




The Dynamics of the Election System during the New Order Period in Indonesia (Between Stability and Limitations of Democracy)

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Abstract

This article examines the dynamics of Indonesia's electoral system during the New Order era, focusing on the tension between the pursuit of political stability and the limited application of democratic principles. During this period, elections were often tightly regulated to ensure the desired outcome for the regime, which tended to retain power. On the one hand, the New Order government sought to create political stability through strong control of the electoral process, including manipulation of results, restrictions on political participation and the use of a dominant party machine. On the other hand, this approach resulted in significant restrictions on the development of democracy in Indonesia, inhibiting genuine political representation and free speech. This article explores how the New Order electoral system contributed to political stability while also creating serious limitations on democratic practice, as well as its long-term impact on Indonesia's political development.

Keywords: New Order, Electoral System, Political Stability, Limitations Of Democracy

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INTRODUCTION

Democracy is a system of government in which the people participate in the management of the government by sending their representatives (Basuki, 2020). General elections are the mechanism used to elect representatives who will be part of the government, with the task of conveying the aspirations of the people and upholding their mandate for the achievement of prosperity and welfare (Fung, 2015). In general, elections are a manifestation of the concept of democracy that guarantees people's sovereignty, freedom of speech, equality in all aspects, and justice that must be upheld by state officials (Kruikemeier, 2014).

At the beginning of the New Order, following the military coup that overthrew the Soekarno government, there was a major change in the direction of Indonesian politics (Damayanti et al., 2024). The electoral system was modified to reflect tighter government control, which in turn raised critical questions about political legitimacy and public participation (Erlina, 2023). The dominance of the Golkar Party as the ruling party with the full support of the government, as well as the involvement of the military in the political process, characterized the New Order electoral system (Purba, 2021). The New Order electoral system created significant challenges for political pluralism and opposition (Spoon & West, 2020). Parties that disagreed with the government could face dissolution

or suppression, resulting in a less dynamic political landscape (Jedwab, 2001). It also created inequalities in political competition, ensuring the continuation of ruling power.

The New Order was characterized by authoritarianism (ANTONCHENKO, 2022), restrictions on political freedoms, and strict surveillance of any form of political opposition (Lasswell, 1951). The government also emphasized economic development, which is often credited with increasing Indonesia's economic growth. However, economic success was also matched by high levels of human rights violations and corruption (Cammack & Feener, 2017). In the New Order power paradigm, (political) stability was necessary to facilitate (economic) development agendas. Therefore, political restructuring became an important keyword in the structuring or development of the New Order's political system based on centralism in the hope that economic development could run acceleratively (Greitens, 2020). This format of centralism ultimately produced a style of authoritarianism political power over a period of 32 years, although Soeharto's power was eventually overthrown by the student movement and other civil elements in 1998.

METHOD

This research uses a qualitative approach (Mayring, 2022) with a historical study method and document analysis to understand the dynamics of the electoral system during the New Order period in Indonesia (Inbadas, 2016). Data is collected through literature searches, including books, scientific articles, archives, and official documents related to the electoral system, government policies, and political conditions during the New Order period (Creswell, 2014). Data analysis was conducted in a descriptive-analytical manner, in which the researcher explored and interpreted various historical sources to identify patterns, themes and factors that influenced the implementation of elections during this period. The results of the analysis were then compiled to illustrate how the New Order government's efforts to create political stability had an impact on the limitations in the implementation of democracy, as well as to examine its long-term implications for political development in Indonesia.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

1. Political Party Dynamics

In the reform era, the democratic system in Indonesia entered a new era, especially with the emergence of a multi-party system in general elections in Indonesia. This multi-party system is intended to ensure that all political parties can participate in democracy (Simon, 1999). For a number of countries that implement or claim themselves as democratic countries (sovereignty of the people), general elections are indeed considered as the symbol as well as the main and first benchmark of democracy. A good party system determines the operation of the constitutional system based on the principle of checks and balances in a broad sense (Bustamin & Jaya, 2019). Conversely, the effective functioning of the State's institutional functions according to the principle of *checks and balances* based on the constitution determines the quality of the party system and the democratic mechanism developed by a State (Aziz & Ristawati, 2020).

A multi-party system is a type of party system in which more than two political parties compete in elections for power (Tschersich & Kok, 2022). Andrew Heywood states that the political party system is the network of interactions between parties in the political system. The keyword to distinguish party system types is the number of political parties that exist. Duverger (1954) introduced this parameter, distinguishing political systems into three: single-party systems, two-party systems, and multi-party systems. If there is one dominant party, it is a single-party system; two parties, a two-party system; more than two, a multi-party system (Erlina, 2023).

The party system is a continuous and stable pattern of competition, which is always evident in every country's electoral process (Martanto, 2021). The party system depends

on the type of political system that exists in a country (Hutagalung & Gloriawati, 2022). In addition, it also depends on the diversity of ethnic, religious, economic, and political currents that exist. The greater the degree of diversity of interests in the country, the greater the number of political parties.

A multi-party system is usually reinforced by a balanced representation electoral system that provides ample opportunity for the growth of small parties and groups (Al Izzati et al., 2024). Since the beginning of the Reform Order, the system of limiting the participants of the general election to only the Golkar party and two political parties was ended, the Reform Order changed it to a multi-party system in order to open up as widely as possible for the representation of all groups of Indonesian people (M. Syafi'i Maarif, 1996). The number of parties swelled to dozens as it is today.

New Order elections appeared to be an obligation rather than a citizen's right. The people's choice was already determined by the authorities, namely organizations that were based on Pancasila and supported the trilogy of development (Dimiyati et al., 2021). This concept was disseminated to all mass media, including newspapers. News in newspapers receives strict control, where the discourse conveyed must support government policies in order to maintain national stability and security (Habbodin & Firdaus, 2022). Then, the concept of floating masses stated in the Law on Political Parties and Golkar, made Golkar a superior election organization compared to PPP and PDI, both in socialization and mobilization. Golkar has a network up to the village or sub-district through bureaucratic apparatuses (lurah, pamong desa, camat, bupati, teachers to ministers) and the military can easily mobilize to socialize Golkar's development success (Nuraini, 2010).

Broadly speaking, the implementation of general elections during the New Order era can be said that political power was in the hands of the ruler, meaning that the ruler was dominated by the power of Golkar as the winning party in every election during the New Order era (Fadillah, 2022). Where Golkar always acts as the majority voice supported by the community both from among the ABRI, civil servants and the ruling regime itself, namely the Golongan Karya which always tries to keep winning in every general election.

2. Election Process

The first election of the New Order period was held on July 5, 1971 with the principle of direct, general, free and secret (*Luber*) on the basis of Law Number 15 of 1969 concerning the General Election of Members of the Consultative Body/People's Representatives and Law Number 16 of 1969 concerning the Structure and Position of the MPR, DPR and DPRD. The 1971 election used a proportional system with a closed list of candidates, which was followed by 9 political parties and 1 community organization (Ainur Ropik, 2013).

The *second election* of the New Order period was held on May 2, 1977 with Law No. 4 of 1975 concerning Amendments to Law No. 15 the system used was proportional. The *third election* of the New Order period was held on May 4, 1982 with the principle of direct, general, free, secret (*Luber*) based on Law Number 2 of 1980 concerning Amendments to Law Number 4 of 1975 concerning Amendments to Law Number 15 of 1969 concerning General Elections for Members of the Consultative Body / People's Representatives. The elections used a proportional system with a closed list of candidates followed by 2 political parties and 1 Golkar.

The *fourth general election* during the New Order era was held on April 23, 1987 with the principle of direct, general, free, and secret (*Luber*) based on Law Number 1 of 1985 concerning Amendments to Law Number 2 of 1980 which amended Law Number 4 of 1975 concerning Amendments to Law Number 15 of 1969 concerning the General Election of Members of the Consultative Body/People's Representatives. In the 1987 elections, the Golkar Party experienced a significant victory, while the United Development Party (PPP) suffered a defeat and the Indonesian Democratic Party (PDI) experienced an increase in

votes. In the 1987 elections there were 500 seats in Parliament, with 400 seats directly elected by the people and 100 members appointed by the President.

The *fifth* general election during the New Order era was held on June 9, 1992 with the principle of direct, general, free and secret (Luber). The legal basis and election system used was the same as the 1987 election system because there were no changes to the 1992 Election Law (Ali et al., 2016). The government conducted special research on DPR candidates who could not be involved in banned organizations by showing proof of SKTT. The *sixth* general election of the New Order period was held on May 29, 1997 with the principle of direct, general, free, secret (Luber) based on MPR Decree No. II/MPR/1993 on GBHN and MPR Decree No. III/MPR/1993 on Elections as well as Law No. 5/1996 on General Elections. General elections during the New Order period from 1971 to 1997 only elected members of Parliament, while the President and Vice President were directly elected by the MPR. After the 1997 elections and Soeharto became President again, the opposition movement began to strengthen with the birth of the student movement, the economic crisis that occurred in Indonesia was one of the causes of the student movement and the community took to the streets on a large scale that could not be controlled by the government, thus making Soeharto weak and quitting his post in 1998 (Lestari, 2019).

3. Impact and consequences

The general election for DPR members, the first since 1971, was held in May after a heated campaign that the Jakarta news magazine Tempo likened to a civil war. The main contestants were Soeharto-backed Golkar and the Armed Forces with the PPP (United Development Party) (Sumadinata, 2016). Tensions continued for several months after the election (Aziz Nasihuddin et al., 2020). On the surface the tensions were mainly between Muslims and students versus the President and Hankam, but there were also indications of discord within the mainstream elite (Muchamad Ali Safa'at, 2018). By the end of the year, the discord soon escalated considerably.

Restrictions on Pancasila Democracy Under the New Order Regime When the New Order regime under Soeharto came to power, Pancasila democracy was increasingly confined (Aldyan, 2023). Government power became increasingly authoritarian, with political and civil liberties severely restricted (Sobaci et al., 2018). Political parties were restricted in terms of their structure and political agenda, while political opposition was harshly suppressed (Rauta, 2016). Mass media under government control was used as a propaganda tool, while criticism of the regime was often punished with repression and human rights violations (Abdillah et al., 2022).

CONCLUSION

The electoral system during the New Order era in Indonesia experienced complex dynamics, characterized by a combination of political stability and democratic limitations. On the one hand, this system succeeded in realizing political stability by minimizing political turmoil and facilitating national development. However, on the other hand, this system also created various limitations on democracy, such as restrictions on political parties, strict control over the media, and manipulation of election results. This triggered criticism and resistance from various elements of society, which eventually led to the collapse of the New Order regime in 1998. The dynamics of the electoral system during the New Order era provide important lessons for Indonesia in building a stronger and more sustainable democracy. A balance between political stability and healthy democracy is needed to achieve national progress.

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