The Supremacy of the Executive
Elitist Politics in Indonesia’s Decentralized Reality

There are several factors that contribute to make Indonesia’s local politics elitist—from the transfer of great authority to the smallest of the subnational entities, to the fact that Indonesia’s model of territorial organization is a subsidized one. Taking into consideration the lack of institutionalization of the Indonesian political parties on the local level, as well as the elements that contribute to the weakening of the local legislatives, this paper will explain how the Indonesian decentralization process has resulted in a model that situates the local executives in a supremacist position, paving the way for local elites to hegemonize and control the local political processes.
INTRODUCTION

In an interview conducted with Ryaas Rasyid, member of the famous Tim Tujuh and mastermind of the Law No 22/1999 on the government of the regions, Rasyid (2010) said that the decentralization process initiated with the transition towards democracy, after the fall of Suharto’s New Order, was supposed to be “more technical than political.” The Law No 22/1999 defined a decentralization model oriented towards the improvement of the basic services offered by the State. In Rasyid’s words, “the basic idea was to give the regions money, authority and total responsibility.” While it is true that in the main idea behind the regulation there is part of the basic principle that lies behind every decentralization process—bringing the State closer to the people—its lack of a more political dimension, which continues today despite several reviews, made the Indonesian model of decentralization a system that fails to involve the citizenship into the political process, leaving it in the hands of the correspondent local elites.

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THE LEGAL FRAMEWORK OF INDONESIA’S DECENTRALIZATION PROCESS

As we mentioned in the beginning, Law No 22/1999 on the government of the regions was the law that established the foundations of Indonesia’s decentralization. Subsequent legal reviews and reforms on the topic have always had it as their legal reference. Thus, it is important to pay special attention to it in order to understand the way the Indonesian State is territorially structured.

The first thing to take into consideration about the Law No 22/1999 is that the Indonesian lawmakers decided to transfer great
authority to the regencies and municipalities, skipping the provinces. The argument behind this decision was that the former were the levels of the State administration situated closer to the citizenship—however, there is another political motivation behind it. The decentralization not only had to contribute to the better distribution of services, but it also had to become the instrument that had to guarantee the “Unity of the State,” one of the principles of the Indonesian State philosophy, the Pancasila. In a period of great instability, as it normally is in a political transition, the legislators in charge of “designing” the new Indonesian State were worried that if they gave too much power to such big territorial entities as the provinces, those who had traditionally demanded greater autonomy (mainly Aceh and Papua) would take the slightest opportunity to threaten the unity of the State.³

So within the framework established by the Law Nº 22/1999, the provinces had very limited authority and their functions were reduced to the following: to mediate conflict between regencies, to promote the regencies’ and municipalities’ development, and to represent the central government in the region (Bünte 2009, 107). On the other hand, Jakarta transferred to the regencies and municipalities the authority in all government fields, except for the following: foreign policy, defense, security, monetary policy, legal system, and religious affairs, all of which were exclusive of the central government.

The Law Nº 22/1999 also established the institutional structure and the mechanisms to elect the provincial and local governments. Both regional administrations followed the structure and the mechanisms of the national level at that time, and they consisted of a regional parliament (DPRD I in the provinces, and DPRD II in the regencies and municipalities) that was elected by the citizens, and afterwards this same parliament elected the regional executive head, the governor in the provinces, and the Bupati or the Walikota in regencies and municipalities, respectively. This electoral mechanism presented a great amount of problems not only for the everyday functioning of the new system, but also because it led to new forms of extortion and corruptive practices. This, together with the lack of preparation of the politicians and bureaucrats on both levels (national and regional), made the correct implementation of the process a very chaotic task, to the extent that some of the problems then are still present today.

Because the first decentralization law had generated such implementation problems and was constantly questioned, in the last days of her administration, Megawati Sukarnoputri, who wasn’t
herself much of a “decentralizer,” passed the Law Nº 32/2004 on the
government of the regions. This new legislation followed the president’s
thoughts on decentralization and, in many ways, went in the opposite
direction of the previous law. Although it kept decentralization as an
essential tool for democratization, it confirmed a tendency towards
re-centralization. The new law had as its main target to provide the
central government with the necessary means to intervene directly
in local political affairs (Bünte 2009). In this regard, for example, it
strengthened the role of the governors as coordinators and supervisors
of the local governments. Moreover, it tried to develop a bit more on
the competences of each level of the administration, but not with much
success. Conflicts between administrations still emerge, particularly,
when they have to do with organizing shared competences. As it is
mentioned in a UNDP-Indonesia policy paper of May 2009:

The designation of shared areas of responsibilities, including
mandatory and optional affairs, is actually based on sectorial
responsibilities, such as public facilities, health, education,
labor, cooperatives and small and medium enterprises
(SMEs), and the environment. Little is mentioned on the
actual governmental functions that need to be done by each
level of government (UNDP-Indonesia 2009, 8).

With the objective of fixing this situation, President Yudhoyono
in his first administration (2004–2009) passed a Governmental Decree
(PP 38/2007) in which not only the areas of action where detailed, but
also the mandatory functions that both provinces and regencies needed
carry out. However, as it is said in that same UNDP-Indonesia
It is necessary to keep this in mind when we later talk about the
distribution of resources from the central government to the regions.

The second interesting factor to take into consideration while
analyzing Law Nº 32/2004 is that it introduced direct elections of the
local executive, in the lines of the constitutional changes that had been
introduced in the 1945 Constitution regarding the presidential election.
As we mentioned before, the indirect election of the local executive had
caused certain problems. Mainly, local and regional parliaments used
their power to threaten and blackmail candidates, expanding “money
politics” to the provincial and local levels. The introduction of direct
elections tried to end these practices. From 2005 onwards, the Bupati
and Walikota, as well as the governors, were going to be elected directly by the citizenship, increasing vertical accountability between regional and local governments and the people. Legislatives saw their powers reduced; their capacity to sack the head of their respective executive branch was taken from them and, corresponding to the main idea behind the law of giving back to the central government the capacity to intervene in local affairs, it was returned to the Home Affairs Ministry, which could do it if regional or local chiefs were involved in graft cases or threatened security (Schulte-Nordholt and Van Klinken 2007).

So with the passing of the new regulation (Law № 32/2004 on the government of the regions) the DPRD’s (Dewan Perwakilan Rakyat Daerah, or People’s Representatives Regional Council) weakening was translated into an strengthening of the local executives, which not only saw their power quotas rise, but also enjoyed higher legitimacy thanks to the fact that they were elected directly by the citizenship. An example of the greater power given to the local executives by the law № 32/2004 is fiscal authority:

Whereas the 1999 Regional Government Law gave local assemblies extensive powers vis-à-vis subnational governments, Law № 32/2004 on Regional Government tilted the balance of power in favor of the latter. It strengthened, for example, the fiscal authorities of district heads, who were empowered to control the financial management of their respective territories, to authorize expenditure and to set priorities as well as the ceiling of the budget (articles 156 and 192) (Buehler 2010, 278).

Moreover, the law also gives the local executives the capacity to produce legislation together with the local parliament, and allows it to intervene in the DPRD’s everyday functioning by authorizing it to select and control the public employees that form the parliament’s secretariat, the office in charge of preparing the necessary information that the members of the local parliament need to control the executive’s performance (ibid., 279).

Michael Buehler (2010) tells us that the Law № 32/2004 on the government of the regions has developed what he calls an “executive dominance” that has reduced horizontal accountability in local governments. This hasn’t allowed a “public sphere” to develop because, due to certain socio-economic and institutional conditions, local
politics in Indonesia are still elitist. He also tells us that it is because of this lack of public sphere that public policies on the local level haven’t been carried out effectively. As much as we agree with Buehler on this, in this article we want to focus on the abovementioned “institutional conditions” that make Indonesian local politics elitist.

So far, the decentralization legal framework has shown us a winding path of reforms and legal adjustments that might continue until it finds its balance within the democratic regime. The dogmatic status of the Negara Kesatuan (Unitary State) among Indonesian politicians makes it difficult to find this balance through political development. However, as we will see in the following section, the Unitary State of the Republic of Indonesia (NKRI) has decided to be in contact with its decentralized reality by the means of funding and subsidies distribution.

THE ECONOMIC ASPECTS OF INDONESIA’S DECENTRALIZATION: “A SUBSIDIZED DECENTRALIZATION”

The economic aspects of the Indonesian decentralization have strongly conditioned the model and its functioning and, as it happens in most of the countries that carry out a similar process, they have been the source of a considerable amount of conflicts between levels of government. But apart from that, in Indonesia, the fiscal element of the territorial organization of the political power is one of the factors that have mostly contributed to the strengthening of the local executives to the detriment of their respective legislatives.

Law Nº 22/1999, the one in charge of shaping the new decentralized state, was accompanied by Law Nº 25/1999 on the fiscal balance between the regional and central governments. This law, as its name states, established the new framework for fiscal relations between Jakarta, the center, and the now “autonomous” regions. While this represented a substantial change if compared to functioning of the previous regime, the truth is that the degree of fiscal/economic autonomy that the law determined wasn’t in accordance with the degree of authority and responsibility that had been given to the regions, especially to regencies and municipalities. It could be said that the political autonomy of the regions was limited by a centralized fiscal policy, or as Schulte-Nordholt and Van Klinken (2007) would
put it, Indonesia’s model of territorial organization of the State is a “highly subsidized” one.

With the Law № 25/1999, the State had to transfer 25 percent of its income (from its net profits) to the regions; 10 percent of that quantity would go to the provinces, and the remaining 90 percent would go to the regencies and municipalities, which had, and still have, the main responsibility in the spending of these resources. This way, the transfers from the center continued to be the regions’ main source of income, but, the contrary to what happened during the New Order years, now they were the ones deciding on what they would spend it.

With Sukarnoputri’s reform of Law № 22/1999 came the reform of the Law № 25/1999. So, Law № 32/2004 was accompanied by Law № 33/2004 on the fiscal balance between the regional and central governments. This didn’t represent a substantial change in the economic relations of the center with the periphery, but it did foresee a progressive increase of the State’s net profit destined to the regions.

The fiscal framework established by Law № 33/2004 determines four different income categories for the regions: first, “own-source revenue, consisting of tax and non-tax revenues”; second, those coming from the balancing fund distributed by the central government to all the regions (provinces and districts), “consisting of the General Allocation Fund (Dana Alokasi Umum, or DAU) grant, the Special Allocation Fund (Dana Alokasi Khusus, or DAK) grant, and shared taxes and revenues”; third, “loans and other forms of local borrowing”; and fourth, “other local revenues” (Eckardt and Shah 2006, 237–38). The second income category represents the districts’ biggest source of revenue, mainly because the DAU grant has “accounted for more than 60 percent of the total revenue in the past few years” (ibid., 238). However, the DAU grant has big limitations for its spending. The formula to calculate it determines the spending capacity of the local entities because it takes into consideration two particular aspects: on the one hand, a basic allocation to compensate the salary costs of the public services; and on the other hand, an equalizing quantity to compensate the fiscal gap, taking into consideration the fiscal capacity of the region and its spending needs. According to Eckardt and Shah (ibid.), the logics behind the introduction of the salary component are not really clear.

Indonesia is a vast and diverse country, where it seems logical to think that some regions will develop slower than others. Because
of that, when the central government decided to decentralize the administration and the provision of public services to bring them closer to the people, it needed to make sure that all the regions had the human resources necessary to do so. In fact, Law No 25/1999 already took that into consideration, and the salary component of the DAU was applied. However, what makes it different from the approach of Law No 33/2004 is that in this late one, the salary component amounts to the totality of the local administration wages. This represents a huge limitation because, as Eckardt and Shah (ibid., 241) indicate:

Indeed, in the aggregate, the expenditure side of local government budget is dominated by wage costs, which account for about half of local government expenditures . . . Local budgets in most districts are heavily skewed toward operating expenditures, leaving few funds for much-needed capital spending.

When it comes to the DAK, these represent around 5 percent of the local governments’ budgets, and they are targeted to fund those projects considered national priorities and/or those that cannot be included in the DAU and are of a special need for a particular region. Although these allocations can be solicited by the different sectorial departments after consulting with the Finance and Home Affairs Ministries, it is generally the central government the one deciding their destination. Anyway, these DAK represent a very little amount if we compare them to the regular sectorial development expenditures of the central government, which curiously are not part of the regional budgets (Anggaran Pendapatan dan Belanja Daerah, or APBD) and, therefore, they cannot be controlled by the respective regional parliaments. Regarding this and the object of this article, it is interesting to bring up one of the conclusions of Eckardt and Shah’s article (ibid., 268):

Central government departments in decentralized sectors continue to spend significant funds directly in the regions, at least part of them for functions officially assigned to local governments. This spending creates accountability problems because citizen-customers do not know which level to hold accountable for the quality of the service delivery.
Besides all the accountability problems that this situation presents, the difficulties in discerning who the real service provider is have been used by some local governments, or more precisely some Bupati and/or Walikota when facing re-election, to claim certain achievements in order to win credibility and popularity among the citizenship, even if they aren’t responsible for them. This, as we will see in the following section, makes the position of local executive head very appealing for the political parties, because it is from these positions that they can build a political program based on the performance of their candidates.

To sum up, in this section we’ve seen that the economic aspects of the decentralization have contributed to the strengthening of the local executives, mainly because these are given great amounts of resources that are not controlled by the local parliaments because they aren’t listed in the regional budgets (APBD). Moreover, due to the fact that the relationship between the center and the regions is based in the fiscal aspect and the top-down distribution of subsidies, especially through the regular development funds which travel directly and exclusively via the executive channel, the Bupati and Walikota become an indispensable piece for the well-functioning of the territorial organization of the State. They become the only relevant channel through which the regions deal with the center, so in many ways, they act as lobbyists in search for resources for their regions, as the many kabupaten and kota offices spread all over Jakarta show us.

THE LACK OF PARTY INSTITUTIONALIZATION ON THE LOCAL LEVEL

As we’ve seen at the end of the previous section, the Bupati and Walikota positions are extremely important for the political parties. In such a big and diverse country as Indonesia, where political parties have to be, by law, nation-wide parties, the development of a political program for each one of the more than 500 subnational entities represents an arduous task. By securing a local executive position, the political parties can develop a program based on their candidate’s performance. The most tangible results of their candidate’s performance will depend more on the ability of the local executive to get resources from the center (the number one spender in fixed capital in the regions) than on its true action and management.

But beyond the importance that these executive positions have for the parties in terms of the development of a political program, these
are also important for the parties’ economic survival. As Idrus Marham (2010), Golkar’s Secretary General, explained in an interview:

If we want to be successful in the next legislative and presidential elections, before we need to win a lot of Pilkada [the direct election of the local executive heads] . . . because if we win, we can conduct our program of constant work right the way [this program consisted, according to Marham, in being active, doing things on all the levels of government so the citizenship could see that Golkar was working]. Without power, this is impossible . . . opposition parties cannot exist in Indonesia . . . How do we do opposition, with Idealism? No. Criticizing [the previous government]? We cannot do that either because nowadays society tends to pragmatism. In stronger words, the people are asking: Can we eat Idealism?

With this statement and what we’ve seen so far about the importance of the local executive, not only economically but also politically, we can argue that the Pilkada are one of the most important instruments for the well-functioning of the Indonesian political system.

In a way, the Pilkada have contributed to improve vertical accountability between the citizenship and the local politicians. But have they really helped to bring the State closer to the people?

As Buehler (2010) pointed out, local politics in Indonesia continue to be elitist basically because of the laws that regulate the Pilkada. First, all the candidates to local executive heads need to have at least a high-school (sekolah lanjutan tingkat atas) degree or equivalent. In Indonesia, this leaves a great number of citizens out of the equation, especially in rural areas. Second, the costs of participating in an electoral contest are very high, even higher for independent candidates, those who decide to run without the backing of a political party. Independent candidates can run for local executive heads since the approval of the Law № 12/2008 about the second revision of Law № 32/2004. However, there’s a great difference, regarding the costs of the campaign, between these and those who run under the banner of one of the national political parties. For instance, whoever is interested in running for Bupati as an independent needs to present certain number of supporting signatures based on the total population of the region they are campaigning (article 59.2A and 2B of the Law № 12/2008 established between 3 to 6.5 percent). This requires a great logistical effort, with a high economic cost, that party
candidates don’t need to face (article 59.1). Political parties can present their own candidates as long as they control 15 percent of the DPRD seats. Of course, if a party doesn’t fulfill this requirement, they can always create coalitions to reach that threshold. But we will talk about coalitions later. Also, independent candidates need to sign an “electoral contract” in which they reassure that they won’t back off during the electoral process (article 59.5a.c), and if they do back off, they will be charged 20 million rupiah (around US$2,000). Party candidates don’t need to sign that sort of contract.

As we can see, electoral campaigns in Indonesia aren’t cheap, not even for party candidates. In 2005, the average cost of the winner candidacies in regencies and municipalities amounted around US$1.6 million (Rinakit 2005). Because of this, only the established and resourceful political and economic elites can run for Bupati or Walikota (Choi 2009).

In addition to the high costs of participate in the local elections, there is another factor, in many ways related to this one of the costs, that allows local elites to control local political processes. We are referring here to the lack of institutionalization of the political parties on the local level. In my study of the institutionalization levels of the Partai Keadilan Sejahtera (PKS), I observed that even when a party has high levels of institutionalization on the national level, as it is the case of the PKS, that doesn’t mean that its levels of institutionalization are the same on the local level.

Before we descend to the local level, it is important that we take a quick look at the history of the party to see the reasons why it can be considered one of the most institutionalized parties in Indonesia.

The embryo of the current PKS, the PK (Partai Keadilan), was born a few months after Suharto’s resignation in the democratic effervescence given by the opening of the political space and the new law on political parties (No 2/1999). The Justice Party was funded by a group of young Muslim activists with the intention to become the political voice of an Islamic movement known as the Tarbiyah (literally means “education” in Arabic) movement. This movement was the evolution of a proselytizing Islamic current known as da’wa (dakwah) which propagated Islam as an all-encompassing way of life (Hasan 2009). The da’wa was first introduced in the Salman Mosque at the Bandung Technological Institute (ITB in Indonesian) by an Imam called Imaduddin Abdul Rahim, who had learned the teachings from the Muslim Brotherhood movement that was born in Egypt and later spread to the Middle East.
As a political party arisen from a proselytizing movement, the PK focused its activities in the recruitment of new members and their education in order to fulfill its ultimate goal of establishing a Muslim society in which Islam would govern all aspects of life, from family issues to State matters. The great importance that its members will have for the party relates it to what Duverger (1957, 93) called the “mass parties” to which “their members are the party’s own matter, the substance of its action.”

This particular aspect is what will differentiate the party from the majority of parties created right after the fall of the New Order. The rest of the parties were what Duverger would call “cadre parties,” but what we would call nowadays “voters or notables parties,” which are the ones that focus their activity on the electoral competition rather than in the education of their members and followers.

The importance that the PK gave to its members due to its proselytizing character and the fact that it was constituted as a vanguard party for a bigger social and religious movement, together with its organizational structure based on the usrah (families), the little cells used by the Muslim Brotherhood to spread their teachings and to recruit new members, makes us think about Lenin and his What is to be done? (1902/1988), in which he developed the concept of “democratic centralism.” According to this organization formula, the members in the cells give up some liberty of action in favor of the center in order to gain more efficiency in the political action of the party as a whole. From a strong central core, the party was structured in different regional branches that went from the provincial level to the villages (desa), and thanks to this, the PK had managed to develop a well-functioning network that descended to the grassroots level.

However, all this organizational structure and network didn’t help the party to get enough votes (1.36 percent) in the 1999 elections to consolidate in the emerging Indonesian party system. In order to overcome this adversity, in April 2003, the PK decided to converge into the recently created PKS and provide it with all its extensive structure so the new party could reach the minimal requirements to participate in the 2004 upcoming elections. The newly created party, the PKS, adopted a structure very similar to that of the first PK, but made the Majelis Syura (Deliberative Assembly) the highest authority in the party.

One thing that is quite remarkable about the organization of the party and what makes it quite different from most of parties in
the Indonesian party system is the existence of the Dewan Syari’ah (Shari’a Council). The presence of this council shows the will of the party to claim certain religious authority over its members. It also shows that the party goes beyond electoral competition and tries to educate its members and guide them through the correct path of the Islamic morality. This is very close related to the vision of the Tarbiyah movement which saw Islam as a total way of life: if society is educated with the teachings provided by the Qur’an and its positive values are put to work through social work and humanitarian actions, this society won’t be able to reject Allah’s almighty law, and the establishment of an Islamic State ruled by the Shari’a will just be the next natural step.

The convergence brought also some changes in the ideology of the new party. First and foremost, it was the acceptance of the Indonesian Republic as a modern nation-state and the Pancasila as the state’s philosophy, indirectly rejecting the Jakarta Charter and the seven words that made Indonesian Muslims follow the Shari’a. The PKS opted to implement the Medina Charter, the constitution that established the city-state of Medina under the Prophet’s leadership which recognized all the religious groups of the city and allowed them to coexist peacefully. Although the PKS has accepted the nation-state, it still continues to introduce the Shari’a as the ruling law of the Indonesian State, not from an imposing way, but from the ideological construction that the Islamic law is the best way to organize the State (Hasan 2009).

The PKS had learnt from the mistakes made by the PK and moderated its discourse. For the 2004 election, it adopted the slogan “Bersih dan Peduli,” “clean and caring,” which enhanced its reputation of a party that was away from corruption and, also, showed its concern about the precarious economic situation of the lowest social strata. It worked well, and the party obtained more than 8 million votes, a 7.34 percent of the total. Plus, it was the most voted party in the Special Region of the Capital city of Jakarta obtaining 22.83 percent of the vote, showing its appeal among urban middle classes. The party became the new “rising star,” not only because of the great electoral result, but also because it rose as the new voice of political Islam in Indonesia.

The great results provided the party with a spot in SBY’s new presidential cabinet; a new stage of its political life was about to start for the party. In this new phase, the PKS had to manage as a governmental party, something that is not easy for any party anywhere in the world, but even less in Indonesia, where corruption is strongly rooted to the State.
Some corruption cases affected the party, but it still was the least affected of them all. Ideologically, the PKS navigated between pragmatism and ideological coherence during the first Yudhoyono administration, the former taking much more advantage over the latter the closer the party was getting to the 2009 elections. One of the biggest symbolic actions that showed this shift on the party’s discourse was the celebration of the National Working Congress (Mukernas) in Bali in February 2008. The island of Bali is populated by a Hindu majority and it had been a PDI-P (Partai Demokrasi Indonesia – Perjuangan, or the Indonesian Democratic Party – the Struggle) ground, Megawati Sukarnoputri’s party, since the fall of Suharto. Moreover, the island had been one of the biggest opponents to the anti-pornography bill defended by the PKS at the National Parliament. The choice of celebrating the Congress in Bali wanted to prove, according to Fahri Hamzah, that the PKS recognized the plurality and religious, ethnic, and cultural diversity of the Indonesian nation (Tomsa 2010).

From a political science point of view, the Bali Congress also represented the start of a new path adopted by the party, a path through which the party was abandoning its original nature as mass party and advancing towards becoming a catch-all party as all the others that form the Indonesian party system.

Yet the swift towards pragmatism didn’t have the expected result. In the 2009 legislative elections, far from getting the 20 percent of the votes and becoming one of the “big three” as the party leaders were hoping, the PKS maintained in single digits and barely increased its votes (7.9 percent). Despite these poor results, in the II National Congress (2010), the party decided to stick to this openness strategy. As Hilmi Aminuddin, the Majelis Syura Chairman, announced, after the consolidating years where certain exclusivity was necessary to develop the party’s character and personality, it was time to start to open in order “to build this State with all the components of the nation.”

In the second Yudhoyono administration, the PKS continued to be a member of the governmental coalition and it again held several cabinet seats. However, its second adventure in power ended with a huge graft scandal that not only put its “clean” reputation into question, but also its Islamic moral and values.¹⁰ Despite that, the PKS seems to have found its place in the Indonesian political spectrum, and in the most recent legislative elections of April 2014, it has obtained 6.8 percent of the people’s vote (Pemilu 2014). Although this result represents a small loss of the voters’ support, it also tells us that the
party has maintained a solid base of around 7 percent of the national vote for ten years and three successive elections (2004, 2009, and 2014).

To analyze the party’s level of institutionalization, taking into consideration the environmental variable of the decentralization, I used Randall and Sväsand’s (2002) model for the analysis of party institutionalization in new democracies, and I adapted the indicators so it could be explanatory when analyzing the party’s functioning on the local level. The model is summarized in the below (table 1):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dimensions</th>
<th>Indicators</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Internal</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Systemness</td>
<td>Selection mechanism of the running candidates and the role of the headquarters in such mechanism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Value Infusion</td>
<td>Selection criteria for the candidates and for the creation of coalitions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>External</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Decisional Autonomy</td>
<td>Political program and political agenda of the candidates</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Normalization</td>
<td>Treatment given to the candidacies by the mass media during the campaigns</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1. Indicators for the analysis of the impact of the decentralization on the process of party institutionalization. Author’s compilation.

The PKS has a homogeneous candidate selection mechanism which reduces the autonomy of the local branches in choosing their candidate because it is the center that controls the whole process showing great levels of interdependence among the three levels (central, provincial, and local). The local branch proposes a candidate to the Regional Council in the province; this validates the candidacy which is finally sent to the Executive Council in Jakarta in search for approval. All this indicates that when it comes to the Systemness dimension, the party maintains its high levels of institutionalization both at the national and on the local levels.

The Value Infusion dimension, though, is another matter. Pragmatism becomes the number one criteria in candidate selection and coalition formation, being of special relevance because of the low vote register at the local legislative elections, the PKS can hardly ever present its own candidate. According to Agus Purnomo (2010), a PKS
Member of Parliament, who for a while had been in charge of the relationship between the party in Jakarta and its regional branches, “there are no limits for the formation of coalitions.” When he tried to illustrate this, he used the coalitions formed in Central Java between the PKS and the PDI-P. Purnomo said that even though the PDI-P was considered “more leftist and us [the PKS] more centrist,” they still shared some principles regarding the prosperity of society. Also, he mentioned that Central Java was mostly a rural region and that the PDI-P had strong support among the peasant community. At the same time, since the PKS occupied the chair at the top of the Agriculture Ministry, and many Bupati would have to deal with that ministry to fulfill the demands of their constituency, it made perfect sense, in a very pragmatic approach, to run together in the local executive elections.

This means that the party’s moderate Islamist ideology is often put aside or even neglected in favor of the popularity and electability of any given candidate. As Purnomo (ibid.) put it, “in the first place, there are the shared principles between the candidate and the party; his abilities and his competences; [and then] we have to add the possibilities that the candidate has to win the election.” As a consequence of all the above mentioned, the Value Infusion dimension of the institutionalization process suffers negative effects due to the party’s behavior on the local level.

In terms of the Decisional Autonomy dimension, it is important to say that a good analysis of the selected indicator for this variable would require the observation of all the PKS candidacies in all the Pilkada, something that neither this paper, nor my doctoral thesis could afford to do. However, the field work done for the latter provided with certain conclusions. Based on the fact that the popularity of the possible candidate is the main selection criteria, it is not exactly wrong to think that this possible candidate already has an agenda on his/her own which has given him/her his/her popularity. Moreover, the PKS doesn’t have the necessary support in most of the regions to present its own candidate so it is quite hard for the party to impose its political agenda to any of the candidates in a coalition. In many occasions, as Purnomo (ibid.) denounced, “the winning candidates have forgotten who supported them.” And even when it has been able to choose its own candidate, the PKS has not always chosen a party member because they are in most of the occasions too young to have the sufficient amount of money to run for the election. \[^{14}\] In contrast to what happened “under equal circumstances” on the national level,
where the party had a high degree of institutionalization in this dimension, it seems that with the introduction of the decentralization variable, the Decisional Autonomy is slightly eroded.

Regarding the Normalization dimension, the PKS doesn’t have a high degree of institutionalization judging from its performance on the local level. Its minimal role in the majority of the coalitions makes it difficult to associate any of its candidates with the party program and/or values, which would be the feature that would define the place of the party within the Indonesian political spectrum. In this regard, it is important to point out a very paradoxical case related to the PKS coalitions. In some occasions, the PKS has formed a coalition with the PDS (Partai Damai Sejahtera), the biggest Christian party in Indonesia. When this has happened, the mass media have brought the party to the spotlight, but not in a very positive way. What the Press and rest of the media have pointed out is the contradictory character of the coalition, something that has situated the PKS in a specific place of the political spectrum, in the Islamist side, but, at the same time, it has highlighted its ideological incoherence (Jakarta Post 2010).

Among many other conclusions, what the study on the PKS tells us is that in Indonesia, even the most institutionalized of the parties, from a national perspective, as it is the case of the PKS, fails to show high levels of institutionalization on the local level. This opens the door for local elites to take over the local political processes and maintain their status, and, in some occasions, even create local political dynasties in the new democratic context.

ELITIST POLITICS IN INDONESIA’S DECENTRALIZED REALITY

Indonesia’s new territorial organization of the State has suffered several transformations since the beginning of the new democratic period. It is quite probable that it sees new changes and reviews because it has the complicated task of decentralizing State power, services, and responsibilities, at the same time that it has to secure one of the nation’s ideological principles, the “Unity of Indonesia.” So far, judging from the levels of development of Indonesia’s outer islands and the outcome of the regional conflicts such as, for instance, the one in Aceh, it seems that it has been much more successful in the second task than in the first one.
Indonesia has based these center-periphery relationships on the economic aspect, developing a subsidized model of territorial organization of the State. This model is a complement of the State’s everyday functioning, but it hasn’t been able to produce integration. Local political processes seem to run parallel to the national one but with very little interaction between them. There is very little permeability between the two most important levels of power. Yet that might be, precisely, the secret for a good articulation of the political power in a Unitary State: two strong powers, one on the local level and one at the center, this way facilitating the transmission of the decisions taken by the highest authority in the country, the President.

It is because of this situation that the figures of Bupati and Walikota take special relevance. Not only are they powerful on the local level because the regulation puts them in a dominant position regarding their relationship with the local legislatives and because they are the ones in charge of a great amount of un-scrutinized economic resources, but also because they become almost the only channel through which the local and central levels interact. Also, the subsidized nature of the decentralization allows the center to maintain its grip on the regions and transforms the local executives into lobbying agents in search for resources in Jakarta, leaving room for informality and patronage practices to sink in, which is what makes it attractive to local elites.

Before this situation, Pilkada reach an extraordinary importance in the whole functioning of the State. The political parties are fully aware of that and they place them as their number one priority. However, the lack of party institutionalization on the local level—due, first, to the economic difficulties that the parties suffer and, second, to the huge cultural, social, and economic diversity of a country like Indonesia that obliges nation-wide parties to adjust their program and discourse to very diverse environments—has put local political and economic elites in a very interesting spot. They are in a good bargaining position before the political parties because they can offer popularity and economic assets in exchange for certain electoral facilities and direct access to state resources. This allows them to maintain their power, and on several occasions, it even allows them to create political dynasties that take over regencies, municipalities, and even provinces. Overall, we can say that the Pilkada are a transaction between local elites and national parties, where pragmatism overrules party ideology or set of values, and the personal agenda of a local prominent figure overrides a party’s political program.
This transactional pattern and the consequent lack of party institutionalization on the local level will continue to happen unless the big gap between the national and local political processes is reduced. The little permeability between the two levels prevents national parties to suffer drastic consequences when their candidates don’t perform correctly or they become involved in corruption cases. If the parties were punished electorally on the national level after underperforming on the local level, they would try more seriously to control their candidates. They could, for instance, develop stronger local branches from which they could always nominate party cadres that would comply with the party program and whose personal agenda wouldn’t be that far from the party’s.

Finally, it would be interesting to reflect on the consequences that the maintenance of elitist politics on the local level and the informality that they imply can have for the well-functioning of Indonesia as a country. The most dangerous of them could be the arbitrariness in the production of results. In other words, the development of a certain region will be left to the personal negotiation abilities of the local leader of that specific region, and also to his/her professionalism and political integrity. Since not all the Bupati or Walikota are the same, nor they have the same bargaining power in the center, some significant disparities between the regions’ level of development can emerge. This, in the long term, can transform into the source of potential conflict between regions and/or between regions and the center, the type of conflicts that can present a threat to the State’s unity. In addition, the kidnapping of the local political process by the local elites, thanks to the weak institutionalization of the political parties in the regions, presents another threat regarding political representation. The model of territorial organization, together with the lack of institutionalization of the political parties on the local level, has allowed the system, in combination with its informal mechanisms, to maintain a significant level of governability nationwide while not putting the State’s unity in jeopardy, by permitting local elites to have access to the State’s resources. Up until now, the system has been more or less working, but the big distance between the parties and the grassroots, due to the elitist practices on the local level, could generate a crisis of party representation that would endanger the still young and, therefore, weakly consolidated Indonesian democratic system.
NOTES


2 The Tim Tujuh (Team of Seven) was the experts group in charge of developing the basic reforms to initiate Indonesia’s political transition. It was formed by Ryaas Rasyid, Andi Mallarangeng, Afan Gaffar, Hamid Aualuddin, Djohermansyah Djoohan, Ramlan Surbakti, and Anas Urbaningrum.

3 Some literature on this issue: Bertrand 2004; Bünte 2009; and Buehler 2010.

4 Since 2001, this is no longer the case in the Aceh and Papua provinces which, thanks to their special status, are in charge of the majority of their income generated by their own natural resources (oil, gas, and mining).

5 According to Eckardt and Shah (2006), the percentage in the provinces is slightly higher.

6 We are referring here to the budget allocation of each of the central government ministries targeted to improve the regions’ development. Since 2005, these allocations are registered in a document called DiPA (Daftar Isian Pelaksanaan Anggaran, or Implementation of Budget Allocations List), something that has contributed to greater transparency regarding the central government action. However, the fact that these allocations aren’t registered in the APBD makes the accountability process in the regions difficult.

7 According to what is established in the article 108 of the Law No. 33/2004, the regular development funds should end up becoming DAK, however, this would depend on the will of the various sectorial departments, which will see their control over the funds reduced if these become part of the regional budget as DAK. In 2007, the percentage of DAK distributed by the central government was below the 2.25 percent of the National Budget (Anggaran Pendapatan dan Belanja Negara, or APBN) (Eckardt and Shah 2006).

8 To illustrate this, see Sambijantoro 2013.

9 In an interview with Muhammad Qodari (2010), the Executive Director of Indo Barometer (IB), Qodari said: “On the local level, the figure of the Bupati is key. It is through this, through his position in government, that the parties develop their program. Since they don’t have a well-developed program, one of the few things they can present to society during the election period is their government performance. If they are out [of the local executive], it is much more difficult for them to present an alternative.”


11 The selection of this indicator is due to the fact that, on the local level, there is a lack of opinion surveys with the objective of situating the different parties along a political spectrum. Due to this lack of surveys, the mass media become the second best indicator to analyze this dimension because it is them who have the ability to generate, or create, a public opinion in regencies and municipalities.

12 Randall and Sväsand (2002, 12) understand party institutionalization as “the process by which the party becomes established in terms both of integrated patterns of behavior and of attitudes, or culture.” They distinguish between an internal and an external aspect of the process, the former related to the developments happening inside the party itself, and the latter related to the relationship between the party and “the society in which it is embedded”. And at the same time, in each one of these aspects there will be an attitudinal and a structural component, composing a matrix of four elements: Systemness (Internal/Structural), which is “the increasing scope, density and regularity of the interactions that constitute the party as a structure”; Value Infusion (Internal/Attitudinal), which is the party’s “own distinctive culture or value system that is an important aspect of party cohesion”; Decisional Autonomy (External/Structural), which is the party’s freedom from interference in determining its own policies and strategies”; and fourth, Normalization or Reification (External/Attitudinal), which refers to “the extent to which the party’s existence is established in the public imagination.”

13 Interdependence between its different levels is what characterizes the party’s internal relationships. As Pak Zuhrif, a PKS representative in the DPRD of the Yogyakarta municipality, commented on an interview conducted in Yogyakarta on 24 March 2010: “the offices at the regencies and municipalities don’t have direct access to the center [the party’s central power, the Dewan Pengurus Pusat], they
are subject to the regional councils (DPW, Dewan Pengurus Wilayah), the contact is through this DPW.”

14 In the first round of Pilkada that took place between the years 2004 and 2006, the PKS only presented two member candidates. In the second round, the ones that took place between 2009 and 2011, they presented “maybe 15” (Purnomo 2010).

15 For an illustration of this point, see Jakarta Post 2013b; also, Dami 2013. For more on Ratu Atut and her fall, see Amelia and Paath 2013.

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