

# Internal party democracy in former rebel parties

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## Abstract

Intraparty democracy is considered an important feature of former rebel movements' adaptation to democracy more generally. What conditions intraparty democracy in former rebel parties? This article traces internal debates about and organizational adaptation to intraparty democracy in Partai Aceh (Indonesia) and Fretilin (East Timor), paying specific attention to the interaction between party leaderships and the wider rebel organization. Leaning on theories of party change and organization, the article finds that even in the presence of formal procedures that prescribe inclusive decision-making, the nature and persistence of decentralized wartime command structures and relative strength and dependence on these networks limits intraparty democracy.

## Keywords

Fretilin, intraparty democracy, partai aceh, post-civil war parties, rebel parties

## Introduction

Democratic institutions figure prominently in any explanation of how politics can become less contentious: radical groups are generally expected to become more moderate as a consequence of participating in democratic elections (Kalyvas, 1998; Przeworski, 1980; Share and Mainwaring, 1986). The way in which former military actors contribute to post-conflict governance is also considered a decisive factor in the success or failure of peace processes and, ultimately, of post-conflict democratization (Curtis and De Zeeuw, 2009; Lyons, 2005; Mansfield and Snyder, 2005). Consequently, transforming armed groups into political parties has become integral to securing peace in the aftermath of armed conflicts (De Zeeuw, 2008; Manning, 2007; Söderberg-Kovacs, 2008). As parties, former rebel groups are offered alternative channels for articulating their interests and opportunities to access formal politics and institutions (Curtis and De Zeeuw, 2009; Ishiyama and Batta, 2011). In order to transform and fulfil the expected role as vehicles for democracy, however, former rebel groups must be significantly restructured (De Zeeuw, 2008; Söderberg-Kovacs, 2008). As parties, former rebel groups not only have to adjust to the procedural rules of multi-party competition, they are also expected to 'become democratic on the inside'. Former rebel parties face similar challenges as do any new party in both new and established democracies: they need to create a full-time organization, develop

a political platform, raise funds to campaign and devise procedures to select candidates and leaders (Allison, 2010). Yet, their historical legacies as autocratic militant organizations inevitably shape the ways in which these processes are set in motion, making the need for internally democratic procedures more acute. At the same time, intraparty democracy might heighten competition between internal factions, which in the post-conflict context may impact negatively on political stability. How do former rebel parties mediate these contradictory concerns?

Although there is a growing body of literature on demobilization and reintegration of ex-combatants that has taken notice of the crucial role of political parties in peacebuilding (e.g. Ball and Van de Goor, 2007; Lyons, 2005), only a handful discusses political reintegration or mobilization in relation to former rebel parties specifically (Berdal and Ucko, 2009; Söderström, 2013, 2015). Similarly, the literature on engineering and regulation of parties in conflict-prone societies (e.g. Bastian and Luckham, 2003; Reilly, 2006; Reilly and Nordlund, 2008) tends to emphasize the institutional framework surrounding parties rather than the

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parties themselves. Notably, while there has been growing attention to former rebel parties, few have paid attention to their internal dynamics once they have made the transition and the effects on the wider democratization process.<sup>1</sup>

This article contributes to filling this extant gap by examining what factors condition and explain variation in adaptation to intraparty democracy in two former rebel parties: Partai Aceh (PA), the party descending from the Free Aceh Movement (GAM) in Indonesia's Aceh province, and Fretilin, the party of the Revolutionary Front for an Independent East Timor (Fretilin) in East Timor. Highlighting that the challenge of intraparty democratization in former rebel parties lies in decentralizing decision-making and creating more inclusive forms of internal governance, the analysis shows that contrary to conventional expectations, decentralizing the party structure does not necessarily lead to more inclusive internal governance. This feature, it is argued, results from the legacy of strong regional command structures and persistence of independent power networks. Focusing on leadership selection as an indicator for wider organizational dynamics, the paper traces the ongoing internal debates regarding intraparty democracy revealing how informal procedures anchored in wartime organizational logics, continue to dominate post-war party mobilization.

In the following, I first discuss how the two dimensions of centralization and exclusion can be used to assess internal party democracy in the specific case of former rebel parties. I then offer a short methodological clarification for the case selection and the nature of the comparative case study. Next, I map out the organizational structure and transformation of the militant movements, before analysing the leadership selection processes in each.

### Internal democracy in former rebel parties: Some key dimensions

The organizational development of former rebel parties is a product of fundamental internal struggles, such as struggles over identity and power (Ishiyama and Batta, 2011). How these struggles emerge and are resolved ultimately affects both how the party is organized and how it will fare as a 'vehicle for democracy', whether in government or in opposition. Rebel groups are commonly organized around a tight-knit leadership group – typically a hierarchical military structure – and patronage structures that flow from the central leadership to sub-command levels and down to combatants and civilians. Such organizations are generally xenophobic and introverted and have evolved in the war environment to maximize their political relevance through a combination of intimidation, compliance and popular mobilization (Weinstein, 2007; Wickham-Crowley, 1992). Foundational ideologies that merited strong and centralized leadership structures, such as Fretilin's past as a neo-Leninist party, are also likely to encourage the persistence

of autocratic leaderships. Because of these traits, former rebel parties are likely have less participatory and consensual decision-making processes than political parties in representative democracies (De Zeeuw, 2008: 14). In this regard, intraparty democratization may prove important to break down militarist structures and attitudes that have come to define political mobilization in post-conflict societies.

In the literatures on party change and party regulation in divided societies, a main reference point for assessing intraparty democracy is party institutionalization (e.g. McMnamin, 2008; Randall and Svåsand, 2002). Arguably, institutionalization as a concept fails to capture the extent of internal adaptation to democracy. If party institutionalization is measured by the degree of party autonomy and/or 'embeddedness' (Janda, 1980; Panebianco, 1988), then former rebel parties are already highly institutionalized. Their legacy as liberation movements implies that they are indeed highly autonomous organizations. Moreover, as guerrilla organizations they are already deeply embedded in society in ways that new parties rarely are (Mampilly, 2011; Wickham-Crowley, 1992).

Party institutionalization also refers to the degree to which procedures for internal decision-making are formalized (Randall and Svåsand, 2002). Subjected to both internal and external pressures to democratize, many former rebel parties include references to intraparty democracy in their statutes.<sup>2</sup> However, formal institutions might co-exist with informal procedures and may actually say little about how important decisions regarding leadership are actually made. Helmke and Levitsky (2004: 726) note that attention to such informal institutions is critical for understanding the incentives that enable and constrain political behaviour.

More fruitful than asking whether parties are institutionalized, then, is examining one key decision-making process and the effect of variation in organizational form on this particular process. Leadership selection is a good indicator of the wider organizational dynamics of former rebel parties both because it demonstrates how key decisions are made as well as revealing information about the nature and intensity of internal conflicts.

I distinguish between two dimensions, *centralization* and *exclusion*, that capture change in organizational and attitudinal dynamics as well as any informal procedures that impact on leadership selection.

*Centralization* concerns the extent to which decisions are made by a single group or decision-making body at the highest echelon of the party organization or, following Duverger, the way in which power is distributed among different levels of leadership (Duverger, 1963). A centralized party features a concentration of effective decision-making authority in central party organs with a smaller number of individuals participating in the decisions (Janda, 1980). Indeed, decision-making in political parties in new

democracies is typically controlled by powerful leaders. Centralized parties in new democracies are also frequently characterized by general weakness of the party organization beyond urban centres. By contrast, in decentralized parties, the central committee is typically focused more on facilitating coordination and communication between party offices than on providing definitive guidance to the party (Scarrow, 2005).

Because of their past experience as militant movements, it might be expected that former rebel parties would adopt centralized models in spite of the fact that they are based on grass-root mobilization. However, the strength of regional command structures may require more decentralized party organizations and, therefore, decentralized decision-making structures. However, even in decentralized party organizations, decision-making might be centralized at the level of the sub-regional party leadership. A related party type, which captures this dynamic, is the so-called ‘stratarchical’ party type, which is geographically decentralized but tightly controlled by party elites at each different level (Carty, 2004; Eldersveld, 1964; Scarrow, 2005: 6). The literature indicates that ‘stratarchical’ parties tend to have appeal in federal systems where regional branches mobilize on the basis of regional concerns (Carty, 2004; Koole, 1996). It might be expected that former rebel parties with strong regional command structures resemble ‘stratarchical’ parties. Although the military functions of rebel groups tend to be centralized around their leadership, such organizations are generally more decentralized in day-to-day affairs and governance than is typically assumed (Mampilly, 2011; Sindre, 2011). Former regional commanders might only continue to support the central party leadership if it continues to provide rewards in the form of spoils, contracts and positions within the bureaucracy or government.

The second dimension, *inclusiveness*, refers to the width of the circle of decision makers (Scarrow, 2005: 6). In an exclusive party organization, key decisions are made by a single leader or a small group of leaders, whereas in an inclusive party organization, party members (and sometimes supporters) participate in decisions on important issues, such as the selection of party leaders. Inclusive parties are also generally more open to deliberation leading up to the decision stage and are considered more internally democratic.

The relationship between centralization and inclusiveness is not straightforward. Whereas comparative studies show that exclusive party organizations tend to be more centralized (Janda, 1980), the reverse is not necessarily the case. For instance, an inclusive organization may decentralize candidate selection to the sub-district level but restrict the real powers of organizational sub-units within the party (Lundell, 2004; Norriss, 1997).<sup>3</sup> Moreover, as Ishiyama argues, whether a party decentralizes depends partly on the competitive environment it faces, both externally and internally: if a centralized organization continues to be

electorally successful, then there may be no incentive for intra-organizational change (cited in Ishiyama and Batta, 2011: 370). Moreover, organizational changes that expand intraparty democracy will – by definition – increase inclusiveness. However, as Scarrow notes, ‘what constitutes a “democratizing” change in any specific case depends on where the party is initially located along the “inclusiveness” spectrum’ (Scarrow, 2005: 7). Nevertheless, changes in inclusiveness are likely to affect the level of centralization and thus party institutionalization.

An additional constraint is related to the interaction between formal and informal mechanisms (Helmke and Levitsky, 2004). National party laws might prescribe inclusive procedures, whereas the party leadership in reality directly influences or even controls the processes through other informal mechanisms, such as patronage, informal lobbying or intimidation.

In the remainder of the paper, these ideas of *centralization* and *inclusiveness* are used to discuss the aspects of intraparty democracy that concern leadership selection in PA and Fretilin. The next section clarifies the comparative design and logic of the case selection.

## Methodology and cases

The article deploys a small-n comparison of PA and Fretilin, which is suitable for identifying the processes of intra-organizational change as well as the interactions between informal and formal procedures (Helmke and Levitsky, 2004).

PA and Fretilin are selected for the comparison because they are similar regarding their historical trajectory as former guerrilla movements and as contenders in multi-party democracies after transforming into political parties, but differ regarding their electoral success in post-conflict politics and in their subsequent emphasis on intraparty democracy.

PA is a local party in Indonesia’s Aceh province that was established after the rebel leadership signed a peace agreement, a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the Indonesian government, accepting regional autonomy in lieu of full independence in 2005. Fretilin is the main party of the liberation movement in East Timor, which became independent from Indonesia in 2002 after a UN-backed referendum over the status of the province in 1999. Fretilin headed the First Constitutional Government from 2002 to 2007 with its founding leader, Mari Alkatiri, as Prime Minister. It moved from government into opposition after losing its majority in two consecutive elections in 2007 and 2012.<sup>4</sup> In Aceh, after three post-conflict elections in 2006, 2009 and 2012, PA controls the executive, including almost half the positions as mayors and district heads, and the provincial legislature.<sup>5</sup> An additional difference is that PA is the only party representing former rebels in Aceh, whereas Fretilin competes alongside several new and

old factions that split away from Fretilin prior to achieving independence.

These differences allow for a consideration of how wartime organizational structures and the competitive environment in the aftermath of war affect intraparty democracy differently in the two parties. Moreover, a comparative case study of former rebel parties, allows for testing and expanding extant theories that have evolved in contexts quite different from Aceh and East Timor. The analysis draws on an extensive body of ethnographic secondary material for both cases and interview data collected by the author in Aceh from 2006 to 2008 and through correspondence with both parties.

### Transforming the rebel organization

Ex-combatants represent a stable mass support base for former rebel parties but they also have a vested interest in gaining power to secure their own position post-conflict. Attention to how these structures evolve in relation to wider reintegration processes provides insight into the internal dynamics of former rebel parties.

#### *The Aceh Transitional Committee (KPA)*

After demobilization, GAM's transformation into a political party was closely tied to the transformation of the military wing of the movement. On paper, the military hierarchy of the rebel movement had a clear chain of command with a political wing, a 'government in exile', and a military wing, *Tentara Nasional Aceh* (TNA). In reality, however, the two segments overlapped in terms of both personnel and strategic planning. On the ground, the TNA was divided into 17 regional commands, each with four district level commands and with an unknown number of sub-district commanders below. In addition, there were informal combat cells, support networks, affiliates and sympathizers.

In reality, the hierarchies were much less clear. Below district level, GAM was more of an umbrella under which oppositional groups mobilized (Sindre, 2011). Consequently, the local commanders often experienced a rather high degree of autonomy in day-to-day affairs, especially over the shadier areas of tax collection, racketeering, illegal logging and smuggling (Aspinall, 2009; Kingsbury and McCulloch, 2006).

When stripped of its military status, these latter features, which reflect the wartime civilian political capacities of the rebel movement, became dominant. This is further reflected in the way that the former rebel organization, renamed the Aceh Transitional Committee (*Komite Perlilihan Aceh*, KPA), was tasked with the responsibility for the reintegration of its own ex-combatants. Under the same leader, Muzakir Manaf, the KPA replicated TNA's command structures with a provincial governing body located

in the district capital and regional and sub-regional leadership bodies down to the village level (*KPA Gampong*). Internal to the KPA structure are also more informal hierarchies that distinguish between support networks and fighters that have become important in determining the distribution of reintegration funds, spoils, including party positions and government contracts. Within this context, the KPA and PA are highly interdependent organizations and as will be further explained below, have become increasingly indistinguishable over the years. The KPA's massive patronage machinery ensures throngs of party cadres at PA rallies and one cannot easily distinguish between local party branches and the local KPA office.

#### *Fretilin*

Owing partly to the nature of Indonesian occupation in East Timor and partly to leadership strategies that split the resistance in three among a guerrilla movement, a diplomatic front and clandestine organizations, the East Timorese resistance movement was much more fragmented than GAM. Consequently, East Timor's 'veterans' have divided their loyalties among different factions supporting different leaders, of which Fretilin is only one.

Fretilin was originally organized as a conventional guerrilla movement with a political wing, a 'government in exile' and a military wing, Falintil. From its inception, Falintil enjoyed far greater organizational autonomy from Fretilin than did the TNA from GAM. This division was reinforced in the 1980s when, Xanana Gusmão, a founding leader and the first President in East Timor, campaigned to rid Fretilin of its Neo-Leninist traits to recreate the movement as a non-partisan broad-based popular movement. These differences led to the formal split between Fretilin and Falintil in 1987 (Simonsen, 2006).

The strategy of creating a popular non-partisan front also involved the formation of urban clandestine groups that began to grow in the 1980s in association with youth groups and the Catholic church and the strengthening of Fretilin's diplomatic efforts internationally (Robinson, 2001). Although the clandestine front ran a surprisingly efficient resistance struggle from within each pocket, it lacked unity, and any existing hierarchies were highly localized (ICG, 2011). The Indonesian armed forces' strategy of oppression combined with the intra-elite rivalry among Fretilin's founding leaders described above also weakened the top-down hierarchies of the Falintil guerrilla forces (Rees, 2004). The result has been a specific set of unforeseen challenges to the Fretilin party organization after independence.

Against this backdrop, the dismantling of the resistance movement has proved particularly contentious for East Timor's transition to democracy. The demobilization and reintegration of the armed forces proved easy targets for individual leaders to politicize. As a new national army

excluded important segments of the resistance movement, ex-combatants felt that they were increasingly being alienated from the political project of rebuilding the country (Rees, 2004). Instead of a unified interest organization, several ‘veterans’ associations’ operate as patronage machineries for ex-combatants dividing their loyalties between individual Falintil commanders. The wider inability of the Fretilin-government to deal effectively with the problems of reintegration was an important reason for the violent confrontations between different factions of the new police and military in 2006 after which Mari Alkatiri, the Fretilin Secretary General, had to step down from his post as Prime Minister (Simonsen, 2006).

Evidence from this section has shown how specific war-time organizational dynamics – decentralized command in Aceh, and fragmentation along ideological and programmatic direction in East Timor – have created different patterns for post-conflict mobilization in the two contexts. Due to the legacy of fragmentation of the resistance struggle in East Timor, Fretilin faces a much more competitive external environment than does PA. Notably in Aceh, although the rebel organization was decentralized, it was not fragmented: via the KPA, the former rebel party remains the main avenue for political mobilization for ex-combatants. In contrast, East Timorese ex-combatants have multiple avenues for political mobilization.

## Leadership selection in PA and Fretilin

### PA: Decentralization and exclusion

After the signing of the MoU, there was a general agreement that a GAM party would adhere to what were perceived as the principles of democracy, but no real discussion was made as to what that would entail in terms of formalized procedures for leadership selection and candidate nomination. This was both the result of an inability to foresee the kinds of problems that would arise for the former rebels themselves as well as an unwillingness by the international community to meddle in the internal affairs of armed actors. In general, GAM was divided into two factions: a pro-democracy wing that consisted of moderates in alliance with civil society activists who also envisioned establishing a broad-based mass party that professed inclusion and another wing that consisted of the founding leaders and a segment of the local commanders who believed that peace was simply the ‘continuation of the struggle via other means’ and who were concerned that GAM would become diluted if ‘outsiders’ began to represent it. The latter group, headed by Malik Mahmud, the ‘prime minister’ of GAM’s ‘government in exile’, still enjoyed the legitimacy of being the founding leaders and thus also the political leadership with whom the international community and the Indonesian government would consult on issues concerning governance, reconstruction and reintegration.

Because of such internal fissures over the general direction and purpose of a ‘GAM party’ in peacetime Aceh and the more concrete issue of leadership, the formal establishment of a party based on the rebel organization was postponed until after the first elections were held in December 2006, which were the *pilkada*, i.e. direct elections for the executive positions at the province – and district/city-level in Indonesia. Vetting of GAM candidates for the provincial governorship, district heads and mayors in the *pilkada* therefore occurred outside any formal party framework, which was made possible by temporary provisions pursuant to which candidates could run as independents. The option of vetting independents put less pressure on the GAM apparatus to formalize any procedures for candidate nomination and removed some of the stigma attached to the internal splits. It nevertheless required active involvement of the KPA apparatus, which mobilized behind individual candidates. Thus, to voters, even in the absence of a party, a vote for a GAM candidate was in effect a vote for the GAM party.

Crucially, it was generally expected that in order for a decision acceptable to the widest possible basis to be taken, key decisions, such as who would represent GAM in the gubernatorial race, should be the result of wide consultation processes. A first GAM congress meeting was therefore held in May 2006. After lengthy debate, which was also widely publicized in the local media, congress participants voted for a relatively unknown figure, Tgk. Nasruddin to run as GAM’s official candidate by a majority hand showing. Inexperienced and otherwise lacking complete backing, Nasruddin declined, and the congress failed to gather behind an alternative candidate.

The ensuing discussions underlined the strong expectations of intra-party democracy in the form of inclusive consultation processes on the part of the factions representing ex-combatants and commanders. In Indonesia such consultative processes, known as *musyawarah*, are a common aspect of associational life (Sindre, 2012) and hence *musyawarah* as an informal consultation process is also included in PA’s statutes, although exactly how this process should take place remains unspecified.<sup>6</sup> The general perception by ex-combatants seems to be that consultation takes place within the local party branches. The branch-leader – typically an ex-commander – then weighs the pros and cons and makes the final decision, which is then conveyed to the central party office.

Considering the role of the branch-leaders in these consultative processes combined with a volatile environment might also lead to intraparty competition and factionalism, as also suggested by Harmel and Janda (1994: 269). It therefore raised tensions and worry when the founding leadership branch nominated Hasbi Abdullah as GAM’s official candidate for the governorship, with Muzakir Manaf, the KPA chairperson, as his running mate without carrying out any form of consultative process. This move

to bypass the GAM Congress raised criticism of ‘authoritarian paternalism’.<sup>7</sup>

Yet, it was clear that at this point the central leadership lacked local backing and it was generally perceived that a majority of the KPA supported the independent candidature of local figure, Irwandi Yusuf, the former head of intelligence and spokesperson for GAM’s armed wing on the ground (ICG, 2007). Irwandi had gained popularity as GAM’s representative to the Aceh Monitoring Mission (AMM) and for his criticism of the formulation of the Law on the Governing of Aceh (LoGA), but also for his proximity to the movement on the ground (Stange, 2010). His alliance with Muhammad Nazar, the popular leader of the pro-referendum movement Suara Independen Rakyat Aceh (SIRA),<sup>8</sup> laid the foundation for a broad and inclusive base, which also resonated well with the political platform of moderates within GAM.

The rift between the old GAM leadership and the younger segments further intensified when Malik Mahmud made the decision to replace Irwandi Yusuf with one of his allies, Zakaria Saman in the AMM in October 2006. The decision angered KPA commanders and several moderates who felt that they were being sidelined and that the GAM leadership had assumed powers through non-democratic means, bypassing the consultative process initiated at the first GAM Congress.<sup>9</sup> Internal protests and dissatisfaction led to a turnaround just one month before the elections when Malik Mahmud declared he would not nominate an official GAM candidate after all (ICG, 2007; Stange, 2010).

What implications can be drawn from this trajectory? The overwhelming support for Irwandi and GAM candidates in the *pilkada* indicated that the structural power of the local GAM support base and its internal allegiance were strong. The KPA had set in motion a mass-mobilization machinery that other candidates lacked and created tight vertical loyalties between candidates/ex-commanders and their sub-organizations. The elections also highlighted the importance of creating a unified GAM party, which was a major concern inside the KPA. As one commander stated, ‘Irwandi may attract our vote for governorship, but he is not *the* GAM-party’.<sup>10</sup>

While KPA’s support for Irwandi had proved the decreasing influence of the GAM leadership within the movement, the symbolic powers of the leadership became a unifying factor. Malik Mahmud moved swiftly and announced the opening of a GAM party office in July 2007. By September 2007, at least three parties with a formal GAM background were on the ticket, including one formed by Irwandi, which already had a platform ready before Malik announced his party (ICG, 2007). However, to avoid accelerating internal rivalry and weakening the GAM base before the election, Irwandi decided to join Malik’s party, which took the name Partai Aceh, in March 2008, refraining from taking on any particular position (Stange, 2010).

Irwandi’s decision to join PA secured the KPA’s turnaround, but he clearly overestimated his own ability to implement procedures to secure an inclusive process for selecting party leaders before the 2009 parliamentary election. The executive board of PA was immediately dominated by Malik loyalists, with Muzakir Manaf formally appointed as the party head. By the time of the elections, PA claimed a total membership of approximately 340,000, which in the context of a local party is substantial and a clear sign of how much PA benefited from the KPA’s territorial structure (Stange, 2010).

Moreover, it was clear that factionalism was considered to endanger PA’s chances at winning the elections and so the party strategized effectively to convey an image of tightly closed ranks: PA’s flag was present across the province and the KPA unified around a single message of implementing the entire MoU, which concerned a higher percentage of return on natural resources and full reintegration of ex-combatants.<sup>11</sup> The strategy worked as PA emerged from the election as the largest party in the local legislature with approximately 47 per cent of the vote.<sup>12</sup> PA’s position was further bolstered in the 2012 *pilkada* when PA’s candidate, Zaini Abdullah (also of the founding leadership) won the governorship alongside the head of the KPA, Muzakir Manaf.

As it turned out, although the intensity of internal deliberation regarding leadership was quite high in the immediate post-conflict period, the prospects of factionalism and potential splits raised the warning flags within the KPA and amongst ex-commanders. To the former rebels, potential splits directly translated into fears of losing elections and hence of being alienated from political life and future access to spoils.

The way that GAM executives have administered their powers is crucial for how they secured further backing for PA and of the interplay between wartime organizational structure and party mobilization. While the post-disaster economy in Aceh had provided ex-combatants with opportunities in the construction sector, as donors moved out, their dependency shifted towards the government and the former rebel party (Sindre, 2014). In the post-conflict context and in the absence of effective reintegration programmes, former rebel commanders carry the responsibility for ‘their’ former subordinates and their families (Barron and Burke, 2008). After several of these commanders moved into positions as mayors and district heads, these networks were further strengthened. Most new officials replaced local government department heads and administrations with their own confidants from within the KPA, even at the village level and KPA contractors capitalized on the fact that leading GAM members had acquired executive positions and thereby had access to government funds through public construction projects (Aspinall, 2009; Sindre, 2011).

With this in mind, although the decision by the GAM elite to bypass the congress on the issue of leadership

resembles a centralization process in line with Duverger's thesis (1963), PA more correctly fits the 'stratarchical' party type described by Eldersveld (1964) and Carty (2004). The level and nature of internal competition has ensured a rather decentralized party structure, but not one that is inclusive. In the wider context of post-conflict democratization, the strength of individual commanders alongside persistence of localized patronage clearly impacts on PA's approach to governance. While during his tenure as governor, Irwandi gained popularity for implementing a range of welfare policies, including access to health and higher education, the PA-dominated legislature has been adamantly slow in implementing these policies, generally uninterested in formulating policy, and otherwise steeped in political rivalries (Hillman, 2011).

### *Fretilin: From inclusion towards more inclusion?*

While the initial commitment by GAM elites to intraparty democracy was abandoned as the party organization was being consolidated, Fretilin had in place regularized and rather inclusive procedures for leadership selection and consultation from the time of independence. Since moving out of government the party leadership has chosen to adopt procedures that open up for an unprecedented level of membership involvement in the election of party leadership. In reality, however, informal mechanisms such as symbolic power, intimidation and control over the party machinery have been as important in guiding leadership selection as the formal procedures.

The first formal post-independence party congress was held in 2000, prior to the first election, with reorganizing Fretilin (and its associated organizations) and 'restructuring' the political programme as the theme. The inclusion of the 'people's movement' was perceived as an indication of the continuation of Fretilin as a political movement and party with a strong mass base that was able 'to gather around all the cadres to make sure the structures are functioning, so that everyone participates in the process of selecting a leadership'. As one spokesperson said: 'From the village level up to the national level, we are going to develop our mass organizations, including women's and youth organizations.'<sup>13</sup> The joint forces of Fretilin's leader Mari Alkatiri and the Falintil commander Lu Olo secured the support of cadres and veterans at the second post-independence congress in 2001. The delegates opted for a secret ballot rather than a show of hands.

Intraparty democracy enhanced the legitimacy of the elected leadership, which was reinforced with Fretilin's electoral victory in 2001 and the swearing in of Alkatiri as Prime Minister of the First Constitutional Government the subsequent year. Despite such inclusive measures, in government the party remained a highly centralized structure, manifesting itself as a homogenous force centred upon its leadership. Alkatiri's main strategy to secure unity was

to exclude dissident voices and bypass the party's legislative group (Simonsen, 2006). For instance, most of the legislative initiatives of the period originated not from parliament but from the government, and the Fretilin legislative majority voted homogeneously in support of its government, which also raised worries about authoritarian practices.<sup>14</sup>

Although several factors account for the security crisis that led to Alkatiri's forced resignation as Prime Minister in 2006, it was in part caused by the government's and specifically Alkatiri's strategy of excluding important segments of the clandestine front and Falintil and not to take seriously the crisis posed by failed reintegration (Gunn, 2010; ICG, 2011). The weakening of Alkatiri provided the space for mounting internal dissent and renewed demands for new candidates for the leadership posts. Even so, Alkatiri and Lu Olu faced no other contenders and were re-elected, this time through a show of hands at an extraordinary party congress ahead of the general election.

The internal rebellion was not completely tamed, however. The outcome of the election was further challenged by the dissenters who argued that alternative candidates had insufficient time to come forward and that Alkatiri and Lu Olu were in a privileged position to mobilize cadres, particularly the crucial segments of the veteran corps. They also challenged the actual legality of the election, asserting that the general election law requiring a secret ballot was also applicable to the selection of party leaders and candidates. A group of dissenters raised the issue with the Court of Appeals and the plea was supported by then President Gusmao who publicly stated that the re-election of Alkatiri was illegitimate and broke the country's General Law on the secret ballot issue.<sup>15</sup> He also accused Falintil veterans under Lu Olo's protection of employing intimidation and authoritarian tactics towards members and non-members of Fretilin to secure the re-election of Alkatiri and Lu Olo (ICG, 2013). Even though the appeal was denied on the grounds that the selection process had been implemented in accordance with the party statutes, it triggered a widely publicized debate about intraparty democracy conveyed and discussed in relation to democratization more generally. The perception about privileges being awarded to former members of the militant movement not only delegitimized the leadership duo, but the party itself.

It was this crisis of legitimacy that led Alkatiri to introduce changes to the party law: at the next party congress in 2011, Fretilin leaders were elected by a secret ballot open to all 156,500 registered party members (ICG, 2013).

The election for party leader was successfully carried out and attracted widespread international attention as a sign of democratic commitment. However, although announced in 2007, there were only two nominees, the incumbents Lu Olo and Mari Alkatiri. This meant that in practical terms the electorate, i.e. party members, had the option of rejecting candidates by ticking a blank box or the

box with the candidates' names. If the number of votes cast failed to reach the appropriate threshold, the candidates would face a ballot at the national congress. Voting took place at more than 700 polling stations in every *suco* (sub-district) throughout the country. The results indicated a turnout of approximately 150,000 of the registered members and a secure victory for the incumbents. Fretilin reported that more than 5000 party volunteers participated as election officials and monitors. Both national and international non-governmental organizations (NGOs) observed the elections for party leadership. Effectuating the whole party apparatus around the candidate elect, the event was a display of Fretilin's organizational strength.

As Scarrow (2005) notes, while inclusiveness is defined by formal rules, it is also a matter of process. In fact, there were few real opportunities for open deliberation ahead of the election and although the election itself was well organized, the procedures for candidate nomination were ill-defined at best. The leadership election by secret ballot thus served two purposes. It secured Alkatiri the legitimacy that he lacked and temporarily silenced criticism about the former guerrilla leadership being organizationally and ideologically steeped in the anti-democratic behaviour of guerrilla warfare and thereby unable to fully commit to democracy. Moreover, it shows both the security with which Alkatiri has been able to build an organization centred upon the militant movement and the continuation of the struggle, very much conditioned by fears about the party diminishing in relevance if diverging from its roots. In this regard, it is also likely that the external competitive environment placed restrictions on the willingness of potential leadership candidates to put forward their candidature. As some of them noted, in the current political landscape, none other than Alkatiri could publicly challenge Gusmao without weakening Fretilin, suggesting that Alkatiri is an exception for two reasons: he is from the same generation of leaders and the antagonism between the different branches of the resistance movement, crystallized in the competition between Gusmao and Alkatiri, has long been known to voters (ICG, 2013: 11).

## Conclusion

This article shows that changes in the institutional landscape such as the transition to democracy may provide the strategic logic for radical groups to participate in democratic politics but that those incentives do not always lead to internal acceptance of democratic norms, at least not in a consistent or predictable manner. Assisted by theories of party change in relation to intraparty democratization, the analysis further asserts that the nature and persistence of decentralized and sometimes highly fragmented wartime command structures and continued dependence on such networks to run the party organization works counter the development of intraparty democracy. The article challenges a common presumption

that the most pressing obstacle to intraparty democracy in former rebel parties is merely centralization and exclusion.

PA retains a decentralized party organization with autonomous branch offices, but this has not produced a more inclusive party organization. This strategy of exclusion has proven electorally successful. Faced with the threat of breakaway factions that would severely weaken PA's electoral strength, the leadership has bought off rogue elements within the KPA with construction contracts; they have warded off internal splintering by awarding support and budgetary control to PA mayors and regents, and they have successfully alienated dissidents and critics from within the party. In this regard, PA resembles a stratarchical party (Eldersveld, 1964) where power is decentralized among geographical layers of the organization, but tightly controlled by the elites of these layers. Naturally, this party elite has little interest in relinquishing decision-making within the organization and as long as the party is able to provide opportunities (mostly in the form of patronage) to its members and supporters, internal dissent is curbed.

A different pattern has emerged within Fretilin. Alkatiri's centralized and rigid leadership style is an important explanatory factor for the pre-independence fragmentation of the resistance movement, which was also reflected in the partial rejection by the electorate later on.<sup>16</sup> The subsequent emphasis on intraparty democracy in the form of an open leadership election highlights how environmental shocks, such as the removal from power and subsequent electoral defeat forced an otherwise authoritarian leadership to respond to pressures to open up the party organization. This is consistent with theories on party change that serious challenges can lead to dramatic changes in party behaviour (Harmel and Janda, 1994: 267; Panebianco, 1988: 243–244). Yet, the comparison of PA and Fretilin shows that conventional theories of party change do not sufficiently account for how, in transitional contexts such as these, informal institutions often supplant formal procedures conforming to Helmke and Levitsky's assertion that 'consideration of informal rules is also often critical to explaining institutional outcomes' (2004: 726). The predominance of informal power relations embedded in the civilian political capacities of former rebel parties such as these may counteract the effects of formal procedural changes on intraparty democracy. It seems that the most important challenge that former rebel parties face is thus to redefine the relationship between the party organization and ex-combatants and their associations.<sup>17</sup>

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## Notes

1. Exceptions are Ishiyama and Batta (2011) and Ishiyama and Marshall (2015).
2. Such external pressures often involve the channelling of technical and financial assistance from donor agencies and NGOs directly to the party organization as part of wider peacebuilding initiatives. Still, international assistance has typically been ad hoc and opportunistic (see Kumar and De Zeeuw, 2008; Reilly, 2008). For PA and Fretilin, international involvement was limited to democracy-training workshops and training sessions on the general election law mainly provided by small national and local NGOs (author interviews).
3. Note that contextual differences, such as institutional design, and specifically electoral system and territorial organization, do not seem to affect the degree of centralization in the candidate selection processes (Lundell, 2004).
4. In 2007 Fretilin was the largest party in the legislatures (27 per cent of the vote) and the newly founded National Congress for Timorese Reconstruction (CNRT), headed by Gusmao. The two parties negotiated to form a national unity government uniting the resistance movement, but the talks collapsed and a minority government was formed without Fretilin. In 2012 Fretilin came second (30 per cent) to CNRT (37 per cent). Again the two parties engaged in coalition talks, but again CNRT formed a minority coalition government without Fretilin (see ICG, 2013).
5. The next elections for local legislature were scheduled for 9 April 2014.
6. The party's statutes: 2007 version *Anggaran dasar dan anggaran rumah tangga Partai Aceh* obtained from PA head office, signed by Muzakkir Mandaf (party leader/*Ketua Manaf*) and Muhammad Yahya (*Sekretaris Jenderal* – until 2012). To the best of the author's knowledge, this is the latest version.
7. Personal interview, Nur Djuli, head of Aceh Reintegration Body (BRA), February 2007.
8. SIRA was the umbrella organization for the civil society front that mobilized in support of a referendum over the status of Aceh in 2008–2009 (see Sindre, 2010).
9. This view was raised by several profiled GAM members and local commanders during party meetings and repeated in personal interviews with the author.
10. Author interview with KPA representative (mid-level command level), Sigli August 2006.
11. The MoU had focused on the reintegration of 3000 combatants. The real number is closer to 45,000 and still growing depending on what constitutes 'participation in the struggle' (Barron and Burke, 2008; IOM, 2008).
12. The second largest party, Partai Demokrat, came second with a mere 10.84 per cent (KIP Aceh).
13. Mouchou, in an interview with the Australian weekly journal, *Green Left Weekly*.
14. The parliament had adopted 16 laws since the restoration of independence, and most had been 'received from the Government and . . . had undergone little substantive change within the legislature' (UN Secretary General 2003, cited in Simonsen, 2006: 582).
15. Plea made by Fretilin legislators Vitor da Costa, Vicente Mau Boci, Aderito de Jesus, Igidio de Jesus, Cesar Moreira, Ricardo Nheu, Armando Midar and Adolfo Antonio Belo.
16. See Note 4.
17. The findings resonate with Ishiyama and Marshall's (2015) argument about the Communist Party Nepal (Maoist) (CPN(M)) where they show that internal conflicts occur between district level cadres and the top-level leadership. Ishiyama and Marshall attribute fissures to the mechanism of inclusion: The CPN(M) has become more of an umbrella organization for different opposition groups (2015: 10). The trajectory described in the present article merits factionalism not to an electoral strategy of expanding the popular base, but to the friction between different levels of leadership otherwise rooted in decentralized patronage networks.

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