

**Cleavages, electoral systems and the politicization of Islam in Indonesia and Malaysia**

Islam is much more politicized in Malaysia than in Indonesia, at least when it comes to political parties, their programs and their campaigning - one reason why democratization in Malaysia is blocked, whereas post-Suharto Indonesia has witnessed sweeping reforms. While struggles between secularists and followers of political Islam, and reformers and conservatives are losing significance in Indonesia, social cleavages transferred to the political party system are conspicuous in Malaysia. The causes for this are complex, and have to do with electoral systems and the way social cleavages are transformed into conflicts between political parties.

**Andreas Ufen**

Reformasi and political systems in Indonesia and Malaysia

Indonesian and Malaysian political systems have transformed unexpectedly since 1998. In Indonesia, at the height of the Asian financial crisis, President Suharto was forced to leave office, engendering a range of political reforms and the introduction of electoral democracy. In Malaysia, the sacking and arrest of Anwar Ibrahim, previously the powerful deputy of Prime Minister Mahathir, resulted in the formation of a reformative government and the establishment of a multiracial pro-democratic party (PKR) and competitive, though still highly manipulated national elections.

Both regimes are hybrid forms combining characteristics of authoritarian and democratic systems. While elections in Indonesia were sufficiently free and fair according to national and international observers, the impact of money politics, weak law enforcement, lack of civilian control over the security apparatus, the fragile situation in the Moham-TOC Challenges in the West-Malaysian Parliamentary System (after 1999)  

- **1999**
  - **PKR**
  - **BN**
  - **PAS**
  - **Other**

Cleavages in Indonesia and Malaysia after 1998

In the new states the two revolutions took place simultaneously and in many cases remain intertwined. In addition, other cleavages need to be considered. An analysis of political party structures, voting behaviour and key political issues among the public and within parliament shows that the major cleavage in Indonesia and Malaysia divides parties with a more secularist outlook from those with a program based mostly on Islam. In addition, regarding introducing sharia and/or an Islamic state, Islamists and moderate Islamic parties disagree, the latter at times cooperating with secularists.

In Indonesia, the dominant parties representing secularist or ‘nationalist’ forces are PDri-P and Golkar, both of which enjoy strong backing on university campuses. Although both PKB and PAN are nominally secular parties, they are in effect - considering their membership, candidates and voters - Islamic. A cleavage between status quo-oriented and reformist parties is evident in Malaysia. The National Front (a coalition of UMNO, MCA, MIC, Gerakan, etc.) in almost every constituency pitted the Alternative Front (PAS, PKR, the successor of PKN, and, until 2011, DAP). In Indonesia, the dividing lines between former authoritarian and new reformist parties have become more and more blurred since Abdurrahman Wahid became president in 1999. For example, the PDI-P under Megawati Sukarnoputri, once one of the leaders of the pro-democracy movement against Suharto, seems to have evolved into a corrupt network of wheelers-dealers.

The electoral system and Islamization

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