

Challenges of Party Autonomy to Party Institutionalization: A Case of Internal Party Conflict

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Abstract

Party autonomy is one of the critical indicators of political parties' institutionalization. The party's ability to be freed from other influences in managing its organizations and policies can assess how far the institutionalization of political parties is. Using a sequential-mixed method by combining quantitative analysis, which is elaborated more by the qualitative one, this study found that the management of party policies and internal conflicts still portray the influence of external factors. This external influence affects the party's independence while facing and resolving internal party conflict. Party autonomy is a severe challenge for party institutionalization because it will affect internal cohesion and solidity. Relatively, independent political parties will be able to manage their organizations and avoid intervention from external parties.

Keywords

Party Institutionalization, Party Autonomy, Party Organization, External Influences, and Cohesion.

1. Introduction

Political parties are an essential element in democracy. Mainwaring & Scully and Pridham stated that the key to building democracy is strengthening democratic institutions; one of them is political parties (Fionna, 2013). The vital role of political parties in the democratic process cannot be separated from the party's internal dynamics. Randall said that political parties must be institutionalized to play an essential role in building democracy (Randall, 2006). With a high level of institutionalization, political parties are generally considered to positively impact democratic stability because they can help minimize conflicts (Scarow, 2005).

In terms of party institutionalism, it has many indicators. For example, based on a study conducted by Tomsa with the Golkar Party as the object of his research, one of the factors that driven better institutionalization of Golkar than the others is its long history as a hegemonic party during the authoritarian regime. In other words, the existence of a political party can contribute to how the party is institutionalized (Tomsa, 2008). Meanwhile, by analyzing the party organization at the branch level, Fionna (2013) found that daily administration and office management are the factors that determine the party's capacity to carry out its programs at the grassroots.

The Center for Political Studies-LIPI also conducted a study of the institutionalization of political parties in Indonesia. This study analyzed the institutionalization of political parties concerning six aspects, namely: (1) ideology; (2) internal democracy, (3) regeneration; (4) internal cohesiveness; (5) relations with constituents; and (6) financial autonomy, related to party funding sources and party management mechanisms (Muchlis, 2007). Firman Noor (2015) also studied the institutionalization of Islamic political parties in Indonesia by looking at internal fragmentation and party cohesion. Several dimensions measured in his study was procedural leadership, internal conflict resolution, regeneration, ideology, and shared values.

From the various indicators that can be used to analyze the institutionalization of parties above, this study focuses on the issue of how parties run their organizations independently. The independence of political parties, such as in the policy-making process, determining party leadership, and managing internal conflicts, are important indicators in the institutionalization of political parties to support the democratic process. If we ask about this autonomy to party members, we may get answers with positive connotations. However, in practice, political parties have not been entirely free from various interests. One of them that triggers the author to discuss more in this research is the matter of party independence in managing internal conflicts. Political parties often experience internal conflicts due to the party's

failure or inability to manage internal cohesiveness and solidity. As a result, parties often experience factions that lead to new parties and even draw external parties into the vortex of internal conflict.

Internal conflict and factions occur in new democracies such as Africa (Aleyomi, 2013; Okoth & Jagero, 2021) and established democracies like Europe (Ceron, 2019; Marx & Schumacher, 2013). Likewise, in Indonesia, this problem also often occurs in political parties. The big parties, such as Golkar Party and PDI-P, also have traces of internal conflicts in the past. History records that internal party conflicts often occurred before Indonesia's independence, as in the Indonesian Syarikat Islam Party (Subekti, 2014). In the post-independence, as happened to the Masyumi Party, until the reform era wherein the political consequences of internal conflict parties generally end with the emergence of a new party. Gerindra, Nasdem, and Hanura parties are examples of parties born due to internal party conflicts, namely the Golkar Party. The Reform Star Party (PBR) also emerged from internal disputes within the United Development Party (PPP). In addition, the internal conflict within the National Awakening Party (PKB) also gave rise to two new parties, namely the Democratic Victory Party led by Matori Abdul Jalil and the Nusantara Nation Prosperity Party (PKBN) under Yeni Wahid.

The internal conflicts of political parties have become quite crucial in the efforts to institutionalize political parties. Panebianco stated the institutionalization of political parties as "the way the organization solidifies." Therefore, internal party solidity is an essential prerequisite in institutionalization (Randall & Svasand, 2002). Randall & Svasand (2002) define institutionalization as how the party becomes established in integrated behaviour patterns and attitudes or culture. Randall and Svasand described four dimensions of a party's institutionalization: systemness, value infusion, decisional autonomy, and reification. Systemness or the degree of systematicity is used to see the level of routine in building general agreement in the party to guide the behaviour of party cadres. Value infusion is related to how the party has succeeded in creating its own culture or value system that can create party cohesion. Decisional autonomy is associated with the party's ability to be independent of external intervention in decision-making. Finally, reification refers to the extent to which the party's existence is embedded in the public imagination (Randall & Svasand, 2002). In the context of this paper, the decisional-making dimension proposed by Randall and Svasand becomes the dimension used to analyze the issue of party autonomy in Indonesia during the Reformation era. However, this study elaborates this dimension by looking at the party autonomy in managing conflict.

This paper consists of five parts. The first part is the introduction that explains the background, a brief description of the research problem on party conflict and its relation to party institutionalization, and the arguments put forward by the authors. The second part is literature review. The third part is about the data and research methods used in this paper. The fourth is the core part of this paper. In this part, the authors present the descriptive data from the survey of political party administrators regarding their perception of the independence of their party. The authors also conducted a qualitative analysis of the survey findings. Qualitative research is needed to explain what kind of picture the party's institutionalization is, especially on autonomy. Finally, the fifth part will conclude the whole discussion in this paper.

1.1 Objectives

Based on the urgency of the autonomy of political parties and the existing conditions of political parties that are still attached to internal conflicts, this study will analyze the challenges of the party's independence in managing internal conflicts within the framework of party institutionalization. The authors argue that post-New Order political parties often experience internal conflicts, so external parties eventually enter and influence the conflict resolution process. This condition causes the party to fail in building independence in the management of its internal organization. By presenting several data from the survey results of party members' perceptions and literature studies, we hope to contribute to academic discussions regarding the independence of political parties in managing internal party conflicts within the framework of party institutionalization.

2. Literature Review

Various studies on internal party conflicts generally review the causes and impacts of internal party conflicts (Budiatri et al., 2018; Noor, 2015; Romli, 2017). For example, Fickett in Noor (2015) stated that ideological differences and personal conflicts between party elites are the causes of factions within the party. Meanwhile, Shale and Pruitt & Rubin in Subekti (2017) stated that internal conflicts are triggered by favouritism, usually due to differences in the promotion of cadres and relatives and unequal distribution of resources.

In the case of Indonesia, at least the driving factors for internal party conflict can be divided into internal factors and external factors. In addition to ideology, other internal factors that can encourage the emergence of internal party

conflicts are personal leadership issues, fluid party coalitions, and the implementation of a proportional electoral system in extreme multiparty party systems (Budiatri et al., 2017, 2018). Differences in the choice of coalitions, both coalitions as supporters of presidential and vice-presidential candidates and government coalitions, can also cause internal party conflicts (Romli, 2017). In addition, the issue of pragmatism related to the struggle for positions within the party can also encourage internal party conflicts (Kamarudin, 2013). Apart from these internal factors, external factors can also promote the emergence of internal disputes. The party's failure to manage internal problems can allow external parties to enter and be involved in internal conflicts. This external factor can even be a force to maintain or take over party power (Noor, 2021).

3. Method

This study used the explanatory sequential mixed method. Firstly, the author used the descriptive-quantitative method then followed up with the qualitative one to construct the whole interpretation of this study (Cresswell, 2015). The authors used quantitative research methods by doing survey to the parties' officials of nine political parties which have seats in the national legislature for the 2019-2024 period at the central and provincial levels. The purpose of this survey was to capture the perceptions of party administrators at the central and regional levels on the performance and independence of the party's Central Executive Board (DPP). For administrators at the provincial level, the authors took five regional samples, namely West Java, West Sumatra, East Kalimantan, South Sulawesi, and Maluku, based on Indonesia's representation and the distribution of distribution mass support bases for political parties. The object of this research was the PDI-P, the Golkar Party, the United Development Party, the National Awakening Party, the Prosperous Justice Party, the Democratic Party, the National Mandate Party, the Gerindra and the Nasdem Party. At the same time, the study locus was DKI Jakarta, West Java, West Sumatra, East Kalimantan, South Sulawesi, and Maluku. Afterwards, the authors used explanatory qualitative research methods to explain the causality mechanism of the parties' independence in managing internal conflicts of political parties and institutionalization of political parties.

4. Data

The author did all the data collection during April-June 2021. In doing the survey, respondents from each party at each level were drawn by a simple random method using random numbers. With this sampling method, the authors collected 83% (equivalent to 262) data from the 315 target initially targeted target respondents, consisting of 10 respondents from each political party at the central level and five from political parties at the provincial level. The margin of 17% of the original target respondents was caused by the limited time of data collection and other technical constraints in the field, such as some selected respondents who were not at the study locus or population data that was not updated. On the other hand, qualitative data was collected by studying several party documents such as the party constitution (AD/ART) and party regulations and literature or other reading sources, such as relevant print media.

5. Result and Discussion

5.1 Perception of Party Management on Party Independence

Based on the perception survey of political party administrators, this study found that most party administrators, both at the central and regional (provincial) levels, considered that their parties are independent in managing their party organizations. Thus, it can be seen from the party autonomy in party decision-making, in resolving internal party conflicts, and in assessing the performance of the party court as the party organ authorized to resolve internal party conflicts.

Of those perceptions above, most respondents loudly stated that their parties were freed from any values, especially in the party decision-making process and conflict resolution. Of all respondents from nine parties, 82,82 per cent (see table 1) stated that their party is independent of external interests in the party's decision-making process. Only nearly 1 per cent of the 262 respondents said that their party is not independent in the party's decision-making process. In detail regarding independence in the party decision-making process can be seen in Table 1 and Figure 1.

Table 1. Perception of party administrators on party independence (in per cent)

Aspect of Independence	Degree of Independence				
	Independent	Self-Sufficient	Dependent	N/A	Total
Decision Making Process	82,82	15,65	0,76	0,76	100,00
Conflict Resolution	87,02	11,07	1,15	0,76	100,00

Source: LIPI, 2021

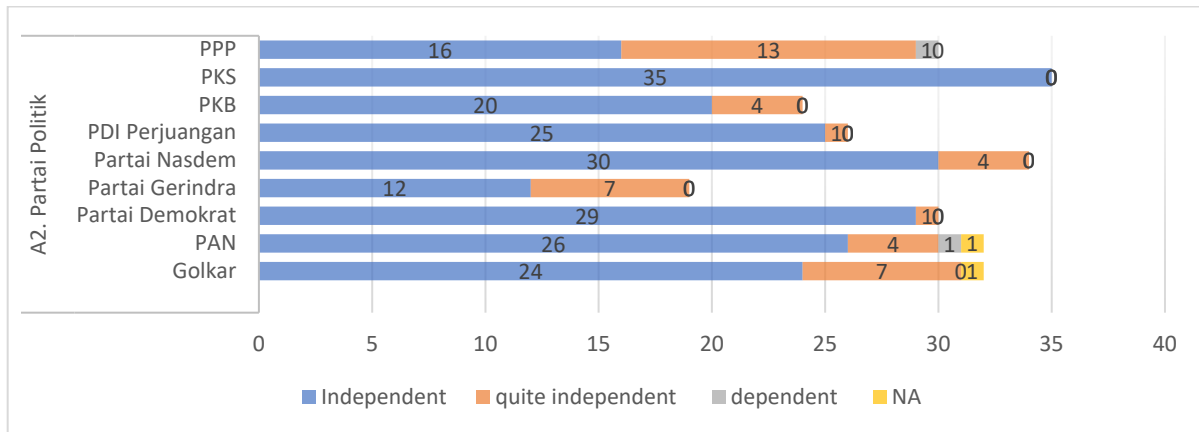


Figure 1. Perception of Each Party Officials on Party Independence from External Parties in the Party Decision-Making Process
Source: LIPI, 2021

Similar to the perception of party administrators about the party’s independence in the decision-making process, respondents also perceived that their party is independent in resolving internal conflicts. Party officials from each party, both at the central and provincial levels, stated that their parties had been freed from external party intervention (87,02 per cent, in detail see Table 1) in resolving internal conflicts. However, only 1,15 per cent of them stated that their party still has external influence in resolving internal party conflicts (Figure 2).

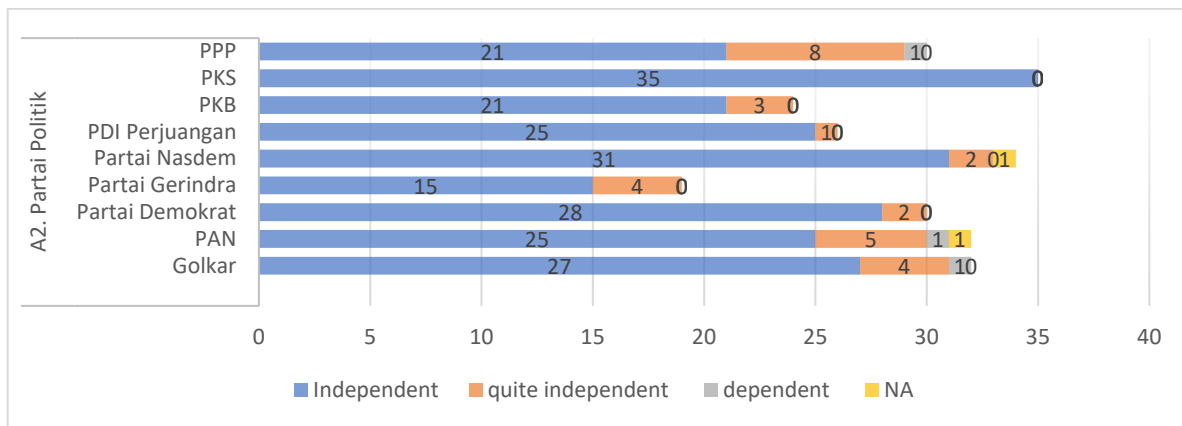


Figure 2. Perception of Each Party Officials on Party Independence from External Party Intervention in Internal Conflict Resolution
Source: LIPI, 2021

However, when asked how the independence of the Party Court both from external and internal influences in obtaining its duty, respondents’ view on this aspect was decreased slightly. If in the two previous aspects more than 80 per cent of respondents could say that their party was independent in this aspect, only 79,77 per cent of party administrators believed that the Party Court was independent in resolving conflicts. Nearly sixteen per cent of respondents said that it was self-sufficient, and 2,67 per cent said it was less independent. This fact becomes quite interesting because when the independence of an organ is measured not only as independent from external influences but also internally, it turns out that the assessment of party officials has changed. It refers to analyzing the possibility of an elite or a person/some figure in the party who has a strong enough influence. The performance of an organ authorized to resolve conflicts is tied to a particular patron-client relationship. It is certainly not a good precedent for political parties because

interventions that can become a dependency relationship can disrupt institutionalizing political parties to become modern parties that support the democratic process (Table 2 and Figure 3).

Table 2. The Independence of Party Court (in per cent)

Degree of Independence	Independent	79,77
	Self-Sufficient	15,65
	Less Independent	2,67
	NA	1,91
	Total	100,00

Source: LIPI, 2021

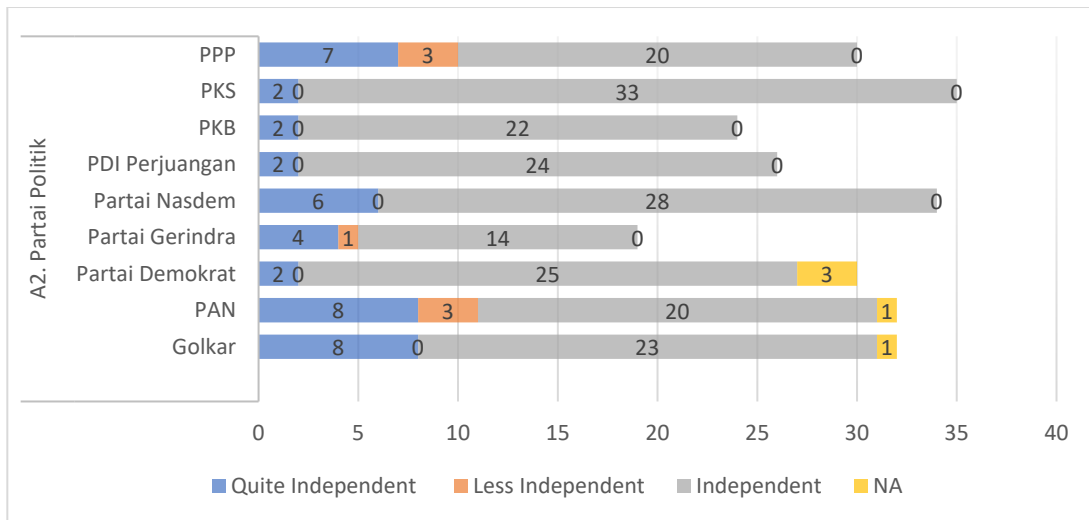


Figure 3. Perception of Party Management on the Independence of the Party Court from the Influence of External and Internal Parties in Carrying Out Their Duties

Source: LIPI, 2021

5.2 Party Autonomy in Conflict Resolution and Its Impact on Party Institutionalization

The results survey of political party administrators in assessing the party autonomy in organizational management, such as party autonomy in decision making, internal conflict resolution, and Party Court performance, show that political parties are relatively independent. However, the party autonomy has some challenges when the party faces internal conflicts. In the reform era, some political parties in Indonesia have experienced internal conflicts that led to factionalization. The resolution of protracted internal disputes has implications for party management, party solidity, and the party's vote acquisition in elections (Marsyukrilla, 19 Maret 2021). Therefore, party autonomy will be tested in resolving internal conflicts, especially when there is involvement from external parties in the conflict vortex.

The party's inability to manage internal conflicts opens the gap for the involvement of external parties in the conflict. In other words, internal party problems that fail to be resolved can invite external parties to enter the circle of conflict. In this case, the internal and external factors merge and unexpectedly become the root of party management's dualism problem (Noor, 2021). Therefore, although party officials' assessment said they have resistance to external intervention, several parties still face internal conflict that often leads to management dualism. (Afrianto, 2021). The external intervention mentioned can be the form of the authorities' involvement or the government, which allows them to put their agendas on the parties in conflict. (Noor, 2015).

The survey of political party administrators about party autonomy in the decision-making process shows that parties have their internal mechanisms. Thus, the party's decision-making process mechanism, as in party policies, becomes an internal matter where institutionally, the party has its procedures. By referring to this fact, we can infer that the

party can prevent interventions from an external influence, such as the direction and policies of the party. In this case, the party's organizational management will make party decisions relatively protected from external forces.

A relatively similar thing is also depicted in the party court autonomy from external and internal influences. As stated in the previous section, the Party court is an institution that handles various internal party disputes. Through the existence of a party court, it is hoped that internal conflicts will become an area dealt with by the internal parties rather than involvement from outsiders. Thus, the Party court usually consists of cadres trusted to represent all interests in an internal dispute. When the party court can carry out its duties and has immunity from intervention from outside the court, the possibility of internal disputes can be handled.

From the survey of party administrators, there are some critical points regarding party autonomy in the context of party institutionalization. First, party autonomy is the internal party ability to manage its organization to avoid intervention from external parties. It will be tested when the party has an institutional mechanism that internally supports its daily business. Second, the inability of political parties to institutionalize internal mechanisms in managing organizations, such as conflict resolution, shows that parties have not been able to sufficiently enforce the agreed internal mechanisms. The implication is that external parties can influence internal party's conflict. This cannot be separated from the "party's hospitality" to the external factor to be involved as they cannot resolve the conflicts internally.

Suppose the party cannot deal with its conflict. In that case, this becomes a challenge for party institutionalization because external influences will be involved in every problem or conflict that arises. The institutionalization of the party emphasizes that the strength of the party is free from external intervention. The involvement of external parties in the management of party organizations makes the parties unable to determine their platforms and policies. The institutionalization of parties encourages parties to manage internal conflicts to maintain solidity from the potential that causes division. Party autonomy can also guarantee the party's constituents by showing them that the party they have chosen is indeed a well-managed institution that can channel people's various political aspirations and interests.

6. Conclusion

As one of the crucial institutions of democracy, the institutionalization of political parties becomes an essential step for political parties to maximize their functions. This institutionalization covers one of the significant issues, namely party autonomy. Party autonomy describes how the party has the ability autonomously over various resources owned by the party. This capability requires the support of a solid internal mechanism for external influence, in this case, the intervention of parties outside the party to influence organizational policies or decisions. The internal perception of the party is mainly reflected in this study showing that the party is relatively independent of various opportunities that provide external parties to be involved in the organization.

The challenge is how the party's autonomy in dealing with internal disputes. Although the party has mechanisms that can prevent the party from potentially splitting up, several internal party conflicts show that the party is still vulnerable to external party intervention. When external parties are involved in the business affairs of political parties, especially in resolving internal conflicts, the idealism, autonomy, and independence of political parties are questioned. When these three things are missing from a party, a political party becomes an organization with no design for a better policy change direction for a country. It happens because the party has intervened so that its ideology or platform that should be the party's footing has been blurred. Instead, the party grew into a political institution that would serve the needs of its patrons, not for the people, and the consolidation of democracy was threatened.

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