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Political Education Through The Mass Media? A Survey Of Indonesian University Students

Students and the media were instrumental in bringing about political reforms in Indonesia in the 1990s, which led to the resignation of Soeharto in 1998 after 32 years in power. In the lead-up to and aftermath of the 1999 national general elections, the mass media was particularly active in heightening awareness of needed political reforms. It was assumed that as an educated social grouping, students would use the mass media for their political activities. A survey of 1,000 university students was conducted to determine how effective the mass media was as an agent of political education in influencing the students' political activities. The results suggest that the relationship between media consumption and political participation was low. This paper suggests that several decades of government of suppression of so-called 'practical politics' among students in Indonesia may have contributed to this trend.

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University students were an essential element in Indonesia's social and political change in the end of the 1990s. This was especially the case in 1998, through their 'reform' movements (locally known as *reformasi*), when they made a substantial contribution towards the campaign to bring down the 32-year New Order (*Orde Baru*), forcing the resignation of President Suharto on 21 May 1998. The early months of 1998 saw a spate of anti-government student protests within the grounds of the University of Indonesia (UI), the Jakarta National University (UNJ), the Bandung Institute of Technology (ITB), the Bogor Institute of Agriculture (ITB), Gajah Madja University (UGM) in Yogyakarta and Hasanuddin University (Unhas) in Makassar. However, as 1998 progressed, the students subsequently spread their demonstrations to the streets of Jakarta, Bogor, Bandung, Yogyakarta, Medan and Ujung Pandang (Makassar). These demonstrations climaxed with students from several state and private universities from Jakarta, Bogor, Bandung and Lampung conducting sit-ins in the national legislative assembly and congress buildings (MPR/DPR RI) in the days before Suharto withdrew

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from power.

The success of this university-based movement for political renewal led to increased political democratisation and greater media freedom. In the political field, 148 political parties were formed, compared to the three parties that had been legally permitted to operate during the New Order, although in the end only 48 parties were permitted to contest the 1999 national general election (Benedanto 1999).

Within days of Suharto's resignation, the New Order's strict laws and regulations that inhibited the mass media's freedom were being ignored or rewritten (Romano 2002). This led to an increased 'openness' (*keterbukaan*) in the coverage of political issues. Journalists were more direct and blunt in their writing style than had been during the New Order period (1966-1998). Political parties enjoyed much publicity. On a daily basis, political news made headline news across all forms of mass media, whether print, radio, television or online. In the context of the reform movement, the news media were finally able to become an independent power that could hasten the collapse of the New Order government and contribute to the ongoing structural transformation of Indonesian political life, particularly in the 1999 national General Elections (Suwardi et al. 2001).

This latter contribution was notable in the lead-up to the June 1999 elections, with both the print and electronic media aiming to provide stories that contributed to political education in a manner far different to the top-down approach that had characterised the New Order era, when the state used many mechanisms to compel journalists to self-censor. In the months before and after the elections, each of the five private national television stations and the one government television station broadcast programs such as "The Parties", "the General Elections Gala", "'99 Democracy" and similar programs every week. Radio stations, especially the FM stations, also became more active in broadcasting up-to-date details of political developments. Listeners could tune in day or night for breaking news about political events. Several leading FM radio stations in Jakarta also aired special programs that discussed politics, with such programs generally broadcast at noon or in the evening. In the print media, special columns about politics provided detailed and in-depth analysis of daily political developments. Almost every national and regional newspaper provided special political supplements. These included information about campaign activities and schedules, political parties' programs, interviews with *pakar* (experts), polls concerning issues relating to general election, political parties, and character profiles of political figures.

Aside from the coverage and special programs, political

education through media mass was also provided through non-profit advertisements that were broadcast through TV, radio, newspapers, magazines and tabloids. These advertisements aimed to (1) explain the nature of the general election as a tool of democracy and (2) invite the public to visit the polling booths to express their voice by casting their votes.

Previous research indicates that the media's coverage on politics influences people's political attitudes, and this includes university students. Kraus and Davis (1978) had found that the media played a significant role in shaping the political attitude of voters. McNair (1995) also shows that the media do mould the audience's political knowledge and attitudes. In Indonesia, research published by Suryadi (*Jurnal Ikatan Sarjana Komunikasi Indonesia* 1998) shows that political media coverage influences political socialisation of senior high school students. However, Suryadi noted that the media alone should not be considered as the sole agent to influence the students' perceptions as a range of other social forces also have an impact.

Our research was conducted to test further Suryadi's question on the media as an agent of political socialisation and stimulus for political participation among university students. University students have a high need for political information because they belong to a social group that plays an important role in critiquing social-political development and they are currently important actors in the continuing social and political change occurring in Indonesia. It was hypothesised that consumption of political information circulated by the media would significantly influence the students' political participation, particularly during the 1999 general election period.

University students have a strong desire for knowledge and participate directly in political change (Romano 1996). For this reason, students were selected as the sample for the survey research discussed in this paper (see Methodology below). Because this research draws from a sample of university students, a politically active population in Indonesia, the findings of this research can be used as an indicator of the links between democratic development and the media mass, particularly in developing countries such as Indonesia.

The starting point for this research is the Uses and Effects theory. This theory is among those dominant theoretical approaches, which focus on the audience. Other related theories are the Uses and Gratification and the Information Seeking approaches (Sendjaja 1995). The Uses and Effects approach is the synthesis of Uses and Gratification approach and traditional theory

Theoretical Framework

of effects (Windahl 1981).

In the traditional effect theory, it is considered that the characteristics of media content will determine most of the outcomes that result among that media's consumers. Media use is only considered as a mediating factor, and the actual process of consuming the media is considered to result in the 'effect'. In the Uses and Gratification approach, the consequence results more from the nature of consumers' use rather than the characteristics of the media content. Media use can exclude, prevent, or decrease other activities, besides having psychological consequences dependent on certain media. In this theory, media use is considered to result from basic human needs.

In the Uses and Effects theory, need is considered to be just one of many factors that leads to media use. Individual characteristics, the would-be consumer's hopes and perceptions of the media, and level of access to the media also affect the decision of whether or not to use the media (Windahl 1981). When considering the results of media use, Uses and Effects theorists consider that results resolve partly from the media content (with the user as mediator of that content) and partly from the nature of the media use itself. In the perspective of the theory adopted for this paper, the impact of media towards an individual media consumer flows from both the content (effects) and also the type of the media itself and how it is used (consequences). The media contents can influence individuals, but the style of media and media use can also have an impact on the individual, so that the two elements cannot be separated. The two processes are at work simultaneously, and together they lead to results called 'cons-effects' (a combination of consequences and effect).

Educational processes (including political socialisation) usually cause results that take the form of cons-effects. In other words, half of the results are caused by the contents that encourage the effect, and the other half comes from the media use process, which automatically involves the accumulating and storing of knowledge.

The basis of this research is the hypothesis that there should theoretically be a positive relation between the Indonesian students' consumption of political information from the mass media and their political participation. The higher their consumption of political information from the media, the higher their political participation. To test this hypothesis concerning the connection between political socialisation via the media and political participation, control variables were used. These control variables included family, peer group, campus, affiliation and interest groups, and membership of political parties. The purpose was to try to determine whether there was a (weak and strong)

relationship between independent variables and dependent variables.

Family was chosen as a control variable for its central role in the development of character and identity during a child's formative years. There is also a strong emotional bond in a family that makes it more possible for family (especially parents) to influence their child or related families (Dowson in Robinson 1986).

School or college was also considered a factor in forming one's perception, including in the area of political problems. Hess and Torney's research (in Kraus and Davis 1978) finds that the school plays a dominant role in political socialisation among children. Following from this, campus socialisation provides knowledge to the young generation about the political world and their role in it. It also offers a concrete vision of political institutions and political relations. Schools can also be a channel of inheritance of values and attitudes that affect political understanding (Almond 1974).

In addition to formal educational processes, students are also often very much influenced by on-campus peer and friendship groups. The peer group has been identified as one of several factors that influences attitude formation, and relations with friends of the same age also plays a role in forming one's identity (Ivor Morrish, in St Vembrianto 1990). The peer group influences can extend to issues of politics.

Political socialisation can also stem from affiliation with public interest and advocacy groups, which have fought for the public interest (Budiardjo 1998). Almost all Indonesian university campuses have had long histories of 'affiliation groups'. These include the Association for Islamic Students (*Himpunan Mahasiswa Islam*), which attracts modern Islamic students; the Indonesian Islamic Students' Association (*Perhimpunan Mahasiswa Islam Indonesia*), which is affiliated with the national Islamic *Nahdlatul Ulama* grouping; the National Indonesian Student Movement (*Gerakan Muda Nasional Indonesia*), which is affiliated with nationalist powers; and the Indonesian Christian Students' Association (*Perhimpunan Mahasiswa Kristen Indonesia*), which is tied to certain Christian groups.

Outside campus, students form a large part of the constituencies of many political parties such as the Islamic-reformist National Mandate Party (PAN), the Islamic traditionalist National Awakening Party (PKB), the nationalist PDI-Struggle party (PDI-P) and the Justice and Unity Party (PKP), and Christian parties. Political parties often target the university students' social stratum for political socialisation activities, in which they prepare new cadres. This occurs either directly through involvement with

party political institutions or indirectly through social or interest groups established by or connected with a political party.

Political socialisation is defined for the purposes of this paper as the process in which political attitudes and behaviours are germinated and formed. Political socialisation can be a tool for one generation to channel political standards and political beliefs to the next generation (Almond 1974). This study compares political socialisation through political news in the mass media as the key variable of analysis, compared against family, peer group, campus, affiliation and interest groups and political parties.

Political participation is defined as a person or a group's active participation in political life, which includes choosing the nation's leaders and involvement in activities that directly or indirectly influence the government's policies. These activities include voting in general elections, attending public meetings, becoming a member of a party or interest group, arranging discussions with government officials or parliament members, among others (Budiardjo 1998). Political participation is measured by variables like whether the university student votes, seeks political information from more than one source, discusses political issues with more than one person, has engaged in discussions with a legislative assembly (DPR) candidate member at regency or central level, has been involved in demonstrations, has joined one or more organisations that is concern with politics, has been involved in election monitoring activities such as checking the qualifications of a general election officer, has worked with a parliament regency or province candidate member, has donated to a political party, has helped with a political party's campaign activities, and/or has attended political discussion outside his/her campus.

Methodology

A sample of 1,000 university students were randomly selected from Indonesia's population -- 767 (76.7%) were males and 233 (23.3%) females. Most students were in the 17-21- year-old range (647 university students or 64.7%); only 317 (31.7%) were aged 22 to 26. The rest (36 university students or 3.6%) were aged from 27 to 30. Although most (221 university students or 22.1%) claimed that they were not affiliated with any organisation, the rest were active in the Executive Students' Association (*Badan Eksekutif Mahasiswa*), their university's Departmental Association (*Himpunan Jurusan*), a sports club, a religious organisation, an art club, a *Karang Taruna* (neighbourhood youth association), a *lembaga swadaya masyarakat* (non-government association), an *organisasi massa* (*Ormas*, community-interest group) or a political party.

Most (266 students or 26.6%) lived in the Southern Jakarta

area, where many of Indonesia's universities are located. Another 219 (21.9%) lived in Eastern Jakarta, and 103 students (10.3%) lived in Northern Jakarta. The rest were scattered in Western Jakarta, Central Jakarta, Depok, Bekasi, Tangerang and Bogor.

Most came from the lower income group. 372 students (37.2%) received monthly allowances of less than Rp.150,000 (i.e. US\$15, calculated from the exchange rate of Rp.10,000 per US dollar). However, 338 (33.8%) said that they had more than Rp.300,000 to spend on expenses per month. The rest (290 university students or 29.0%) had living expenses of between Rp150,001 to Rp300,000 per month.

Most of the university students (52.1%) said that they were not members of any affiliated groups. The rest were members of activist groups like FAMRED (*Forum Aksi Mahasiswa dan Rakyat untuk Demokrasi*), Students and People's Action Forum for Democracy), KAMMI (*Kesatuan Aksi Mahasiswa Muslim Indonesia*, Indonesian Muslim Students' Action Union), Forkot (*Forum Kota*, City Forum), Forbes (*Forum Bersama*, United Forum), FNB (*Front Nasional Bersatu*, United National Front), and others.

The university students came from 16 universities in Jakarta, which during the reform movement period of 1998, provided the base for the students' political organisation and movements. The sample population comprised 50 respondents each from the National University, Gunadarma University, Mustopo University, National "Veteran" National Development University, Pancasila University, Nusantara Science and Technology Institute, Social and Political Sciences Institute, Indonesia Persad University, Jakarta Art Institute, Trisakti University, Tarumanagara University, Indonesia Catholic University and Jakarta Public University. There were 100 respondents each from the 17th August 1945 University and Atma Jaya Catholic University. There were a further 150 respondents from the University of Indonesia.

A structured interview technique was used. The data collection involved a cross-sectional sample survey, i.e. a research survey that is conducted over a discrete time period (Miller 1991). Several forms of statistical analysis were used to analyse the data in relation to the scale-use interval in each variables being researched. The Cronbach's coefficient alpha test was used to examine reliability. Factor analysis was used to judge validity. A study of the relationship between the variables was calculated using the Keiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) system. In KMO analysis, figures fall between the range of $0 < p < 1$, in which zero indicates a weak relationship between the two variables. The significance figure between each variable was also calculated against a significance of ($p < 0.05$). In other words, when significance figures are greater than 0.05 ($p > 0.05$), this indicates that the correlation

coefficient is not sufficiently significant to require analysis of the connection between the variables.

From factor-analysis counting for the validity of media use, a Keiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) number was obtained. The number was 0.767 with the significance of less than 0.01. This points to the validity of the question item that was used to measure the media use variable being generally strong. The reliability of the media use variable is also high, with the Cronbach being 0.8432.

From the factor-analysis result, the coefficient number KMO of 0.915 with the significance level of less than 0.01 was obtained for political socialisation validity. This indicates a high level of validity for the political socialisation variable. The counting reliability for political socialisation variable produced a Cronbach coefficient of 0.947. This number shows the reliability level for the political socialisation variable is very high.

The coefficient KMO level for political participation variable is 0.682 with significance of less than 0.01. The Cronbach coefficient is 0.631. These numbers are still ranging higher than 0.5, which is good for both KMO and a Cronbach figures, so it can still be concluded that the variable is still reliable as a tool to measure a person's political attitude level.

Table 1: Political News Consumption (Highest Category)

| Kind of Media and Consumption Level | Frequency (Often*) | Duration (Long**) | Intensity (Medium high***) |
|--|----------------------------|---------------------------|------------------------------------|
| Television | 89,0 % | 87,4% | 85,8% |
| Radio | 54,3% | 42,5 % | 53,1% |
| Newspaper | 82,7% | 52,9% | 73,4% |
| Magazine | 21,1% | 48,1% | 46,9% |
| Tabloid | 50,5% | 29,7% | 28,4% |

Legend: *Every day **One hour *Consumed until finished**

Television emerged as the main media for university students to obtain political news. Television first ranked in terms of the frequency, duration and intensity for information about politics. The second and the third were newspaper and radio, while magazines and tabloids were the least used and consumed. Generally, the figures suggest that students had high exposure to the mass media, with most consuming at least one form of mass media at least once per day for a period of at least one hour.

The hypothesis that there is a relation between media consumption and political participation was supported. With an *r* Pearson correlation coefficient of 0.34 – before calculating against the control variable – and a significance level of less than 0.01, it can be concluded that the media consumption variable was connected with the political participation variable.

For a relational influence, the coefficient number of 0.34 was obtained from Multiple Regression Counting. This provided evidence that media consumption influenced the political participation of the respondents. The figure is statistically significant, because it falls between the correlation numbers of 0.2 and 0.4. If the correlation coefficient is under 0.2, it should be ignored, because that shows that there is no relation between the two variables. However, at the power level, the figure indicates that although the relationship between the two variables existed, it was weak.

The understanding of the significance *r* Pearson value of 0.34 for the relationship between the variable of media consumption and political participation changes on examination of the control variables, with the relationship weakened further. The full results of this examination can be seen in Table 2.

Table 2: The Change in *r* Pearson Value after Controlling Relations for Media Consumption and Political Participation

| Controlling Variables | R Pearson Value After Control | Changes Value |
|------------------------------|--------------------------------------|----------------------|
| Family | 0.27 | 0.27 |
| Peer group | 0.25 | 0.29 |
| Campus | 0.32 | 0.02 |
| Affiliation group | 0.27 | 0.27 |
| Political party | 0.28 | 0.26 |

Table 3 indicates the strength of the connection between several control variables and political participation. The figures in Table 3 suggest that the greatest influence on political participation is the peer group while the lowest is the campus. The figures also show that the more that they undergo political socialisation through one particular agent of political socialisation, such as peer group influence, then the influence of media consumption correspondingly weakens. This finding emerges in a comparison of the figures in Tables 2 and 3.

Table 3: The Statistical Relationship between the Five Control Variables and Political Participation

| Controlling Variables | Pearson Correlation | Multiple Regression | Significance (p<0.05) |
|------------------------------|----------------------------|----------------------------|---------------------------------|
| Family | 0.42 | 0.42 | <0.01 |
| Peer group | 0.54 | 0.54 | <0.01 |
| Campus | 0.36 | 0.36 | <0.01 |
| Affiliation group | 0.46 | 0.46 | <0.01 |
| Political party | 0.47 | 0.47 | <0.01 |

Participation & Political Culture

Examination of the results increasingly confirms that the connection between media consumption and university students' political participation is weak, especially after allowing for the influence of the control variables. The indications of the weakness of the link between media consumption and student political participation are surprising. As one of Indonesia's most educated social groupings, it might be assumed that students would rely heavily on the mass media, because the media provides a wide variety of facts and information about politics. This raises the question of why the significance of the mass media does not appear to be substantial.

Overall, the relatively low influence of political information transmitted via the media on students' political participation is probably connected to the historical damage that occurred between 1978 to 1998 to the mass media's function as a mechanism of political education. In that period, the media was emasculated by the threat that the government would revoke individual news organisation's licences to operate. Many academics and industry figures have identified how the government's power to punish news organisations by withdrawing operating licences was not conducive to a lively media that conveyed important political information (see Sen & Hill 2000; Hanazaki 1998; Hill 1995).

Eventually, as the reform movement of 1998 gained momentum, one of the results was an increase in media freedom, which had previously not significantly influenced either the general Indonesian population or the student community as a source of political information. At the time of the 1999 General Elections, the changes in the political information system had been in place one year, which would not have been a sufficient length of time for the alterations to be internalised by all Indonesians. It could be deduced that one year was not sufficient time to

acculturate or reconcile students to the concept of the media acting as a political agent for them.

It should be noted that another institution that underwent the same form of political sterilisation as the mass media was the tertiary education system itself. This may be why the research shows that the campus, in common with the mass media, is not a particularly strong influence on students' political participation. The weakness of the variables between campus and political participation (r Pearson = 0.36) should not be separated by the New Order's policy of 'depoliticisation' of campus life since 1978. The Ministerial Decree No. 1/V/78 on the Normalisation of Campus Life (NKK) imposed conditions that neutered political activity on campuses.

Compared to previous periods in which the campuses were centres of political activities, educational activities on campus were oriented towards developing 'technocrats' who were ready to work in the industrial world (Sanit 1989). This barrenness of campus life continued until the ministerial decree was nullified in 1992, and in fact the spirit of this decree continues to have consequences up to the present day. It could be argued that since the introduction of NKK, campuses ceased to perform a political socialisation function. Extra-curricula organisations connected with the university, especially the Students' Council (*Dewan Mahasiswa*), that prior to 1974 had been an effective vehicle for political socialisation, have never re-emerged. In 1992, there emerged the Students' Senate (*Senat Mahasiswa*), but its function is not as dynamic as that of its predecessor, the Students' Council.

If the mass media and the campus were not the social sectors that had most impact on student life – remembering that students often spent more time on campus when those campuses are also good access points for information – this research suggests that the most significant agent of political socialisation was the peer group. The strength of the connection between peer-group socialisation and political participation (r Pearson correlation of 0.54) can be understood in the context that when a formal institution undergoes sterilisation in the way that campuses did, then there will be a redirection of activities towards informal institutions, such as peer groups. Peer group members also form emotional attachments with other members. The peer group is a reference for each member in terms of their attitude and behaviour, including that of the political realm. Furthermore, in practice, a student's ties in a peer group are often underpinned by a similarity among friends or acquaintances from an affiliation group. Based on the statistical results, this points to a strong correlation (r Pearson correlation of 0.46) with political participation.

The peer group also has a natural link with affiliation groups.

The process of political sterilisation of campuses for 20 years of itself did not end the life of affiliation groups. On the contrary, reformation politics gained life through the ties of affiliation groups that could be said to be the foundation of Indonesian student politics. Following the success of the reform movement, several underground affiliation groups have re-emerged. They moved primarily towards ideological philosophies, such as religion (Islam, Christianity), nationalism or socialism. Because of these strong underlying ties, the research found a strong connection between affiliation groups socialisation and political participation (r Pearson = 0.46).

The strength of the connection between political party socialisation and political participation (r Pearson = 0.47) can also be explained in terms of Indonesia's current political situation. After experiencing a period of 'famine' in party-political life, starting from the national elections of 1977 and lasting until the 1997 elections, a passion for party politics was stimulated by the early elections of 1999. The community, including students, welcomed the political parties (and, as mentioned above, 48 parties had the right to contest the elections). In the 1999 general elections, students generally adopted partisan positions in relation to one or other political party, even though these parties did not appear on campus due to the campus policies that restricted political activity. Furthermore, political parties in the 1999 elections generally had ties with religious, nationalist or leftist organisations, so that political values were fundamentally tied to the political affiliation groups of the student cohort. Because of the similarity in platforms between parties and affiliation groups, political parties were well received as political agents by the students.

Based on this research, family influences cannot be neglected as a political agent. The relationship between family socialisation and political participation was quite strong (r Pearson = 0.42). This figure suggests that the family influence is strong on students political behaviour. This may be different to Western countries where families may regard children as bursting into adulthood once they reach university age. Most Indonesian families maintain the system of parent-child relations until the children graduate from higher education, with large numbers of university students living with their families unless they study outside their home town. This tradition helps to explain why families still exert a strong influence on students' political lives. Indonesian students are generally not able to live independently; their study needs are still supported by their families so there is a low possibility for differing in opinion to that their family leans towards, including in political issues.

Conclusion

If these findings are applied with the theory, then one may conclude that political participation depends on political socialisation. Maswadi Rauf and Mappa Nasrun (1993) say that political socialisation is the same as political communication values. Political socialisation points to the process of developing political attitudes and behaviours (Almond 1974). Political socialisation is primarily aimed at transferring political values from political agents to others. One of the main goals, aside from strengthening vested interests, is to develop the public's zest for involvement in politics.

Political socialisation occurs through the mass media and other means such as family, school, peer group, affiliation groups and political parties themselves. The mass media is often considered an effective means of political socialisation, which has widespread effect. But this research suggests that this is not strictly true. The influence of media consumption on political participation is less significant than other factors among university students, who are seen in Indonesia as a critical, rational and mature social sector. This research has been done among university scholars, who have been in the front line of the movement towards social-political change in Indonesia in recent years.

The r Pearson value, which only reached 0.34, shows that the effect of the mass media in increasing political participation among university students is relatively small. Thus, even though this research's hypothesis is proven, the strength of the connection is not strong. It did not even reach the 0.5 as a standard value. It only reached 0.40, which indicated a moderately strong relationship. As was discussed above, this appears to reflect the fact that the mass media and university campuses had for a period of 20 years not acted intensively as agents of political socialisation, so that they did not have a strong influence on political participation. It appeared to be the case, by contrast, that political participation very much depended on political socialisation.

The Uses And Effect theory, which assumes media use (or the consumption of political information through the media) can cause cons effects (in this case the effect is political participation), became less relevant in this research. This may be due to the low level of political participation among university students (for political participation variable the KMO coefficient value was 0.681 and a Cronbach value was 0.631, which was quite high). The low relationship between media consumption and political participation cannot be blamed for this, as it must be remembered that the other political socialisation agents (family, campus, peer group, affiliation groups and political party) are also low. Additionally, as mentioned, the relation of each control variable with political participation was not very strong. Only the peer

group variable showed a strong relationship (0.54 r Pearson).

The discussion above suggested several reasons as to why the university students did not appear to have as high levels of political participation as the researchers initially expected. Firstly, this may have resulted from the characteristics of the Indonesian university students. From 1974 to 1998, a time in which strict government restrictions were placed on the campus-based political activities, scholars rarely had intense contact with practical political problems. At the same time, political freedom outside the campus was tightly controlled, which caused political apathy among students and, indeed, the wider population.

Secondly, from the early 1970s to the end of the New Order in 1998, the media underwent a period of depoliticisation and the government introduced strict controls in the name of using the media to build positive links between the government and public. The media was instructed to support only the (government-determined) development policy that was in place. So during those decades, the press conducted practically no political education activities that involved scrutinising government figures, processes, institutions or policies. Before there can be a considerable mass media affect on political participation, there has to be the support of wider socio-political circumstances and conditions that underpin that political participation. In other words, if the environment is not supportive, media freedom is also suppressed. The socialisation process is very slow when it occurs indirectly (Golding, in McQuail 1980), which was the case during the New Order era – a period in which open and overt political activity was closely controlled.

This context of the time period during which this research was done also needs to be remembered. In the years of 1997 to 1999, Indonesia had just experienced turbulent political change, including a rapid increase in the mass media's freedom. The Indonesian people, including university students, had yet to "tune in" to the meaning of this change. At that time, political conditions were not stable. The people were seeking a new political orientation. Because of that, all socialisation agents (family, peer groups, campus, affiliation groups, and even political parties) were readjusting.

As a social strata that was very active in social-political change, especially in ending the New Order's power in 1998, the university students' political participation in the 1999 general election did not appear very high. This might be connected with the moral tradition of national student movements. Indonesian students never truly completely ended their activism for political change when limitations were put on political activities in the campuses and the mass media. During the period after strong boundaries

were imposed on student political activity in the wake of the so-called Malari Incident of 15 January 1974 up to 1998, a small body of students still struggled against perceived political abuses, such as official clearing of community land, obstructions to press freedom, lack of political openness and corruption (Saidi 1989). In such cases, the students' activism was aimed at achieving community good rather than personal gain. This also emerged in the 1998 reform movement, when the students' again directed their activities towards moral goals and working for the perceived public good rather than individual gain. It may be because of this that they have not been interested in practical politics in the 1999 Elections. Different parties competed, but this was not a moral crusade in the same way that the fight against obstructions to press freedom, corruption or other political abuses was.

This might be seen as a warning to political parties, that they cannot hope that students will always form part of their party constituencies. It is to be expected, however, that students will continue to act as agents for socio-political change in various arenas, because in the Indonesian context, this is part of their historical role.

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