to maximize votes cast for the party. (The rules allow the one additional candidate, to help boost party vote totals.)

That practice means all the candidates from, say, Jokowi's Partai Demokrasi Indonesia-Perjuangan (PDI-P) contest against each other, claiming the same party backing and local party base, as well as against candidates from other parties, who may be less closely comparable (setting aside the frequently opportunistic and seemingly haphazard alignment of candidates and their party vehicles). Trumpeting a party line could not be expected to get a candidate far, even where party campaign coordinators at least attempted to demarcate territorial 'zones' in which each candidate would focus.

The end result in both cases is a gap—clearly deeper in Indonesia than Malaysia—between how parties present choices to voters, and how voters actually make their decisions. This gap takes at least two key forms. The first is the distinction between a personal vote and a party vote: when a Malaysian voter chooses a BN candidate from the United Malays National Organisation (UMNO), for instance, is she casting her vote for that party or for the specific representative of the party standing in her area? What actually reels in the votes: UMNO's message of Malay rights and/or multiracial stability, or the fact that candidate X is a cabinet member with clout to bring a bridge, hospital, or university to the district? Sometimes that problematic is very clear. When Japan shifted in 1994 from its primarily single non-transferable vote (SNTV) system to a mixture of single-member majoritarianism and closed-list regional proportional representation, the shift meant instead of competing against others in their own party, and hence through emphasizing personal appeals, candidates were able to run based on party identity (Reed 1994). When a voter is choosing between candidates from UMNO and the also overwhelmingly Malay PAS—whose championing of Islam is demographically tantamount to Malay-centrism—the specific weighting of person versus party may be far less clear.

The second form is the common rhetorical difference between how the party differentiates itself from competitors (tropes of good governance, cleanliness, and economic policies, for instance) and how it actually secures individuals' support. The most local of issues or attention, including through small gifts or other inducements, might 'prove' commitment in the way abstract, national-level promises simply cannot, even when orthogonal to the party's ideological premise and/or really not different from one party to the next. While this dilemma is perhaps especially keen for programmatic parties that really do seek to run on messages of governance, industrialization, or whatever else, more overtly charismatic or clientelistic parties face the same challenge of both reifying the party and promoting specific candidates.

Implications

However pessimistic in terms of how much institutional engineering can accomplish, this assessment should not be taken to suggest that electoral rules are meaningless. As the effects of recent amendments to voting procedures in Indonesia suggest, those rules carry real impact. Rather, it suggests that we should temper our expectations of what amending these rules might accomplish, even as we take seriously questions of the sequencing of reforms and extra-institutional dynamics.

The patterns outlined above foreground the question of what is cultural or structural. That distinction is hard to disentangle—given the many dynamics simultaneously in effect, it is invariably difficult to parse out which theory of causation is most germane, and under what circumstances. For instance, both the Malaysian and Indonesian systems are marked by clientelism, in the form of personal, hierarchical, iterated, and mutual ties (Scott 1972: 92-93), but the networks and forms of patronage upon which they rely are different.

Or to expand the analogy: by some measures, Singapore's PAP is deeply clientelistic. Its MPs spend long hours each week engaged in one-on-one constituency service, doing their best to meet the specific needs and concerns of individual voters, who come to see their MP as their patron in a very basic way. And yet what these MPs dispense is rarely 'patronage', in the sense of a contingent exchange (Stokes et al. 2013: chap. 1); rather, they primarily ensure broad-based PAP-government programs reach their intended beneficiaries, while also distributing moderate amounts of stop-gap direct welfare assistance, via party or parastatal channels. In part, the PAP's perennial rule has made this model the norm—even as constituents do come to 'meet the people sessions' in hopes of securing special favours, they may leave disappointed or with a fairly boilerplate letter to whichever government agency is germane. In part, too, structure determines this pattern of interaction, from the specific positions MPs hold in local administrative bodies (for instance, Town Councils), to the diligence and potency of the Elections Department and Corrupt Practices Investigation Bureau. In other words, in terms of extant networks and aspirations, political culture matters, as well as for popular socialization towards an understanding of new modes of doing politics, but it is no more the whole story than mere legal rules are.

Moreover, the same rules will function differently across contexts, not merely for cultural reasons, but because contemporary electoral engineering invariably is layered atop earlier modes. For instance, multi-member districts play out differently in terms of electoral effects depending on where the party system stands at the time these constituencies are introduced. Had Indonesian parties been stronger and more clearly, stably differentiated by the time the current multi-member system came into play, those parties would likely have been better equipped to coordinate and manage their candidates' campaigns. For

instance, they may have been better able to enforce ‘zonification’, such that each candidate focuses on his or her own territorial slice and not on poaching personal votes from ballot-mates. By the same token, were the PAP not so very much stronger than its opponents at the time GRCs were introduced in Singapore, the new system would simply change the nature of the game, but not necessarily function to shut out the opposition and unduly place the advantage with the well-resourced PAP, as critics allege.

Lastly, the intermeshing of rules, norms, and expectations matters for voter participation and the perceived legitimacy of electoral processes. Indonesia’s supposedly state-of-the-art electoral system has not been able to overcome the problem of *golput*, or abstention from voting, for instance. The case raises thorny questions, as in other, more long-established democracies, of what level of turnout is necessary for the results to be deemed ‘democratically’ achieved. The more strident tone and pace of Malaysia’s (shorter, unpredictably timed) electoral campaign, coupled with widespread doubt as to the probity of the process and the autonomy and integrity of the Elections Commission (most obviously, massive ‘Black 505’ protests after the 5 May 2013 elections, alleging gross malfeasance) suggest the fear of many voters that even this state’s relatively straightforward voting rules may be subject to abuse. The openly stated norm that winning the majority of seats (even if this time, not the majority of popular votes) confers a firm mandate further raises the spectacle of ‘wasted’ votes. Widely disparate constituency sizes, seemingly gerrymandered for BN advantage, further impugn not just objective assessments of the fairness of the system, but also levels of its legitimacy and support.

In other words, electoral engineering is a necessary part of democratic development. Both Indonesia and Malaysia, for instance, could arguably benefit from some level of amendment to their electoral systems, to approach more

closely the balance of representation, accountability, efficacy, and stability any democracy worth its salt seeks. At the same time, the notion of an ‘Asian model’—really, any common model—should raise red flags. Rules are layered atop context; structures, atop engrained behaviours. Without assuming any necessary teleology in party development or democratic ‘maturity’, rule-setters must take into account what the likely stumbling blocks to ‘success’ in that particular context might be, and perhaps look more to less institutional remedies such as voter civic education and more aggressive election-monitoring instead of more heavy-handed structural revisions, however well-grounded these are in transnational conventional wisdom.

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