

“OPEN, PROGRESSIVE, THAT’S US!” PARTAI SOLIDARITAS INDONESIA (PSI):

Political Parties as Mechanisms for Social and Political Change in a
Post-Suharto Political System

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II. Abstract

In the early 20th century, political parties in Indonesia were created and grounded in various ideologies to fight for independence from Dutch colonizers. Now scholars argue that parties have weak platforms and lack ideological differences. In a post-Suharto political system plagued with cartelization, elitism, hollow political platforms, money politics and personalized presidential parties, parties have overwhelmingly lost the ability and will to be mechanisms for social and political change. In this context, the Indonesian Solidarity Party (*Partai Solidaritas Indonesia*, PSI) was created in 2014. The party claims to contest prevailing issues in the political party system with a focus on underrepresented younger generations. Through secondary sources, interviews with party leaders, informal conversations with people in PSI's target demographic and participant participation at a PSI candidate meeting, this study aims to determine if PSI has the potential to live up to their platform and create change. While the party's candidates are hopeful and genuine about helping their communities and some younger people believe the party has potential, the overall viability of the party as a mechanism of social and political change is extremely questionable. Their focus on younger generations, while challenging the aging establishment, may put the longevity of the party at risk; their lack of resources further makes their success improbable; and their motivations may not be as pure as the party claims.

Keywords: political parties; post-Suharto Indonesia; political and social change; younger generations; PSI

III. Introduction

The historical context and current reality of the political system in any country helps shape political participation. It is imperative to analyze which elements influence levels of constituent engagement to understand how people push for political and social change or are encouraged not to by the system. In Indonesia, whose multi-party system solidified during a turbulent twenty years in the mid-twentieth century, was suppressed for thirty years under President Suharto and revitalized in 1998 after Suharto's fall, political party allegiance is fragmented and weak away from centralized political hubs. Further, when Suharto fell in 1998, grassroots student movements, not political party elites, drove his collapse (Ufen 2006: 10). Twenty years after the end of Suharto's authoritarian regime, some scholars argue that the Indonesian political party system is weakly institutionalized and rife with cartelization, elitism, hollow political platforms, money politics and personalized presidential parties (Tan 2012; Ufen 2006). As more constituents lose faith in political parties as viable institutions of governmental change, it is necessary to analyze if parties have truly become corrupted presidentialized vehicles of elite power or if they still have potential to be mechanisms for political and social change in Indonesia.

Objectives of Study:

By studying the Indonesian Solidarity Party (*Partai Solidaritas Indonesia*, PSI), I attempt to understand to what extent political parties inspire and cultivate greater political and social change in Indonesia. Established in 2014, PSI promises to revitalize a tired and corrupted system. Restricting party management to those under 45, the party pledges itself to the younger generations that “will determine the politics and leadership of Indonesia in the next 10 to 20 years” (PSI 2016). With the determination to change politics and parties, PSI may signify a shift

towards parties as mechanisms for social and political activism. I wish to analyze the extent to which PSI's influence has spread in Indonesia and to which communities, how they implement their platform in different forms and throughout the various levels of government and how genuine their promises of difference and progress are as they fight within the system they attempt to change.

I decided to root my study in PSI because it claims to contest prevailing issues in the political party system and focuses on younger generations. However, my hope is that through my research I will be able to gage the following broader questions: In a post-Suharto political system, can political parties inspire and cultivate political and social change? Is the political party system influenced too greatly by elites and 'money politics' to be centers of action and accountability? Who do political parties greatly exclude from dialogues and what does that mean for the viability of social change in Indonesia? What drives people to support a certain political party in a multi-party system with competing interests, such as religion, gender, region and class? What characteristics or laws in Indonesia perpetuate a weakly institutionalized, cartelized and corrupted political party system and can parties themselves invoke change?

The purpose of this study is not to scrutinize the Indonesian political system. Rather, the purpose is to analyze different potential mechanisms for political and social change in Indonesia and in political systems globally. I am a dual citizen of the United States and Mexico; both countries' political systems are rife with inequities, elitism and money politics. These issues permeate (while in different forms and extremes) throughout the globe and in every level of development. My hope is that parties like PSI can push for change in their respective countries and be models for the rest of the world. However, this paper will only provide a glimpse at this

new party and its possibilities, only time will expose the extent of PSI's impact on Indonesian politics and society.

Methodology and Ethics:

Methodology

This study is based on a compilation of secondary research, formal interviews, informal conversations and participant observation over a one month period in April, 2018. Through secondary sources, I establish an overview of the political party system in Indonesia since its inception in the early 20th century. I also synthesize scholarly discourse on the Indonesian political party system post-Suharto. This information provides a foundation for the primary data collected on PSI and political parties in general. A total of three formal interviews were conducted: one with the National Secretary General of PSI, one with the Yogyakarta Regional Chairman of PSI and one with a member of Universitas Gadjah Mada (UGM) student government. I conducted structured interviews with my informants, targeting my questions to each specific person and their position. My advisor, Professor Agus Wahyudi, helped connect me to the PSI offices in Yogyakarta and Jakarta. I chose to interview these party members to observe how members interpret the party's platform and actions at different levels of party authority and geographical location. PSI Secretary General Raja Juli Anotoni also provided insight on the origins of the party and management and strategy at the center. I decided to interview a student in UGM's student government to understand the politically minded youth perspective on political parties and PSI. As PSI's platform centers on younger generations, studying how this demographic views the party and their promises is essential to the potential viability of PSI as a mechanism for change. For the purposes of this study, younger generations is defined as those under 40, as that is how PSI defines it in their platform.

To further illustrate the party's impact on its supposed demographic and the hopes and motivations of its candidates, I held fourteen informal conversations with university students, young people in Yogyakarta outside of any university and Yogyakarta PSI candidates. During these conversations, I also inquired about political parties in Indonesia in general and what makes individuals compelled to vote for a specific party, if they vote at all. These conversations took place in a variety of locations, from scheduled coffee shop meetings to impromptu chats in the field. As semi-structured informal conversations, my intention was to gain a wider perspective of younger generations' opinions on political parties and PSI to compare to my formal interviews with party leaders. I found my informants by visiting millennial and youth centered art collectives and through snowball sampling at universities. Through my contact at UGM, I was directed to students engaged in student government. Finally, I observed a weekly candidate member meeting at the Yogyakarta office. My participant observation there provided information and insight on the daily practices of a PSI office and the composition and disposition of its candidates.

Ethics

When conducting a study through an interpreter, in a second language of the informant, in any culture outside of the interviewers own or when significant global power dynamics are at play, the researcher must take additional ethical concerns into consideration. As this was the case for my project, I tried to mitigate these concerns throughout my process. This included providing consent forms in Bahasa Indonesia and/or receiving verbal consent from all informants through an interpreter or in English when applicable. Beyond formal consent, I attempted to clearly explain the purpose of my study and my background. While I acknowledged and continue to acknowledge my biases towards all political systems as a Politics Major who is passionate about

challenging such systems to increase equity, I tried to let my informants explain their perspectives without commenting extensively on my opinions.

Limitations and Challenges:

My greatest limitations and challenges were language and cultural barriers during my interviews and conversations. I conducted two of my three formal interviews through an interpreter. This may have caused some miscommunication, information loss and biased the interview due to the presence of a third party. However, I tried to mitigate some of those concerns by strategically choosing interpreters based on each informant. My advisor, Professor Wahyudi, assisted during my interview with the Yogyakarta PSI Regional Chairman Sigit. As an Indonesian academic, I felt Professor Wahyudi gave me credibility as a foreign undergraduate studying a political party. However, as my advisor is older than the target demographic of PSI and of Sigit (who is 32 years old), his presence may have still influenced the data collected. A mutual friend, Jenica, helped interpret my interview with Carolus, the UGM student in student government. Jenica is an Indonesian student also studying at UGM and therefore most likely caused minimal bias to the interview.

While I conducted my last interview with Secretary General Raja Juli Antoni (Toni) and the majority of my informal conversations in English, varying language abilities and cultural differences in political systems and terminology may have caused some miscommunication and prevented more in-depth conversations. My participant observation at the PSI candidate meeting held at the Yogyakarta PSI Office was extremely limited due to the meeting being conducted in Bahasa Indonesia. My knowledge of Bahasa Indonesia was far too minimal to understand the majority of what candidates said. However, my side conversations with a few candidates that spoke English aided in my understanding of the proceedings.

Other limitations of my study included time, geographic location and diversity of informants. The short duration of my study (three weeks) prevented a more comprehensive and representative analysis of PSI and the political party system in Indonesia. Due to limited time and resources, I focused my study on Yogyakarta. Renowned as the center of education in Indonesia (Ramdhani, Ardiyanti & Istiqomah 2012: 21), Yogyakarta provided a large sample of both politically and non-politically minded people from younger generations. Besides my interview with Raja Juli Antoni in Jakarta, all my interviews and conversations took place in Yogyakarta. Additionally, most of my informants were educated and lived (at least currently) in an urban setting. All these factors diminish the generalizability of my study past a very specific demographic of Indonesians. However, I attempted to speak with people from a range of ages, religions, occupations and genders. Due to the political nature of my project and the spaces I was able to access, my three formal interviews and a majority of my informal conversations were conducted with men. Unfortunately, I was unable to meet with the female Chairperson of PSI, Grace Natalie. Due to this, my data lacks a more comprehensive gender perspective. However, the lower number of women in my study is relevant in itself (due to the lower number of women in Indonesian politics in general) and should not be discounted as only a methodological error.

Brief Statement of Findings:

Over the three weeks I spent in the field, I interviewed two PSI party leaders—including the Secretary General, spoke with many university students and other young people in Yogyakarta, witnessed PSI candidates in action and visited two party offices. Through a combination of these field experiences and scholarly discourse on the state of political parties post-Suharto, I found that the political party system in Indonesia is full of deficiencies, such as money politics, elitism and lack of ideology, that make creating any change from within the

system extremely difficult. Further, younger generations have largely given up on parties as mechanisms for any substantive change and are split on the viability of voting or participating in the system in any way. Additionally, younger people's knowledge and opinions about PSI significantly varied, making the party's ability to garner support questionable.

While the literature and opinions from younger generations in Indonesia are grim, PSI claims that they can create change and be an effective critique to the establishment. I found that the party is attempting to combat some of the problems in the system. For example, holding open recruitments that they post on social-media to transparently professionalize the way their party selects candidates. Additionally, many of the candidates I spoke with are non-politicians that seemed genuine and hopeful about helping their communities. However, beyond a few very specific examples, PSI's commitments seem hollow and lack depth. Their focus on younger generations, while challenging the aging establishment, may put the longevity of the party at risk; their lack of resources further makes their success improbable; and their motivations may not be as pure as the party claims. While my research largely points to PSI (and parties in general) as not being a viable mechanism for social and political change, the party is new and some younger people are very hopeful about the party's potential. Only time will show if the party actually accomplishes change in Indonesia and if that can be a model for other parties in the country and throughout the world.

IV. Background

Development of Political Parties in Indonesia:

Origins Pre-Independence

The development of the Indonesian political party system stems from the solidification of nationalist movements against Dutch colonial rule during the first few decades of the twentieth century. While various colonial powers reigned over Indonesia for centuries, opposition remained isolated to localized grievances. However, in the early 1900s various global events instigated a national struggle against the Dutch (Adam et al. 2018). For example, after Chinese nationalist revolutionaries overthrew the Manchu Empire in China in 1911, a strong form of nationalism came to Indonesia via Chinese-Indonesians. Further, the Russian Revolution, World War I and greater unrest in Western colonized countries in Asia and Africa helped cultivate an Indonesian idea of ‘nationhood’ and a cohesive movement for independence (Singh 1961: 43; Adam et al. 2018).

In addition to these global streams of nationalism, various social and educational movements in Indonesia also led to the creation of the political party system. While these movements were (at least initially) inherently cultural and not political, their influence is paramount to the nationalist movement and eventual Indonesian independence. In 1902, Raden Ajeng Katrini founded a school for Indonesian official’s daughters. She believed that education combining both Western and Indonesian concepts could elevate the condition of women in Indonesia. Katrini’s efforts not only helped spearhead modern female education, but the cultural-nationalist movement as a whole (Kahin 1952: 64). In the following years, Wahidin Sudirohusodo founded the first organized cultural-nationalist movement—*Budi Utomo* (Noble

Endeavor)—aimed at raising the status of Javanese people through an intertwinement of Western knowledge and traditional Indonesian cultural practices (65).

These cultural-nationalist organizations progressively grew political and developed into political parties. The organization *Sarekat Islam* (Islamic Organization) was originally founded in 1912 to advance the economic interests of Javanese Muslim merchants against their Chinese counterparts. However, the organization quickly became political and grew immensely in membership (Adams et al. 2018). Also in 1912, E.F.E. Douwes Dekker founded the Indies Party based on Eurasian-Indonesian cooperation. After the government banned the party a year later, most of its supporters joined Insulinde, another Eurasian party (Kahin 1952: 71). However, a small number of the Marxist-minded former Indies Party followers, in addition to other like-minded mostly Eurasian and Dutch individuals, joined the Indies Social Democratic Association (71). Founded in 1914 by a Dutchmen named Hendricus Sneevliet, the party quickly grew in members and in revolutionary Marxist thought. However, to garner a greater Indonesian base needed for a successful revolution, the party soon infiltrated *Serakat Islam*. In 1920, the Indies Social Democratic Association changed its name to the Indies Communist Party and in 1924, to the Indonesian Communist Party (*Partai Komunis Indonesia*, PKI) (Adams et al. 2018).

After the state crushed an attempted PKI revolt in 1926-1927, a new nationalist organization took over the fight for independence. In 1927, a young engineer named Soekarno, in addition to other members of the Bandung Study Club, created the Indonesian Nationalist Party (*Partai Nasional Indonesia*, PNI) (Kahin 1952: 90). The party aimed to unify all anticolonial ideologies and movements to achieve full independence from Dutch rule. However, PNI's efforts eventually proved fruitless against the Dutch government (Van der Schaar 2017; Adams et al. 2018).

The emergence of World War II ultimately led to the brief Japanese occupation of Indonesia and created new power dynamics in the archipelago. During this time, the Japanese incorporated Indonesians into their administration and attempted to gain the support of nationalist and Islamic leaders, including Soekarno himself (Adam et al. 2018). After three years of brutal treatment by the Japanese, Soekarno declared Indonesian independence on August 17th, 1945. However, when World War II ended, the Dutch attempted to regain control of Indonesia leading to the revolution against colonial forces from 1945-1949 (Fionna & Tomsa 2017: 4). Due to domestic opposition and international pressure, the Dutch finally recognized Indonesian independence in 1949 (Van der Schaar 2017). The country was now in the hands of competing ideological forces that incorporated themselves into political parties.

'Aliran' in Soekarno's Old Order

The first elections in the new independent Indonesia were held in 1955. Political parties around and during these first elections were marked by what Clifford Geertz, in his renowned work *The Religion of Java* (1960), labeled as *aliran* (literally 'streams'). This meant that political parties consolidated their support in mass bases and were rooted in specific social milieus (Ufen 2006: 5). This held true for the four most notable parties of the Old Order who collectively obtained approximately 80% of the vote in 1955. (1) PNI represented nationalist civil servants, (2) PKI's communist values attracted a base of urban and rural laborers, (3) *Nahdatul Ulama* (Renaissance of Islamic Scholars, NU) had mainly Muslim traditionalist¹ followers, and (4)

¹ In Indonesia, there are two main branches of Islam—traditionalism and modernism. Traditionalists incorporate local beliefs and practices, modernists reject this practice and believe in a 'purer' Islam resembling the Middle East.

Masyumi (Consultative Council of Indonesian Muslims) consisted of mostly Muslim modernist followers (Ufen 2006: 7-8).

In 1959, Soekarno instituted a period of Guided Democracy. This entailed moving away from liberal democracy and towards a more authoritarian rule. Marked by increased leftist tendencies (including increased support for the PKI), anti-Western sentiments and nearly complete cooptation of state power, Soekarno's Guided Democracy eventually created both domestic and international opposition. Tensions accumulated in a mysterious coup in 1965 that overthrew Soekarno's government and helped instigate a violent massacre of PKI members and other suspected communists (Van der Schaar 2017).

Political Parties in Suharto's New Order: A Political Ruse

An army commander, General Suharto, soon took control of the government and began a more than thirty year reign over Indonesia. Suharto's authoritarian regime "acted to control and discipline, and ultimately to rationalize, the political parties" (Adam et al. 2018). This included the forced consolidation of the four preexisting Muslim parties into the United Development Party (*Partai Persatuan Pembangunan*, PPP) and the five preexisting non-Muslim parties into the Indonesian Democratic Party (*Partai Demokrasi Indonesia*, PDI). An additional party, Golkar, represented the regime and always maintained control of the national parliament. PPP and PDI acted as opposition parties only so far as to simulate democracy. Additionally, Suharto easily won every presidential election due to his intensive and corrupt political machinery and depoliticization of all other social-political organizations (Ufen 2006: 9; Adam et al 2018). However, Suharto's rule relied heavily on the legitimacy gained from economic development during his reign. When the Asian Financial Crisis hit Indonesia in 1997-1998, Suharto's

legitimacy crumbled and soon, largely due to pressure from student demonstrations (not political party opposition), the New Order ended with Suharto's resignation in 1998 (Van der Schaar 2017; Ufen 2006: 10).

Scholarly Discourse on the Post-Suharto Political System:

A Fragmented Revival

The fall of Suharto dramatically revitalized the political party system in Indonesia. A total of 148 parties, representing every imaginable social enclave, registered for the 1999 elections. Eventually, 48 were permitted to participate (Ufen 2006: 5). As the first post-Suharto election, voter turnout for parliament² was an extremely high 93.3% (IDEA 2018). Due to continuously more restrictive requirements set by the General Elections Commission (KPU) since 1999, fewer and fewer parties are eligible to participate in elections. In the latest national election in 2014, only twelve parties met KPU's requirements and were able to enter (Hamid 2014: 2). Voter turnout (while naturally lower than the first post-authoritarian elections) remains high in Indonesia for both parliament and the president (75.11% and 69.58% in 2014, respectively) (IDEA 2018). This is especially remarkable considering the low trust Indonesians have in political parties and the extensive defects prevalent in the political party system (as I will discuss below).

Literature on Post-Suharto Political Parties

While some parties still hold onto their ideological bases, political parties as a whole are now marked much less by *aliran*. Post-Suharto political parties are instead “characterized by all kinds of deficiencies...most of them are ridden with internal conflicts, their financing is often

² Indonesia did not have direct elections for president until 2004.

shady, their platforms are vague and party elites tend to monopolize decision-making” (Ufen 2006: 5). While parties earlier in Indonesia’s history also had their share of flaws, as any political party system does, those flaws have been magnified and expanded since Suharto’s fall (Tan 2012: 154). Further, those defects now threaten the viability of political parties as mechanism for social and political change.

In the early 20th century, parties solidified around various ideologies largely to instigate change within the government. Now scholars argue that parties have weak platforms and lack ideological differences. Parties attempt to attract as many voters as possible with charismatic leaders and catch-all stances (Tan 2012; Ufen 2006). The recent rise in the cartelization of parties also shows their thin attachment to any strong ideology. Frequently, parties will put aside their supposed platforms to ally with the most strategic party to garner votes and disregard ideological differences (Fionna 2016: 130). This in turn leads to low competition in parliament which erodes the possibility of substantive policy change. Essentially vehicles for elites (many of whom began their careers in the Suharto era), parties largely no longer push for social and political change within the government. In fact, “as parties continue to be the main means to run in politics, they seek rent, exert their influence and fight various efforts to curb them” (Fionna 2016). Party leaders control everything from the top down with very little transparency or accountability. Frequently, a few central board members make unilateral decisions, such as the selection of candidates. Further, bribery usually dictates which candidates these party leaders select.

Money politics only worsened in 2005 when the state drastically cut public spending for political parties. Parties subsequently turned to other methods to earn the large sums necessary to compete in elections—largely leading to further corruption. This includes “colonizing state bodies, raising government allowances for parliamentarians to stratospheric levels (and

demanding party contributions from parliamentarians), and essentially selling candidacies in regional elections to wealthy businesspersons” (Tan 2012: 172). This leads to candidates that can buy their way in and not to those who feel connected to the ideals of the party and committed to implementing them once in office.

The candidate-centered nature of politics grew in 2004 with the introduction of direct presidential elections, in 2005 with the transition to direct local elections and in 2009 with the change from a closed party list system to an open list (Mietzner 2012: 518). While many of these measures allow for more accountability from candidates and politicians and provide Indonesian constituents with a larger say in their government, they also further erode primordial connections with parties and put further attention on the nominee’s individual personality and charisma (518). The rising prevalence of personalized politics in Indonesia combined with poorly institutionalized parties with weak connections to the electorate, vague platforms, cartelization and authoritarian control of parties by an elite few make the viability of the political party system as an avenue for constituents to push for changes in government and society extremely improbable.

V. *Partai Solidaritas Indonesia* (PSI): The Millennial Party

Overview of PSI's Development and Principles:

The Indonesian Solidarity Party (*Partai Solidaritas Indonesia*, PSI) was founded in 2014 by Grace Natalie, Isyana Bagoes Oka and Raja Juli Antoni. The party's mission is to combat the problematic practices of established political parties and be 'open and progressive.' This includes a dedication to the party's four basic principles: virtue, diversity, openness and meritocracy (PSI 2016). Additionally, by restricting leadership to those under forty-five years old, PSI commits itself to younger generations that are largely underrepresented by the aging elite currently in power. Their platform emphasizes how these younger generations are largely urbanized and educated and need a party to be responsive to their issues. The former television spokesperson and thirty-five-year-old Chinese Christian Chairwomen, Grace Natalie, "believes the time has come for a new generation of politicians who would be genuinely accountable to the people" (Kapoor 2018).

Bro Toni: A Conversation with the Secretary General of PSI:

From Muslim Activist to Elite Politician

His three-inch long hair swept casually across his face as he leaned back in his chair and ate a small pastry with his mouth slightly open. Affectionately known at PSI as Bro Toni, Secretary General Raja Juli Antoni embodies his nick name. Though appearing even younger, Toni is an extremely accomplished forty-year-old. Originally from Sumatra, he attained his undergraduate degree at the Syarif Hidayatullah State Islamic University (UIN) in Jakarta, his masters in Peace Studies at The University of Bradford in England and his doctorate through the School of Political Science and International Studies at the University of Queensland in Australia

(Raja Juli Antoni, personal communication, April 23, 2018).³ Toni began his political career as an activist. He harnessed his extensive knowledge of political science to attempt to change policy and transform the greater political situation in Indonesia through civil society. To accomplish his goals as a Muslim political activist, Toni became the Executive Director of the Maarif Institute—a think tank started by a former Muhammadiyah⁴ chairman dedicated to combating corruption, promoting good governance and advocating for human rights (Raja Juli Antoni, personal communication, April 23, 2018). It was evident that Toni’s experience inspired a deep confidence in both his abilities and opinions.

While completing his doctorate, Toni began to reevaluate his life trajectory and the potential contribution he could make to Indonesia. After much thought, Toni decided the most effective way to create sustainable change was by joining a political party. Toni emphasized how he did not mean to undermine the role of civil society, as that is where he came from and believes it is an important pillar of the fight for progress. However, he explained that “at the end of the day if you want permanent change or change that has a bigger impact, you should participate in the political struggle” (Raja Juli Antoni, personal communication, April 23, 2018). While Toni had the opportunity to get a prestigious position at an established political party, such as PDI-P,⁵ he did not believe he could create change in the political system through an oligarchic organization consumed with elitism and money politics. After Toni arrived at this conclusion, he decided to create a new political party; one that could “bring a new atmosphere, new culture [and] new ways of politics” (Raja Juli Antoni, personal communication, April 23, 2018).

³ See Appendix for full transcription.

⁴ Muhammadiyah is the second largest Islamic organization in Indonesia founded in 1912. It promotes modernist Islam in Indonesia.

⁵ Indonesian Democratic Party of Struggle; Descended from PDI, which formed during the Suharto regime.

Together with Grace Natalie and Isyana Bagoes Oka, Toni then began creating the Indonesian Solidarity Party.

PSI's Platform: A Nice Idea or an Impetus for Change?

While Toni reaffirmed much of the party's anti-corruption, pro-tolerance and youth orientated platform, he also candidly acknowledged the realities of creating a party in a preexisting and problematic political system. He stated that "we are here on Earth...we know the context—you are new, but you are not really new...of course, we need to negotiate with the political reality, but, as hard as we can, we have a value—a new value—a new culture, a new standard of ethic" (Raja Juli Antoni, personal communication, April 23, 2018). Refreshingly honest for a politician, it may indicate how deeply deficiencies are ingrained in the Indonesian political system. Alternatively, it may also signal PSI's eventual resignation to the status quo.

However, Toni then described a substantive way PSI attempts to combat the non-transparent, authoritarian, money-driven and elitist party system. Instead of having the chairperson or central board secretly select all the party's candidates through unknown measures, as many Indonesian political parties are now notorious for, PSI invites renowned experts to publically select candidates and even occasionally live-streams the panels on their social media (Raja Juli Antoni, personal communication, April 23, 2018; Kapoor 2018). The experts at the panel conducted on April 22nd, 2018 consisted of a former chairman of the Constitutional Court; the Commissioner of the Indonesian Anti-Corruption Commission; a former Minister of Trade or Industry; a member of the Indonesian Women's Commission; two University of Indonesia (UI) professors; and a PhD candidate from Seattle. This process is meant to professionalize the way PSI recruits and nominates candidates by establishing specific criterion and ensuring the process is transparent. Toni explained how he essentially shares his authority with trusted public figures,

so the power is no longer solely in his or his colleagues' hands. Additionally, these practices are how PSI is starting to build their integrity and credibility and reaffirm their initial purpose as a critique to the establishment (Raja Juli Antoni, personal communication, April 23, 2018). As this is PSI's first election, it is nearly impossible to tell if this is a long term commitment of the party or a political ploy to gain votes in 2019. Whatever their true motivations, PSI does seem to be combating certain elitist and corrupted practices committed by the overwhelming majority of political parties.

While Toni provided a very detailed description of PSI's open recruitment strategy, he seemed to lack other examples of ways the party implements their platform. When asked how else PSI fights for tolerance and against corruption, Toni reaffirmed the party's selection of candidates through the idea of meritocracy and then spoke tangentially about his own controversial decision (coming from a pious Muslim background) to be Pak Ahok's⁶ spokesperson (Raja Juli Antoni, personal communication, April 23, 2018). Toni's lackluster answer sheds doubt on the party's true motivations and future potential. PSI may be simply falling prey to the overall lack of ideology inherent in the Indonesian political party system or they may be using their 'progressive' platform as a front to garner votes.

The Political Power of the Millennial

Beyond a critique to the corruption and intolerance prevalent in Indonesian politics and society, PSI commits themselves to the younger generations their platform claims will be in charge of the country in ten to twenty years (PSI 2016). Toni explained that Indonesia has suffered from gerontocracy—politics controlled by the old; further, while Suharto's authoritarian

⁶ Former Chinese Christian Governor of Jakarta accused of religious blasphemy against the Quran in 2016 and subsequently convicted in 2017.

regime officially ended twenty years ago, a large portion of those currently in power started during that regime (Kapoor 2018). According to Toni, this gerontocracy runs counter to the historical foundations of the country. Indonesia was originally established by youth. Soekarno started PNI at twenty-six and became president in his early forties; the early prime ministers of Indonesia gained their positions at forty or even their late thirties. However, now the chairs of political parties and former presidents are almost all from older generations. Toni explains that “we [PSI] are not talking about whether you are wiser when you are older, we are talking about the opportunity that is given to the youth...because they [political parties and leaders] mobilize youth, they use youth for political sake, but they never treat youth as an independent subject that can say what they want to say...they are more of an object rather than a subject” (Raja Juli Antoni, personal communication, April 23, 2018).

The age distribution of those in power also does not align with the demographics of Indonesia. Currently, 48% of voters are between 17-30 years-old and 30% are between just 17-25 years-old (Raja Juli Antoni, personal communication, April 23, 2018; Kapoor 2018). That is where PSI comes in—to focus on the youth itself and to shift the power away from old men who are apathetic about the future of Indonesia’s younger generations. However, this strategy poses a risk for the longevity of the party. Party’s deeply ingrained in stable social groups are more likely to be long-lived (Tan 2012: 164). Focusing on younger generations is inherently unstable as the demographic is constantly shifting and aging. When asked if PSI will continuously focus on youth or will move with millennials as they age, Toni replied “of course we [PSI] have to put into consideration that we started for the youth...the issue is the youth...I become older of course, but I still have to pay more attention to them” (Raja Juli Antoni, personal communication, April 23, 2018). This may mean that PSI is only targeting younger generations

because they are a large, mostly untapped, portion of the current electorate. As demographics change and party leadership ages, PSI's commitment to making youth 'a subject' of the party may shift to other populations.

While PSI is at least currently dedicated to younger generations, getting their support may prove fruitless. According to data from the election commission, less than 50% of those between 17-29 years old voted in 2014—compared to the approximately 90% of those over 30 years-old who voted the same year. Younger generations are largely uninterested in voting for politicians they do not feel represent them (Kapoor 2018). Already disadvantaged due to its target demographic, PSI also lacks the resources to raise awareness about the new party (as explained below).

Can a 'Progressive' Party Gain Traction in a Non-Progressive System?

One of PSI's largest struggles is their lack of party funds. PSI's platform restricts the party's ability to compete against established mainstream parties that incur large sums from money politics. The party relies mainly on crowdfunding and legal donations—putting their current total resources at a relatively miniscule 2.6 billion rupiah (\$180,000) (Kapoor 2018). Nevertheless, PSI excels beyond any other party in social media engagement (Raja Juli Antoni, personal communication, April 23, 2018). However, social media can only go so far when 2013 statistics put Indonesian internet penetration at 24% and only 70 million Indonesians used social media in 2014 (approximately 27% of the population) (Chang & Picard 2013: 32; Thornley 2014: 30).

Toni acknowledged this limitation of PSI and explained that the party tries to compensate by canvassing on the ground, explaining that you must campaign to the people to gain credibility.

However, television is currently the most effective means of campaigning in Indonesia (Ufen 2010: 20). Unfortunately, PSI's lack of funding prevents the partying from sponsoring elaborate and intensive TV advertisements. As a consequence, PSI's popularity (awareness of the party) is 20% and the party's electability is only 1.1% (Raja Juli Antoni, personal communication, April 23, 2018). This became evident when Toni appeared shocked to know that some UGM students in Yogyakarta knew about PSI. As these students are in PSI's target demographic, it is telling that the Secretary General was happily surprised that they had heard about the party. The party's evident lack of finances does signify PSI's true dedication to clean funding and lends support to the party having a genuine commitment to their platform. However, to be a viable mechanism of social and political change, PSI must develop a way to compete with established problematic parties without becoming problematic themselves.

The Forgotten Rural Constituents

PSI's lack of extensive outreach also makes the party's dedication to constituents with less accessibility to the internet and social media, such as rural communities, questionable. When asked explicitly how the party reaches out to people outside the urban educated youth demographic emphasized in their platform, Toni responded simply "through canvassing, door to door canvassing" (Raja Juli Antoni, personal communication, April 23rd, 2018). Further, Toni seemed confused when asked about customs in small villages that compel all members to vote for a specific candidate or party. As prevalent in political parties globally, there seems to be a disconnect between the educated political elite and rural less conventionally educated communities. Not only does this mean that PSI is neglecting a large portion of the youth they claim to be so passionate about, but it also means that they will struggle to win over "voters more interested in local and bread-and-butter issues" (Kapoor 2018). This is extremely detrimental to

the party's potential viability when, in a 2013 survey conducted by the International Republican Institute, 20% of Indonesian constituents selected 'things they have done for your community' as the number one reason they choose a specific political party and only 9% selected 'political party promotes reform' (IRI 2013: 45). To truly push for change and reform in Indonesia, PSI must work to represent all communities, not only those in educated urban hubs.

Secularism: A Dirty Word

When asked why he founded a secular and not Islamic party, Toni exclaimed that secularism is a dirty word in Indonesian politics. After elaborating on the various connotations of secularism relative to different countries, he explained that on the theoretical level he agrees with it; there should be separation between church and state. However, in an Indonesian context, secularism means to "kick out religion from your personal faith" (Raja Juli Antoni, personal communication, April 23, 2018). Instead, Indonesians believe that religion is good, but it should not intervene in the private life of individuals or the state—the state should be neutral. Indonesia's independent government was founded on the values of *Pancasila*⁷, which include both religious belief and democracy. Therefore, no party is 'non-religious' or 'secular,' but instead simply does not affiliate with a specific religion.

While this is not in any way inherently problematic, it is representative of the larger lack of ideology prevalent in modern parties. With the loss of *aliran*, parties have adopted weaker platforms and become catch-all parties. Even some essentially Islamic parties choose mostly neutral platforms to prevent isolation of non-Islamic voters during elections. Modern parties are "engaged in a fight for the middle ground" (Ufen 2006: 23). This lack of ideological differences

⁷ Founding principles of Indonesia created by President Soekarno. Comes from two Old Javanese words derived from Sanskrit meaning 'five principles.'

between parties makes sustainable and progressive policy change basically unachievable. Toni's response about the importance of strategic wording and ideology in Indonesian politics could indicate that PSI will also eventually become a catch-all party and not an active critique to the system.

Regional Realities:

Yogyakarta Chairman Sigit

Sigit wore a brightly colored *batik*⁸ button-up shirt and jeans to his interview. Running fifteen minutes late, the thirty-two year-old Muslim regional chairman seemed slightly flustered, but still confident. Sigit, a Yogyakarta native, explained that he heard about PSI through his network of friends and contacts from Jakarta. He also added how that is typically the way PSI grows—"from friend to friend to friend, who agree with the party's message" (Sigit, personal communication, April 12, 2018). This highlights PSI's dependence on personal connections and social media to spread awareness about the party and garner support. Furthermore, PSI's decision to have a person from the region be the chairman shows the party's dedication to sharing authority with those who have more knowledge of the communities the party is attempting to represent. However, whether this is isolated to Yogyakarta or representative of all of PSI's regional branches is a point for further study.

Sigit then explained that PSI's reform and youth-orientated platform inspired him to join; he said he appreciated how the party is grounded in ideas, not just power. When asked which aspects of the platform he values the greatest, Sigit listed the party's commitment to promoting anti-corruption, tolerance and equality (Sigit, personal communication, April 12, 2018). Being

⁸ Traditional Indonesian technique of decorating cloth with wax and dye.

the party's taglines, it is not particularly surprising that Sigit chose those values. However, it is disheartening to hear the identical party rhetoric repeated once again without variation or substantive depth. When asked more specifically about which demographics the party is trying to prevent discrimination and intolerance against (i.e. women, religious minorities), Sigit answered by describing Ahok's case in Jakarta (Sigit, personal communication, April 12, 2018). This reply was extremely similar to Toni's answer to a slightly different question and makes PSI's commitments seem partly rehearsed throughout leadership. However, Sigit did go on to discuss how the party is a political vehicle to get people from a variety of backgrounds into office to instigate the party's platform throughout Indonesian government. He also explained how PSI's crowdfunding allows anyone around the country (even nonmembers) to have a say in the party if they donate. Further, he claimed that the 3,000 PSI members in Yogyakarta are a combination of urban and rural—which is surprising given Toni's responses above. These examples further complicate PSI's potential to be a mechanism for change. While some aspects of their platform seem to lack depth, others seem to be substantive at least at face value.

Observations at a Yogyakarta PSI Candidate Meeting

The Yogyakarta PSI headquarters was nestled into a moderately busy street in the southern part of the city. There was a *pasantren*⁹ across the street and a small food stand around the corner. The headquarters resembled a converted house, with white walls and a large PSI banner hanging from the roof. Inside, most of the room was left open as a gathering space with just two blue and red mats lining the floor and a few desks pushed against the back wall. PSI merchandise was spread sporadically around the room.¹⁰ As it neared 8:00 pm on a Wednesday

⁹ An Islamic boarding school.

¹⁰ "PSI Banner" Photo taken by Amanda Burckhardt, Yogyakarta, Java, April 18th, 2018.

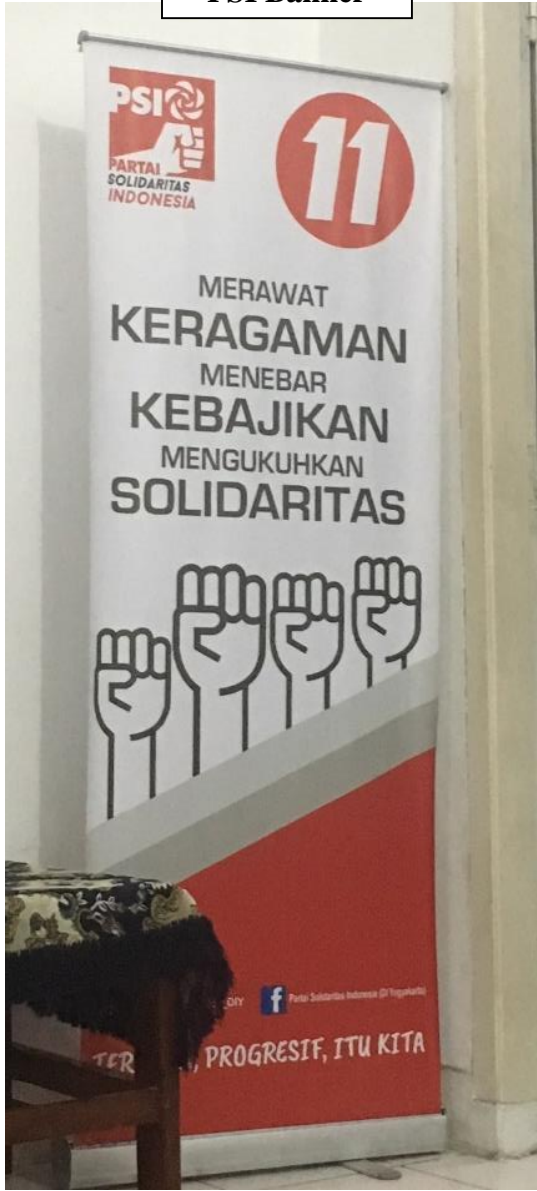
evening (the day and time of the weekly PSI candidate meeting), candidates began shuffling in dressed very causally, some in t-shirts and jeans.

Eventually, around nine candidates sat cross-legged around the room and engaged in light conversation. Most of the candidates appeared under forty years old, with a few showing more signs of aging. The group was heavily male with only two women present. A male candidate explained that women are not as interested in politics, but added that hopefully the 30% quota law¹¹ will soon increase the number of women.

One male candidate with gray hair and glasses who spoke English discussed the similarities between Indonesia and the United States. He stated that politicians use populism in both countries—except in Indonesia it takes an Islamic form. However, he believed that President Jokowi¹² was different. Another candidate added that not only does PSI officially support Jokowi for reelection, but they, as candidates, aspire to be like him.

They appreciate Jokowi for his humbleness and his ordinary non-elite background. The party's official support of the current president and these candidates' idolization of him could signify that the party is not as critical of the status quo as they claim.

PSI Banner



¹¹ Legislative quota originally introduced in 2004 (although not originally enforced) that requires political parties to have 30% female candidates with even distribution on party lists. The General Elections Commission is becoming stricter on enforcement in recent elections.

¹² Joko Widodo—current president of Indonesia, up for reelection in 2019.

However, as the candidates elaborated about their backgrounds and position in the party, their inspiration to support Jokowi became clearer. The candidates described themselves as volunteers not politicians. Unlike many of the established parties in Indonesia, PSI's candidates do not expect to make money by going into politics. They all come from diverse occupational backgrounds and lack concrete political experience. One candidate present was a twenty-three year-old male artist, another man was a lawyer and a third was an online taxi driver. The candidates explained that while other politicians are out for their own agenda, those in PSI truly wished to help their communities. This included working to close the large economic gap in Indonesia and combating the tendency for religious leaders to dictate voting choice to their members. Unlike Toni at the head of the party, these candidates seemed much more grounded in the concerns of everyday people. One candidate, with a smile on his face, exclaimed that they have hope for the party—they are idealists.

These casual conversations continued for about an hour and a half after the official meeting start time. A female candidate who looked around forty and had a pixie hair cut explained that PSI holds this meeting every week, but only around ten candidates of the approximately forty-nine in Yogyakarta attend. She also added that while other parties meet and exclusively talk about politics and strategy, PSI's meetings are much more relaxed. At around 9:30 pm, Chairman Sigit arrived and the meeting became more organized with each candidate taking turns introducing themselves.

The candidates at the Yogyakarta meeting not only seemed genuinely concerned about the current state of politics in Indonesia, but also optimistic about the possibility of change. Their disposition was lighthearted and casual—not what usually comes to mind when contemplating politicians. Unlike the platitudes delivered from party leaders, the candidates spoke about real

concerns affecting their own communities. Their positive attitudes and dedication may mean that PSI and Indonesian parties in general can foster and create social and political change. However, the party's informality, their candidates' lack of political experience and their limited funds may prevent PSI from winning the seats they need to start pushing for new policy.

VI. Youth Perspectives on PSI and Political Parties

Overview

As PSI's target demographic, the youth opinion on PSI is essential to their potential to create substantive social and political change in Indonesia. Without youth engagement as members, candidates and/or voters, PSI cannot effectively break the mold of elite parties run by aging leaders that dominate the political party system. All the people described below are between the ages of 18-30 years old and currently live in Yogyakarta.

Why Bother?

In Yogyakarta, the overwhelming youth opinion on political parties is that they are part of a corrupted system with no viable hope. A twenty-four-year-old art-collective member explained that he chooses not to vote because there is no point in being involved in such a problematic system (Eri, personal communication, April 12, 2018). However, two other men (both twenty-eight) from the same collective explained that while they also believe the system suffers from deficiencies, they always try to vote for the best candidate (Afil & Galih, personal communication, April 12, 2018). One of the men, Afil, had heard about PSI, but did not know about the party in depth. He also mentioned that all parties claim to be 'different' at first, but soon become part of the status quo. These three young artists all dismissed political parties as elitist money driven institutions, but differed in their opinions on engaging with the system.

Youth opinions on voting also differed outside the art community. While a male Literature Major at UGM abrasively stated that politics were not 'his thing,' so he does not involve himself and does not vote, two young female UGM students took a much more positive stance. Both twenty-one years old, Suha and Eliesta spoke enthusiastically about politics. Suha

explained that she was extremely excited the first time she voted because she got to exercise her right as an Indonesian citizen. Additionally, Suha stated that she felt the need to fulfill her civic duty because whether or not the system is corrupt she believes “voting still makes a difference” (Suha & Eliesta, personal communication, April 13, 2018). While she had not previously heard about PSI, she eagerly went to write down the name of the party when informed about their platform. Even though youth seem extremely critical of the political party system, Suha’s dedication to voting and her excitement when hearing about PSI lend hope to the possibility of a successful youth-centered progressive party.

Two university students that actively engage in their student government and describe themselves as political discussed their strategies to encourage young people to vote. While both students stressed the deficiencies in the political party system, such as money politics and lack of ideology, and one even exclaimed that “Indonesia will be stuck until [he] dies” (Hikari, personal communication, April 14, 2018), they still think it is imperative that young people knowledgeably vote. One of the students explained that the UGM student government ran a #don’t-be-stupid campaign stressing how voting is “five minutes for five years¹³” (Fradhan, personal communication, April 14, 2018). Even students that believe in the value of voting and are actively engaged in at least some form of politics have lost faith that real change will actually occur. For those who do believe in voting, they do not vote based on party. The overwhelming consensus of younger people who vote is to choose the best possible candidate. This is very representative of the trend since post-Suharto of more candidate-centered parties (Mietzner 2012: 518).

¹³ Presidential terms in Indonesia are five years.

Indecision with voting and the lack of connectivity to any party pose another challenge for PSI. Not only does the party have to increase their own credibility, but they have to increase the credibility of the entire system in order to encourage youth turn-out. However, when asked about this challenge, PSI Secretary General Raja Juli Antoni did not seem discouraged. In fact, Toni sees it as an opportunity. He stated that he is optimistic because “if people are more fed up with political parties, then it’s time to show that we are different” (Raja Juli Antoni, personal communication, April 23, 2018). However, this may be an extremely challenging task. A twenty-nine-year-old researcher and artist named Brina explained that in an Indonesian context being ‘political’ is seen as dirty (Brina, personal communication, April 16, 2018). In fact, a different member of UGM student government, Carolus, stated that he does not care about politics explicitly because it is dirty. Carolus, who is twenty-one years old and Catholic, added that he joined student government because he cares about societal issues; however, rather than entering politics, he desires to create change through lecturing and spreading ideas (Carolus, personal communication, April 17, 2018).

Yogyakarta youth tended to have differing levels of awareness and subsequent opinions on PSI. Many young people had never heard about PSI, especially those who did not identify as political. Between those who knew about the party, opinion was split on the future potential of PSI as a mechanism for change. Gatari, a twenty-eight-year-old Muslim artist and academic, spoke very negatively about Indonesian political parties in general. However, without being prompted, she explained that she did have hope because she had recently heard about a new party named PSI (Gatari, personal communication, April 18, 2018). Carolus also spoke positively about PSI; he believes PSI may be able to create change because they have fresh ideas from youth. However, Carolus knows the change will not last because with time PSI “will

become contaminated and their idealism will fade” (Carolus, personal communication, April 17, 2018). A different student with a completely negative opinion of PSI explained that he thinks the party is only a strategic attempt by politicians to coopt support from an untapped demographic (Hikari, personal communication, April 14, 2018). The student’s assertion does align with how enthusiastic Toni was about PSI supporting President Jokowi’s reelection (Raja Juli Antoni, personal communication, April 23, 2018). Further, PDI-P, the party Jokowi ran under in 2014, struggles to attract younger voters with their “continued use of anticolonial, ultranationalist and egalitarian rhetoric [that] has a distinctly outdated ring to it” (Meitzner 2012: 519). There is a possibility that PSI is only a tool of the establishment to garner youth votes for Jokowi’s reelection. These varying levels of knowledge and opinions on PSI make the party’s success uncertain, both in terms of electability and ability to create social and political change.

VII. Conclusion

Political parties in Indonesia began in part to combat unjust rule by colonizers. Their purpose was largely to push for social and political change. However, since the more than thirty year authoritarian reign of Suharto, parties are rife with deficiencies that make them almost entirely unviable mechanisms for social and political change. In 2014, three young people decided to form a new party, the Indonesian Solidarity Party (*Partai Solidaritas Indonesia*, PSI) to be a critique to the problematic system. The party pledges itself to combating corruption, fighting for tolerance and being a voice for largely unrepresented younger generations. This study synthesizes previous scholarly work, formal interviews, informal conversations and participant observation to analyze PSI's potential to push for change in the post-Suharto political system.

While Secretary General Raja Juli Antoni had some concrete examples of how PSI implements their platform, such as open recruitment to professionalize their candidate selection, overall PSI seemed to lack many substantive ways to promote their values. Additionally, the party's focus on youth appeared grounded in the number of potential untapped voters for the upcoming election and not in a long term plan to engage younger generations in party leadership. Further, the party's lack of funding and dependence on social media threatens their success in the 2019 election and excludes communities with less access to technology and internet. The party also shows signs of adopting a neutral platform on key interest areas in Indonesia, such as religion. This strategy is representative of a larger trend in the post-Suharto political system to garner as many votes as possible during elections. However, Raja Juli Antoni and Yogyakarta Regional Chariman Sigit both seemed confident and passionate about the party's ability to uphold their principles of openness and progressivity. Further, the Yogyakarta PSI candidates

came from diverse non-political backgrounds and were determined to help their communities regardless of the financial incentives that usually pull people into politics. These candidates valued President Jokowi's humbleness and wanted to embody that themselves. Whether PSI is truly willing and able to fulfill their promises will become evident in the upcoming 2019 election and their subsequent behavior and success.

PSI's target demographic also plays a major role in the party's ability to achieve their platform's ideals and actually combat systemic deficiencies. Younger generations feel overwhelmingly negative about the political party system as a whole. They believe it is a corrupted system with very little hope of change. However, younger people in various demographic groups are split on the viability of voting or participating in the system in general. While still incredulous, some believe it is their civic duty to vote and others want to have a voice in the system even though it is problematic. Awareness and opinion on PSI in general is also split within younger generations of voters. For those who do know about PSI, some are optimistic about the party; some feel as though the party may be able to make limited change, but not substantive and not sustainable; and others feel that the party is just a strategic move to garner youth votes for Jokowi's reelection and have no hope that PSI will be different. These opinions make it difficult for PSI to attract support, membership and voters. Further, beliefs by younger generations bring into question PSI's true motivations as a supposedly youth centered progressive party.

The current political party system is incredibly problematic, power driven and corrupt. While PSI claims to be a critique to the establishment, the party's actual reasons for forming and their potential to be successful in elections remain questionable. Political parties may have lost the ability to be mechanisms for social and political change. This has drastic effects on

Indonesian citizens who no longer have a viable political avenue to raise their concerns and push for change. However, even though PSI may currently lack substantive ways to implement their platform, the party also still has not participated in an election and does not have any representatives in office. It is still too early to dismiss PSI as another pawn of the corrupted establishment. There is still hope that PSI can be a mechanism for social and political change and that progressive parties like PSI can begin and thrive in other democratic political systems throughout the world.

VIII. Recommendations for Further Study

The viability of PSI and their platform is something that should be continuously studied throughout the 2019 election and beyond. More research is also needed about a wider range of demographics. My study focused specifically on Yogyakarta. To fully assess PSI's potential, research must be done in other geographic locations and with a more diverse pool of informants—including from different religions, ethnic groups and rural communities. Additionally, opinions of the party at a more comprehensive intergenerational level could prove insightful. As older generations are more likely to vote, but are not in PSI's target demographic, it would be interesting to see how they perceive the party and if they would be willing to vote for PSI's candidates. Finally, it would be useful to study the role of populism in the Indonesian political system post-Suharto and PSI's place in that development.

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X. Appendix

Interview Transcription: PSI Secretary General Raja Juli Antoni April 23rd, 2018

Name: Raja Juli Antoni

Age: 40

Religion: Islam

A: I actually attended a candidate meeting at PSI Jogja.

R: Well yesterday, we had a very big gathering here. I mean open recruitment. We have very outstanding public figures. A former chairman of constitutional court, he joined as independent panel for recruitment; the Commissioner of Indonesian Anti-Corruption Commission; former Minister of trade or industry, then she moved to tourism; a member of the Indonesian Women's Commission; two UI professors; and a PhD candidate from Seattle.

A: And the even was just to garner support?

R: No it was for recruitment.

A: Oh okay, you all are still recruiting for 2019?

R: Yes, so it's kind of a new tradition in Indonesian politics. Because here if you observe all the political parties, they don't have any transparent procedures on how they recruit. At the end of the day people just have a list of the candidates and they never know if there is any committee or what kind of questions or what kind of standards. So that's the thing. And it's kind of an elite project; everything is decided by the Chairman and Secretary General then they put someone in certain district level, district area and then with some number, you have a number here, you know? Number one, number two—it depends on the seat. Everything is decided by elite, very black very dark process here. So we [PSI] come up with the idea that, if we want to reform our parliament our politics, the first that has to be done is to set up certain criteria to get in and the process is through transparent, professional processes. And sometimes the power of the elite in PSI shared or given to public figure as I mentioned before. So the authority is no longer in my hands it's given to people that we trust.

A: Oh, they were here to help interview people.

R: Yeah, open recruitment. I can show on our website the independent panels that were there. Yeah basically that is the idea. That's why the process is so transparent with the professionalism. Yeah it's no longer elitism. It is supposed to be from the public itself.

A: Yeah I was reading about political parties in Indonesia and I read that it's a common and deep rooted problem here that the chairperson will just pick all the candidates and there is no say whatsoever.

R: Yeah and people bribe to get a good number on the party list. To get number one, you need to pay a certain amount of money. To get the best district, because the chance to win is better than other districts, then you have to pay a certain amount of money. That's the game, I mean, there's no proof, but everyone knows.

A: But PSI is very against that?

R: We come up, we establish the party as a critique to the establishment. That's why we are now starting to build our integrity our credibility, through the critique that we confess before.

A: And was the recruitment for all over Indonesia or just for Jakarta?

R: All over Indonesia, but we here in the [Jakarta] office are only officially responsible for the national level. Then we share the authority to [regional chairman] Sigit in Jogjakarta and the district level.

A: Okay, I have some questions prepared. First, I was just wondering about you and how you ended up here starting PSI? I read a little bit about your work.

R: Me? Really? What did you read?

A: That you attended school in England and Australia and that you studied Aceh and conflict resolution in Aceh. But, I just kind of wanted to know what made you originally interested in politics?

R: I started as an activist, you know? Activism. And here in Jakarta, or even in U.S., activism is part of the politics, everyday politics, but just different parts of the politics, like it is kind more civil society orientation. The goal is really about change, how to transform the policy, the political situation. So I was personally very familiar with the politics, how the politics work, and I had been working for the Maarif Institute. The Maarif Institute, if you follow, is a taken from the name of the former chairman of Muhammadiyah, the second largest Muslim organization, Pak Ahmad Syafii Maarif. He is now in Yogyakarta actually. Former president of Muhammadiyah. The main activity of the institute itself is kind of combating corruption and also establishing and promoting good governance and also we are involved in the human rights advocacy.

I guess I am quite familiar with the political situation. I have a large trajectory a turning point if you like when I graduated from Australia then for the last two years when I was studying, I was reflecting on what kind of contribution I could make in this country [Indonesia]. I got the possibility to continue and do a fellowship in the U.S. or to do work here for the World Bank, it would be more money, but I was thinking seriously what kind of contribution I could possibly make. I had long discussions with friends and family and at the end of the process, I decided to join a political party because I believe that the effective change or the sustainability of change is only through political struggle. I don't want to undermine the role of civil society where I came from or the role of media or the role of university, academic. If you look at the pillars of the state—you need civil society, the economy—but at the end of the day if you want permanent change or change that has bigger impact, you should participate in the political

struggle. That's very altruistic. I decided to go that way and actually I have good opportunities to join the established political parties because of the networking I had before. Maybe I can be the chair of one of these parties, center board. Or maybe in PDI-P or international relations, with my academic record. They aren't going to stop me or reject me. So I believe I can join a political party, but the question was what kind of transformation can be brought if I join one of *those* political parties. With the culture they have, the system, the oligarch, the elite, and the money, what kind of change can be brought?

Then I think to establish a new political party because some friends here. And then we sum up that we need a new political party to bring a new atmosphere, new culture, new ways of politics. Of course, we are here on Earth, you are here in Indonesia, we know the context. You are new, but you are not really new. Of course, we need to negotiate with the political reality. But, as hard as we can, we have a value—a new value—a new culture, a new standard of ethic. At the beginning it was very difficult to initiate the party, people very pessimistic, people very ignore us, undermine us. But, for the last three years we prove that the PSI is the only party that was successfully verified. So here in the country, I don't know if you follow, we have two mechanisms. If you want to establish a political party then you have to be verified by the Ministry of Law and Human Rights. And PSI is the only one that passed the verification. So we have four political parties, but the other three are kind of... Well we have 70 political parties registered by the Ministry of Law and Human Rights. Only around ten or twelve parties survive if you like, but they have their own status. So this one can be sold and bought. Meaning if you want to establish party then you have to consult to Ministry of Law and host the chairman and then constitutionally you have to have congress and within the congress you change the name of party, you change the flag, you change the internal structure and everything. And the establishment then signs the agreement then you have new political party. So we didn't follow that kind of path, we tried to establish one by one according to the law we passed the verification. Then the second verification is through KPU. That is more difficult of course. And yes we were verified and yes we have our vehicle, political vehicle to run in the 2019 election.

A: So, is it mainly through social media that you have grown this space or are there other methods used to attract young people or people in general?

R: So far we only have social, well not so far, the main thing we have. But the real politics is how to win the electoral and to win the electoral you need the... what do you call it in English? You have airborne, but you have groundwork. You have to deal with the people in the grassroots, especially with the limitations of social media penetration. You need canvassing, you need door to door. You need to recruit volunteers to campaign. So we started to do that. But again Amanda the more important thing is how to build your credibility—trust from the people. But unfortunately, the credibility is not enough in the politics, people have to know you have credibility, you have to campaign to the people. And unfortunately, according to research, the only, well not the only, the highest way, the most effective way to raise the awareness, to increase the popularity is to through TV ads. That is the thing that we don't have so far.

A: You don't have any TV ads?

We did before, very small a couple of days, but you have to have a very intensive TV ads for certain days or months to increase your awareness or popularity. So that's the thing unfortunately there is a survey that our popularity is around 20%, but our electability is 1.1%. Compared to Parindo, their popularity is almost 90% because the party belongs to a tycoon that has a TV, but the electability is only 2.1%. So meaning that if we have a chance to increase our popularity to from 20 to 50 or 60 most likely our electability goes up to 5%.

A: Wow and is popularity just, what does that mean?

R: Popularity means, well in political science there's popularity and electability. So it means that popularity if you ask people if they know PSI and they say no, I don't know. Do you see this picture of the party this logo of the party, do you know this one? And they say no or they say yes I know. And then you ask who's the chairman of the party? You ask things to see if people know you, that's popularity. But electability is--so you know PSI, do you want to cast a ballot for the party? That's electability. Two different things. Two different steps in the politics actually. To have electability you have to have popularity. But in the case of Parindo you have popularity, but it doesn't necessarily mean you have electability because you have to grow your credibility. We have credibility. I mean I don't want to claim. But the public figures I mentioned to you, they join us because they trust us. But then how to increase the popularity. Because the social media is not enough.

A: And are you all struggling with that because of your decision to stay away from big corporations and have small scale funding, or why?

R: We try both. Big and small donation because we don't have money now. I don't, I mean, we also have crowd-funding. We do that. But that doesn't mean that we don't also want to have a big donation, we just don't have it.

A: Why did you all go with the youth platform or targeting young people more?

R: Well in the political science you will read the concept of what so called...sorry I forgot. Sorry I have been very busy, so not fully concentrated. Gerontocracy, the politics is controlled by the old. This is the concept of the political struggle during the French Revolution in 19th century. So basically if you look at the history of this country, this country was established by youth, Soekarno was 26 when he established PNI and he became president when he 42 or 43 years old. You look at the prime ministers of Indonesia, they become prime ministers when they are 40 or late thirties if you look at the history. But now a days, if you look at the chairs of the political parties, SBY, the former president late 60s, Megawati 70s. We are not talking about whether you are wiser when you are older, we are talking about the opportunity that is given to the youth. Because they mobilize youth, they use youth for political sake, but they never treat youth as an independent subject that can say what they want to say. They are more of an object rather than a subject. And at the same time we now have a demographic balance, right? Where the majority of the Indonesians up until 2035/45, that our workforce is young, we are the youngest workforce in the world. If you look at the chart, just Google it, compared to China, they are becoming aging. If you look at Japan or Europe, even now 48% of the voters in 2018 are millennials.

A: Of the people that voted or the people that could have voted?

R: The age between 17-30, the number is 48%. So how can we rely, the future of this country, to the old men that don't care about the future of the youth? So that's why we are focusing on the youth itself.

A: What about the longevity or the future party? Will you continuously focus on youth or will you move with the millennials as they age? Do you know?

R: Of course we have to put into consideration that we started for the youth. The issue is the youth. I become older of course, but still I have to pay more attention to them.

A: You have talked about this a little bit, but I am really interested because I have been talking to students at UGM and just other students and young people in Jogja, just about political parties in general and usually the first thing that comes up is that they are corrupt, they are terrible, and I am staying out of it.

R: Do they know PSI at all?

A: Actually some of them do.

R: Really?!

A: Yeah.

R: Oh, that's surprising.

A: Yeah and sometimes I won't say I am studying PSI and I'll be like "what do you think about political parties?" And some girl was like "oh I hate them, but there is this new one and I have hope." And I was like yeah I am studying them!

R: Really?!

A: Yeah I have been talking to students that are student government and also students that are not political, trying to get more of a gage. But how do you combat that? That mentality that there is no point in trying anymore with parties?

R: It depends you know on how you look at the glass. Are you seeing it as the half empty or the half full? I am quite optimistic because people are quite frustrated--people are kind of fed up with political parties, but for me that is the opportunity. Because we already accept democracy as our norm, to regulate our life here in the country. We agree upon it, then we have an election every five years, no question. Then you have to go to the polling station, you should go. But you look at the participation, turnout, in the election and it is quite good, compared to the U.S. We still have 73%? Check out the number. I mean our first election is kind of 90 something percent. Of course decrease, the confidence, the trust to politics parties decrease. Even that is one thing that makes us very optimistic as well is the Party ID. You know the concept of Party ID, right? The personal attachment to the party. In 2014, it is only 11%, very low, very very low. I think the last two months ago or four months ago, showed that the Party ID only 9%. So what does it mean? It means that there is big opportunity for us. So it means that people are not automatically

choosing political party. They will choose PDI-P because their neighbor maybe run as a parliament as the mp or maybe family reason or maybe money politics. So the reason is not because you belong to any political party. So 91% that don't have party ID, combined with the number of youth—48% that's very big opportunity. And then look at the popularity of political party, I mean there is a regular survey, it is very low, I mean it has been very low. I think it's the lowest political institution, I mean compared to the president or whatever and the election commission, constitutional court. It's consistently the lowest.

For us it is a good opportunity. But, if people are more fed up with political parties, then it's time to show that we are different.

A: When you were first creating or coming up with a new party did you know that you wanted it to be secular or did you think about...?

R: Don't use word secular.

A: Oh I'm sorry.

R: No, I mean as a politician. It is a dirty word. Secularism, liberalism. What else? Two words at least. Because the word secularism means that you kick out religion from your personal faith. Although personally I believe in secularism. Well there is a long debate about secularism itself. U.S. secularism is completely different from the one in France. Even in the Western Europe secularism is different from the other part of Europe because of the history. Correct me if I am wrong, your secularism is to protect religion from the people. Where in France, the secularism is to protect the state from the religion. So that is different, because you [the U.S.] are still very religious still the presidential candidate has to go to the church, has to prove they are very family man. That is totally different from Australia for example. The former prime minister was unmarried and had a boyfriend, so it doesn't matter at all. So I am just telling you that there are different contexts, different meanings of secularism itself. Secularism just has a negative connotation in Indonesia, no positive at all. But, if you read the concept we agree. It supposed to be certain rules that, there should be separation between religion and state. So we believe in that context we are pro, not secularism, but the idea of secularism itself. It means that we believe that religion is okay, is good, but please don't intervene in private space or the state itself because the main idea the main idea is that the state should be neutral. The concept of a secular state is to put citizenship at the central. No discrimination because you are Christian, you are Muslim, you are Jew, whatever. But that is basically the idea. And we agree about it, but we never say secular. Otherwise, it is bad. But also, do we really separate church and state now a days in any political system?

A: No, definitely not. Hmmm, I guess what other ways, besides the recruitment you were talking about, do you all use to fight for tolerance and against corruption? Are there other ways your party is trying to achieve those?

R: We started to show to the public that we choose our candidates through the idea of meritocracy. That's why we supported Pak Ahok in Jakarta. I was a spokesperson of Ahok. I spent day and night with him during the campaign. With a very negative connotation you know?

You can imagine that I am a Muslim, I come from the Santri—the pious Muslim background. I am not pious myself, but I have the baggage not to support someone with the blasphemy law on him. But, yeah that's the way we struggle.

A: So my director comes from a small village and she was telling me that they all vote together. I guess I was interested to see if that matters on a national scale when strategizing for your political party?

R: Why do they fight?

A: I guess I don't know why they do that, never mind, next question. So from my research I know that there is a complicated process before you can run a presidential candidate, would you ever in the future want to run a presidential candidate?

R: Of course, I mean we, Amanda, 2019 is the first time in Indonesian history that the presidential election will be run at the same time as the parliamentary election. But the problem is, when the law on election passed by the parliament they still use the old school, the old system to support the candidacy. It's supposed to be, I mean we have the 2014 election, in the 2014 election there is a rule, if you want to support a candidate the minimum seat you have to have 20% of the seat or 25% of the voters. But, because the parliamentary elections came first--around five months before the presidential election. So now you have the data, you have the fact that how many seats did you get in the parliament. So then the qualifying parties have a right to nominate a candidate. But then the question, if the 2019 then you have simultaneous election then how are you going to make recruitment for the presidential election? For us, as long as you pass the verification of the KPU, you are now a political party, then you are eligible to support any candidate. Because the 20%/25% is in the last election, it is no longer valid in 2019. But because they are the ones that drafted it and made the law and then decided that in 2019 they still use 20%/25% as basic requirement for the candidacy. But then we went to the constitution court and asked whether it is valid or not. But unfortunately we lost. We file to ask the constitutional court to ask about the presidential threshold, the second one is about the verification. What is stated in the law, only new political party that should be verified by the election commission. So they are an establishment they don't want to. SO that's why after they decided the law, we went to the court and filed the two laws. We won one and lost one. So that's very funny. You use a ticket to go to LA or to go to the cinema, but then after you use the ticket you will use it later on again. But that happens here in the country.

A: So PSI is supporting Jokowi?

R: Yes, last we met with Jokowi before the process of verification. But only after a couple of days when we formally announce political party then we go to the palace again to meet with Jokowi and give support. In this process of political setting here in Indonesia we are on the spotlight because we are new, even if we haven't yet got the verification, but Jokowi is already accept us, accept our invitation. After we got our verification, we are the first party that has been to palace that is a symbol that Jokowi made a political gesture towards us. That makes establishment also jealous.

A: Is it harder to, because on your website you talk about urban educated youth a lot and what do you do to reach out to people that are outside of that? That are rural Indonesians?

R: Through canvassing, door to door canvassing.