

The Elections and Foreign Policy: The Cases of Southeast Asia

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Abstract

Elections are always the part of a democratic society, especially those who are living the representative democracy in their society. Nevertheless, the nation-states who run the democratic mechanisms in its constitution would also hold the elections. Elections, in the term of representative democracy, majorly are held to elect the representations of people who take the offices in the state for taking parts in the policymaking of the nation-state, including its foreign policy as a part of its sovereignty and its nature as a subject of international law. Southeast Asians' case is one of the best examples of case, because of their nation-states' democratic styles and its international political surface. On this research, as from 10 full members of ASEAN, or 11 principal members, at least until the accession of Timor Leste, at least 4 members do democracy proper, namely Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, and Timor Leste, which are also studied. Also, there is also one who has bigger power and is also considered as a party that actively promotes democracy and human rights in the Southeast Asia, this brings also hypothesis for the region and ASEAN itself.

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1. Introduction

Elections are always the part of a democratic society, especially those who are living the representative democracy in their society [1]. Miriam Budiardjo, which is in her Indonesian-famously book of the fundamentals of the political science, told of the importance of the election as the symbol, and also the benchmark, of the democracy itself, with its result in the case of official openness with the guarantees of freedom of speech and freedom of association, which can be the most accurate projection of the civil participation, and also the aspirations of the people [2]. Therefore, elections' results can be also the abstraction of the people's decision-making for the nation-state and its political system.

Nevertheless, the nation-states who run the democratic mechanisms in its constitution would also hold the elections. Elections, in the term of representative democracy, majorly are held to elect the representations of people who take the offices in the state for taking parts in the policymaking of the nation-state, including its foreign policy as a part of its sovereignty and its nature as a subject of international law.

In an election within a nation-state, there is usually a period when each participant pitches and promotes ideas and discourses that become points for citizens as voters and constituents to be given a mandate in representative democracy that will carry out policymaking for the nation-state, as already regulated in the constitution [3]. That is also including foreign policy itself as it is in the existence of the sovereignty of nations-states who do the elections. Usually, almost democratic societies in the world, have multiparty political system, so are the elections there too, with many political parties as the contestants. Although the origins of political parties have been on before the election [32], the position of political parties as the actors of the election have the places on examining the correlation between the elections and the foreign policies [2].

The Southeast Asian region is one of the most stable regions in the world, even during times of transition and crisis, such as the Cold War and various other events [4]. This is, nevertheless, the product of the foreign policy of each country in this region, which of course comes from the existing policymaking within their respective political systems. In fact, ASEAN as a regional-multilateral organization was also born and operates with it, while remaining based on the principles of consensus and non-interference decision-making [5, 6], to negotiate and manage the international order in the Southeast Asian region in general [4].

As what academicians and diplomats know from Southeast Asia, Indonesia is the largest nation-state in the region, and one of the big democratic societies in the world, even on par of India and the United States. But, from 10 full members of ASEAN, or 11 principal members, at least until the accession of Timor Leste, at least 4 members do democracy proper. These are Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, and Timor Leste. Many academics also give the academic impression that Indonesia is a regional great power in the Southeast Asian region, especially among ASEAN member countries (7, 8). Indonesia is also mentioned as holding traditional leadership in ASEAN based on various assumptions, including historical assumptions. The Indonesian government is also considered as a party that has a mediation function at the regional level by using its power and influence to mediate conflicts that have the potential to endanger regional stability and is also considered as a party that actively promotes democracy and human rights in the Southeast Asian region (9, 10, 11, 12).

2. The Correlations of the Foreign Policy and The Elections

2.1. The Theories and Concept of Foreign Policy

Jeannette L. Nolen describes foreign policy as the general goals that guide the activities of a country in its interactions with other countries, whose development is influenced by domestic considerations, the behavior of other countries, or plans to advance certain geopolitical designs [13]. Mark R. Amstutz states that foreign policy is the explicit and implicit actions of government officials of a country designed to promote national interests beyond the borders of a country [14]. Hermann (2001) describes that foreign policy makers make decisions at the individual, group, and coalition levels [15]. According to Alex Mintz and Amnon Sofrin, in 2017, there are several models in foreign policymaking that are considered the main ones: the rational actor model, the prospect model, the polyheuristic model, the cybernetic model, the bureaucratic political model, and the organizational politics model. These models are based on unique decision-making rules, including rules for maximizing, rules for satisfying, rules of elimination by aspects, lexicographical rules, as well as other rules [15].

The first model is the rational actor model. Allison, in 1971, states that this foreign policy model leads to decision alternatives that produce the most favorable consequences [15]. Cashman, in 1993, describes that foreign policies that have a rational actor model have a series of steps in their decision-making process, including problem identification, goal identification, information gathering, alternative identification, alternative analysis by considering the costs and benefits of each alternative, as well as the probability of success, selecting alternatives with maximum opportunities, implementing decisions, as well as monitoring and evaluation [15]. In each decision-making step in this foreign policy model, rational actors are assumed to use purposive actions to display consistent preferences and maximize their utility [15].

The second model is the prospect model. In this foreign policy model, policy makers (decision makers) try to avoid risks related to the benefits received in every consideration that is approved and try to avoid accepting risks related to losses [15]. Kahneman and Tversky, in 1979, and Levy explain, in both of their thoughts, that in the prospect model, decision makers try to evaluate outcomes as a function of deviation from a reference point, by trying to find a balance between losses and gains [15]. There are two decision-making steps in the prospect model for foreign policies that are decided based on the modeling, namely the editing phase, which consists of presenting decisions along with the identification of options and related probabilities, and the evaluation phase, when choices are made based on reference points and utility function values [15].

The third model is the polyheuristic model. The basis of this foreign policy modeling is the cognitive mechanisms used by policy makers to simplify complex foreign policy decisions, in a polyheuristic manner. Polyheuristics itself comes from two Greek words, namely poly which means several and heuristics which means shortcuts. The polyheuristic model itself can be produced by policy makers through the process of sorting out various alternative foreign policies into two types, namely alternative policies that are rejected based on critical dimensions, and alternative policies that are accepted with maximum possible profit receipts and minimal risk reduction of its implementation [15].

The fourth model is the cybernetic model. March, in 1986, and Simon, in 1957, both describe that in the

cybernetic theory model, foreign policy is structured by trying to reduce uncertainty in decision-making considerations using information feedback loops, with the basic argument that an individual faces processing and cognitive constraints. accompanying, something that can limit their computing abilities, memory, and memory abilities, so that individuals then develop decision procedures that enable them to deal more effectively and decisively, both with their own cognitive limitations and with the demands imposed by the decision environment [15].

The fifth model is the bureaucratic political model. Mintz and DeRouen, in 2010, explain that in this modeling, foreign policy is described as a package of decisions that involves various bureaucracies and can lead to political competition [15]. Dougherty and Pfaltzgraff, in 1990, state that the existence of foreign policy can occur because the decisions in it arise from political struggles and political bargaining activities from various political groups. Thus, foreign policy is considered as something that is decided through an abstract political space rather than a formal decision procedure that relies on a formal chain of command [15]. Allison, in 1971, states that the actors in the foreign policy model are individuals who sit in organizations who are authorized to make decisions regarding foreign policy, along with their respective interests, agendas, and maximum goals [15].

The sixth and final model is the organizational political model. In this foreign policy model, decisions related to foreign policy are taken by the organization. Sometimes, decision making is based on standard operating procedures. What is meant by standard operating procedures here are some a priori guidelines or administrative rules that have been established by the organization [15].

2.2. The Theories and Concept of Policy Making

Meanwhile, policies are collections of decisions taken by a powerful political actor or group, to choose goals and ways to achieve those goals. Decisions themselves are the results of make a choice among several alternatives [2]. All of policies and decisions have each of its own making-process. Academicians have already acknowledged decision making process, so must be the policy making.

Both of policy making and decision making are processes of the politics. Every political process shapes the public policies or the governmental policies. That is also including choosing several alternatives around the case to be solved in the policies [2]. The policies themselves, are also related to the distribution and allocation of values in the society, as are the politics in the definition of the problem of who gets what, when does they get, and how does they get, as rhetorized by Harold D. Laswell in 1959 [2]. That political life includes a variety of activities that affect the policies of the authorities, which are accepted for a community, and which affect the way to implement the policy, so that community participation is needed in political life when the community activities relate in some way to the making and execution of policy for a society.

2.3. Examination of Foreign Policy as A Part of National Policy Making

As cited that foreign policy is the general goals that guide the activities of a country [13], and with also the citation that regards policies as the collections of decisions taken by a powerful political actor or group, to choose goals and ways to achieve those goals [2], therefore, foreign policy can be defined as the policy which is

made of politics too.

When David Easton in 1971, stated that political life includes a variety of activities that affect the policies of the authorities, which are accepted for a community, and which affect the way to implement the policy, so that community participation is needed in political life when the community activities relate in some way to the making and execution of policy for a society, foreign policies, which rule how a country interact with the others, are also included. Considering every nation, which is contained of societies and ruled also by a state, is having its own interests, and shall promote its own national interests beyond the borders of that state [14], with the understanding that a state equals a country, therefore foreign policy shall be also included in the political life where communities can participate.

2.4. The Roles of Political Parties

As already abstractly written before, usually, almost democratic societies in the world, have multiparty political system, so are the elections there too, with many political parties as the contestants. Although the origins of political parties have been on before the election [32], the position of political parties as the actors of the election have the places on examining the correlation between the elections and the foreign policies [2]. Carl J. Friedrich and Giovanni Sartori, by the conclusion, describe a political party as any political group that present at elections, and has any capabilities on placing the public officials, which will have ability for policymaking, through electoral process (33, 34).

Theoretically, political parties have roles and functions in the middle of democratic societies. First, political parties have a role as the actor of political communication, through interest aggregation and interest articulation [2]. Sigmund Neumann, in his analysis of the correlation of political parties and political communication, concluded that political party as the big medium who connects the ideologies and aspirations with powers, to the governmental offices [35]. Second, political parties have a role as the actor of political socialization [2], by the introductive activities a party pushes, so people can have any abstracts about their political system and every political phenomenon which already happened [36]. Third, political parties have a role as the actor of political recruitment, from the public to the government itself, and for the last or the fourth, political parties also have a role in conflict management around the democratic society [2].

With all these functions, and those correlation to the elections and the policymaking, especially on the matters of foreign policies, political parties have been more focused on this research, including the political parties on the case of the democratic societies in Southeast Asia.

3. The Election in Indonesia and The Affection on Indonesian Foreign Policies

Indonesia, the most important nation-state in the region, has held the elections, especially for the parliaments, for several times since 1955. Although, Indonesians just have elected the head of state, the president, since 2004. Most election editions mandate voters in Indonesia to elect candidates who will serve in legislative and executive positions for a five-years term, except for certain editions [17].

Although Indonesia has officially adopted free and active foreign politics based on the constitution, *Undang-Undang Dasar 1945*, since the independence, as regulated by The 37th Law of the Republic of Indonesia of 1999 on International Relations (*Undang-Undang Nomor 37 Tahun 1999 tentang Hubungan Luar Negeri*), every head of state and legislators who serve for a 5-years term or for other special terms as already happened in the case of the government shaped by the 1955 election, generally also have their own interpretation of Indonesian foreign policy during their term of office [18].

For the example, in the specification of the full democracy, there are differences between the foreign policies under President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono, who took the office from 2004 to 2009 by the 2004 election and retook the office from 2009 to 2014 by the 2009 election, and the foreign policies under President Joko Widodo, who took the office from 2014 to 2019 by the 2014 election and retook the office from 2019 to 2024 by the 2019 election. As already abstracted earlier around the correlation between the elections and policymaking, especially foreign policy, the roles of each political parties around these two leaders shape a lot of their leadership and policymaking, especially on the making of foreign policies as the President of the Republic of Indonesia.

In 2004 until 2014 under the presidency of Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono from *Partai Demokrat* (Democratic Party), the Indonesian foreign policies move around the spirit of ‘a million friend, zero enemy,’ based on roles such as norm setter, consensus builder, peacemaker, bridge builder, and the voice for developing countries [19]. Yet, it must be clear that although the Indonesian foreign policies look weaker in these periods, Indonesia had still under the period of transition from the military political-backup President Soeharto era which ended in 1998, to the era of full democratization [22]. Indonesia, which was the founder of ASEAN too, has only recently rediscovered its strength within the Southeast Asian region when it regained the leadership of ASEAN in 2011, when the Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono’s government has successfully upgraded the ASEAN with that leadership. Indonesia has also been admitted into G20, in 2008, under the presidency of Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono too [21]. These policies are born in aligned with the manifesto of *Partai Demokrat* (Democratic Party) itself, that is realizing a thriving Indonesia, which is living safely, justly, and peacefully, democratically and prosperously [37].

Yet, in 2014 until 2024 under the presidency of Joko Widodo from *Partai Demokrasi Indonesia Perjuangan* (Indonesian Democratic Party of Struggle), the Indonesian foreign policy has transformed into the spirit of inward-looking based on the vision of Indonesia that is sovereign, independent, and has a personality based on cooperations [21]. That vision itself is part of Joko Widodo’s campaign when the 2014 election, the first election where he got the office of Indonesian presidency. Also, by the office of President Joko Widodo too, Indonesia also gets active in the shaping of Indo-Pacific region, based on its identity as the island country and the economic situation around Indonesia and the region (20, 21).

These all of manifest around President Joko Widodo’s foreign political leadership are based on the manifest of his party itself, even since when *Partai Demokrasi Indonesia Perjuangan* (Indonesian Democratic Party of Struggle) was an opposition in the regime of President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono [38].

That two different leadership qualities, that are also different from each other in addressing their respective foreign policies, are easy to examine as a product of the general election itself, considering that political parties and voters are involved in shaping the views of the two Indonesian leaders in the reform era which runs with full democracy. Rifqi Ali Mubarak, at a seminar on Universitas Pasundan on May 8th, 2023, as the leader of General Election Commission on the West Java Province (*Ketua Komisi Pemilihan Umum Provinsi Jawa Barat*) said on the forum talking about the election system of Indonesia, especially for the upcoming 2024 election, that Indonesia is already in the era of democratic consolidation, especially since the 2019 election which also brought the reelection of President Joko Widodo in his second term [23]. That can be examined also influencing the upgraded quality of the Indonesian foreign policy, become something that is stronger and bolder in self-expression [24].

4. The Election in Timor Leste and The Affection on East Timorese Foreign Policies

Since its restoration of independence in 2002, Timor Leste has already held five presidential elections and parliamentary elections. Considering that Timor Leste or East Timor was also a province of Indonesia in the New Order era, then the people of Timor Leste are also filled with various narratives from Indonesia, in addition to nationalist narratives influenced by Portugal and the Western World as a whole. These narratives also fulfill the political agenda in the elections in Timor Leste, especially among political figures and political parties.

In general, Timor Leste's foreign policy places great emphasis on the spirit of ensuring survival and affirming the political independence of their country and society [25]. This emphasis in Timor Leste is equivalent to the free and active foreign politics of Indonesia. Yet, each regime, because of elections, has its own priorities. For example, there is one policy that is a follow-up to the foreign policy principles of the Government of Timor Leste, namely the emphasis on regionalism and multilateralism in its foreign policy. That caused the conflict in East Timorese society, whether they decide to be joining ASEAN, or joining other multilateral organizations such as the Pacific Islands Forum, which is a multilateral organization for the Oceania region (26, 27). ASEAN membership was supported by the younger generations of Timor Leste, especially the Indonesian-educated generation and the post-independence youth who were more influenced by globalization, meanwhile the Pacific Islands Forum membership is what the pre-independence and Portuguese-educated generations are interested in, by prioritizing Melanesian sociocultural features that are also shared by the people of Timor Leste in general (26, 27).

5. The Election in Malaysia and The Affection on Malaysian Foreign Policies

Malaysia is a nation-state with a unique one of political system. It is a federal state with a constitutional monarch as the head of state with largely ceremonial roles, called *Yang Di-Pertuan Agong*, which is appointed from and by the Conference of Rulers of the nine rulers of Malay states around the Federation of Malaysia, and a parliamentary government with a prime minister as a head who takes office with the appointment of *Yang Di-Pertuan Agong*, by his opinion, to command the confidence of a majority of the members of parliament, which offices are taken by the citizens of Malaysia through a general election with the multiparty and first-past-the-post-voting system, like the one in United Kingdom (39, 40).

After its forming-in-present state in 1963, by the merger of Federation of Malaya, the State of Singapore (which then expelled from Malaysia in 1965), and the British crown colonies of North Borneo (Sabah) and Sarawak into the Federation of Malaysia by the proclamations of acts, Malaysia first held the general election in 1964 for the Parliament, especially *Dewan Rakyat*, the lower chamber yet the most dominant in the Parliament of Malaysia. Since that election, the coalition comprised of United Malays National Organisation (UMNO), Malaysian Chinese Association (MCA), Malaysian Indian Congress (MIC), and the other sympathizers of the manifesto of that political alliance comprised of, have already formed the government for 51 years, until got lost in the general election for the first time in 2018 by its new opposition, Pakatan Harapan, pushed by the new parties comprised of former UMNO members and more founded-Democratic Action Party (DAP), with the political heritage of pre-expulsion Singapore's People Action Party (PAP), under the manifesto of irrevocably commitment to the ideal of a free, democratic and socialist Malaysia, based on the principles of racial and religious equality, social and economic justice, and founded on the institution of parliamentary democracy [41].

In the years of the government formed by United Malays National Organisation (UMNO) and its coalition, Malaysia had always the foreign policy under the same principal, which uniquely has any alignment with the ideologies of UMNO and its coalition. As publicly already known, UMNO and its coalition have same root in ethnical nationalism and social conservatism, contrary to Democratic Action Party (DAP), which has the ideologies of national multiracialism and social liberalism. Farish A. Noor have reported that foreign policy under UMNO's coalition, especially under the leadership of Mahathir Muhammad, have any connection to the domestic policies related to the spirit of Malay supremacy which popularly known as *Ketuanan Melayu* and Islamic politics [42].

Different to UMNO's coalition, Pakatan Harapan moves themselves on the Malaysian foreign policies with the spirit of Islamic progressivism and democracy. Especially under administration of Anwar Ibrahim, there are a lot of discourses about human rights on the foreign political manifesto of Pakatan Harapan [43].

6. The Election in the Philippines and The Affection on Filipino Foreign Policies

Compared to others Southeast Asian nations, the Philippines has owned its unique electoral system, which also pushes on the uniqueness on the presidential republic of this country. The president and vice-president of the Philippines are taking the office as separate electoral candidates on the separate electoral process too. Also, the candidate of president and vice-president of the Philippines can be coming from different political parties or even be running as the independent without any political parties. This may bring consequences of the more unimportant position for the political parties in the terms of executive offices. That case of independent candidatures is also happened in the senate election, although the senate is part of legislature offices in the Philippines. Yet, the election of the members of House of Representative of the Philippines still emphasizes the important of political parties indirectly besides any independent leader can also be elected and taking offices. Although, compared to others Southeast Asian nations, the Philippines has not owned really its unique foreign policy with that unique political system. Even, every leader there. Instead, the Filipino political leaders usually bring any pragmatic foreign policies, that underscores the national interests of the Philippines, whoever take the offices.

7. Hypothetical Examination on the Influence of the Elections to ASEAN

The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) is a regional group established with the aim of promoting economic and security cooperation in the Southeast Asian region, based on the principles of consensus and non-interference decision-making [5, 6]. Observing these goals, based on the views of Kishore Mahbubani and Jeffery Sng, ASEAN is considered to have succeeded in establishing peace and progress in the social, political and economic fields since its establishment on August 8th, 1967 by the ASEAN Declaration in Bangkok [4]. Robert Yates, in 2019, also strengthens the opinion of this success by saying that ASEAN has a prominent role in negotiating and managing the international order, in the Southeast Asia region and even the Asia Pacific in general, during various times such as periods of stability, as well as periods of transition and crisis have passed, such as during the Cold War and various other events [28]. As from ten full members of ASEAN, or eleven principal members, at least until the accession of Timor Leste, at least five members do democracy proper, namely Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Timor Leste, and Thailand, and there is also one who has bigger power and is also considered as a party that actively promotes democracy and human rights in the Southeast Asia, this brings also hypothesis for there is the influence of their elections to the ASEAN itself, *via* their own foreign policies.

One clear example related to this hypothesis is when Indonesia holds the chairmanship of ASEAN in 2011 and 2023. When Indonesia holds the chairmanship of ASEAN in 2011, it was under the leadership of President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono. One of the special initiatives that Indonesia already succeeded on its 2011 ASEAN chairmanship is ASEAN Institute for Peace and Reconciliation or AIPR, by the Joint Statement on the Establishment of an ASEAN Institute for Peace and Reconciliation which was stated on the 18th ASEAN Summit in 2011. This institute is dedicated for research activities and supporting the ASEAN itself on the issues of peace, reconciliation, conflict management, and conflict resolution (29, 30). The establishment of this institution, whether by chance or on purpose, took place under the same leadership, who consciously formed the Indonesian-Timor Leste Truth and Friendship Commission with tasks and functions not much different from AIPR, to handle the post-ballot riot settlement in East Timor in 1999. The Commission itself was established in 2005 [31].

8. Conclusion

By looking at the existing examinations, it can be concluded that elections, as a political process which is part of political life. This political life also includes the process of decision making and policy making. Because foreign policy is part of the policy itself, it is very scientific if foreign policy can also be influenced by the electoral system itself.

Considering this, it is important for citizens to pay more attention to their right to vote in general elections, because their influence is no longer only related to national politics, but also to a more international level, especially in the Southeast Asia, which is increasingly integrated with ASEAN, as well as in other regional areas, such as in the European Union.

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