



THE HABIBIE CENTER
PUBLIC DISCUSSION



Public Discussion Forum

on

“Reimagining Democracy:
Revitalising Representative Democracy in
Indonesia and ASEAN”

Jakarta, 17 January 2025



Introduction

On Friday, 17 January 2025, The Habibie Center (THC) convened a public discussion forum on “**Reimagining Democracy: Revitalising Representative Democracy in Indonesia and ASEAN.**” The forum featured **Dr. Fernando Casal Bertoa** (Associate Professor, University of Nottingham) as the speaker. **Titi Anggraini** (Member of the Board of Supervisors, Perkumpulan untuk Pemilu dan Demokrasi (PERLUDEM)) and **Khanisa Krisman** (Researcher, Research Center for Politics at the National Research and Innovation Agency) were present as discussants. The forum was moderated by **Sri Murniati Yusuf** (Chief Operating Officer and Senior Research Director, The Institute for Democracy and Economic Affairs (IDEAS)).


The discussion is imperative as representative democracy appears to falter in many parts of the world, including Indonesia and ASEAN. In an era of rapid change and growing public dissatisfaction, it is necessary to consider whether democratic systems can still effectively represent the aspirations and needs of the people. Are vested interests and political polarisation eroding the foundation of democracy? Or are we witnessing a more profound structural crisis in how democratic systems function? The discussion aimed to provide a platform to reflect, recalibrate, and reimagine how representative democracy can be achieved in today’s Indonesia and ASEAN.

This discussion report summarises the key points conveyed by the speakers, responses from the discussants, and the question and answer session with the audience.

PRESENTATION FROM THE PANELIST



Dr. Fernando Casal Bertoa
Associate Professor
University of Nottingham



Dr. Casal Bertoa's remark primarily reflected his research focus and upcoming book on democracy in Europe. He began by highlighting that democracy has five elements, namely civil rights, political rights, electoral regime, government effective power, and horizontal responsibility. However, the different elements have been put into question due to challenges such as globalisation and the migrant crisis in Europe. Among the five elements, challenges to the standing of the electoral regime have grown more prominent as the idea of free and fair elections becomes increasingly more prone to risks such as foreign interference. In extension, anti-partisan sentiments have risen in the last few years.

To demonstrate such sentiments, Dr. Casal Bertoa pointed to data on trust in political parties among citizens of the European Union (EU), as the largest collective of consolidated democracies in the world, which found that only about 17% of EU citizens trust political parties. Other essential representative institutions in democracies, such as the parliament and central government, also notably fare worse than other non-representative institutions such as the police and the army. Widespread sentiments of political parties as the most corrupt institutions were also found in various surveys of many consolidated democracies. Low trust in and negative sentiments against political parties have further exacerbated polarisation and increased support for anti-establishment parties which harm the legitimacy of liberal democracies.

Central to Dr. Casal Bertoa's remark was the question of whether these trends present a menace to democracy. This question has led him to conduct a research on whether the emergence of and support for anti-establishment parties harm the quality of democracies, where he found that populism and/or polarisation reduce the quality of democracy across different types of democracies.

Dr. Casal Bertoa considered various explanations as to why populism serves as a menace to democracy. Existing research emphasising economic crises as the primary cause is rebuked as he argues that economic recession only contributes to, rather than causes, negative sentiments toward democracy. Moreover, he is less inclined to view the increasing support for anti-establishment parties as the main problem. He deems that this trend is merely a symptom of what he views as the primary cause: mainstream parties no longer representing the people and fulfilling their traditional functions.

Mainstream political parties used to serve as the middle element of change. This role is no longer fulfilled as political parties have increasingly been entrenched in the state and represent the state. Dr. Casal Bertoa pointed to how political parties in many countries are financially dependent on state funding, reducing incentives to reach out to the people. This has driven voters to resort to populist parties who claim to speak for them and are viewed as better able to represent them in a representative democracy.



Dr. Casal Bertoa therefore argued that changes have to be pursued through addressing the “illnesses” evident in mainstream political parties. Reflecting upon historical precedence, he considered several solutions. First, while banning political parties might be viewed as a viable option, this option violates democratic principles in the first place and is constitutionally impossible in places like Europe. Moreover, banning political parties only offers a temporary solution. Second, another viable option is discriminating against political parties. He viewed that past examples have shown mixed results, as discrimination has to be done comprehensively over a long period of time to result in meaningful success. Discrimination might also backfire as it might serve as fuel for the discriminated parties to blame those who discriminate against them. Third,

reconciliation with populist parties is also considered, wherein mainstream parties may join populist parties. This option is viewed to run contradictory to mainstream parties as reconciliation will result in the impression of moderate parties being radicalised by the populist ones rather than the opposite.

Instead of prescribing the three solutions above, Dr. Casal Bertoa argued that political parties should instead pursue what he dubbed as a “change in diets” for political parties. By recognising that political parties are the problem, they should pursue internal changes to recover trust in political parties and, by extension, the legitimacy of representative democracy. This option may be pursued through three steps. First, political parties need to understand that they need to enhance how they institutionalise themselves to strengthen their organisation. To that end, Dr. Casal Bertoa viewed that political parties should focus on catering to the public through constant and responsive engagement rather than consolidating their power. The focus should also be shifted from outbidding each other in elections to bearing responsibility for democracy. Second, political parties should also be transparent to demonstrate their resolve in addressing sentiments of them being corrupt. One practical step towards transparency is disclosing funding and donors received by parties. Last, political parties should also lead by example in order for constituents to respect policies. Politicians are encouraged to think of long-term policies and pursue compromise.



In conclusion, Dr. Casal Bertoa affirmed that populist parties are symptoms of the “sickness” found in mainstream political parties. However, political parties are also the solution; so long as political parties respect democracy, they will be able to address their “sickness.”

RESPONSE FROM THE DISCUSSANT



Titi Anggraini

Member of the Board of Supervisors
Perkumpulan untuk Pemilu dan Demokrasi (PERLUDEM)



In response to Dr. Casal Bertoa's remark, Ms. Anggraini provided her response by drawing from her observation of political parties in Indonesia. Ms. Anggraini viewed that democracy in Indonesia shares various characteristics with ongoing trends found in other democracies globally, central among them is the overall decline in performance as a democracy. She emphasised that many indices have pointed out Indonesia's declining performance across various metrics, particularly in indicators such as elections and corruption. Moreover, she also argued that the recent election had not been competitive as it offered opportunities for what she views as "political recentralisation." Moreover, she echoed Dr. Casal Bertoa's observation on distrust against political parties in recalling that surveys in Indonesia have also found that political parties and the House of Representative gain the lowest level of trust from the public.

Ms. Anggraini therefore shared the view that political parties have become one of the biggest problems found in Indonesia following the reform in 1998. While reform was pushed across various facets of Indonesia's political system, political parties have largely been left unchanged notwithstanding their positions as an interlocutor for appointing and obtaining approvals for figures in positions of power. Parties have become mere instruments of power and neglected their role in providing political education.

Another challenge which Ms. Anggraini viewed as pivotal is the weakening of the opposition and/or the checks and balances system. Efforts to consolidate power have reduced the power of the legislative body to conduct checks and balances, rendering the parliament and law-making processes less functional. This is exacerbated by repeated attempts to politicise the judiciary, as exemplified by the politicisation of the Constitutional Court to disregard due processes in changing the rule of election. Moreover, she also noted the high level of criminalisation against the opposition and various groups who have been critical of the parties in power. Citizens have also suffered from consistent efforts to restrict citizens' democratic rights; democratic processes are argued to be "costly, messy, and tiring," leading to proposals to challenge the election regime. This is well exemplified by efforts to challenge the rules of the regional election.



Ms. Anggraini agreed that political parties also need “diets,” although her proposed solutions are contextualised to Indonesia. First, contrasting Dr. Casal Bertoa’s proposal, Ms. Anggraini proposed that offering more public funding for political parties might offer a solution. Second, she also propounded that elections should be arranged in a way that political parties can be “functional,” particularly by not holding concurrent elections. Political parties should have more opportunities to “exercise” in fulfilling their intended functions in engaging with the public. To that end, different elections should be held at different times, at least every two years, so that parties are incentivised to reach out to the public more.

RESPONSE FROM THE DISCUSSANT



Khanisa Krisman

Researcher

Research Center for Politics at the National Research
and Innovation Agency



Ms. Krisman provided her response to Dr. Casal Bertoa's remark by offering views on democracy in the ASEAN context. She began by considering the steps ASEAN has taken to push democracy forward as a regional norm. Democratic values have been noted to be included in the ASEAN Charter, although determining the specificities of how they are implemented is still relegated to the member states. Moreover, efforts to push democratic values in the ASEAN region cannot be separated from Indonesia's aim to project democracy outward. This can be noted from Indonesia's promotion of integrating the concept of "political development," inclusion of democratic values in the ASEAN Charter, and Indonesia's convening power in holding the Bali Democracy Forum.

Democracy was a strong feature of Indonesia's foreign policy during Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono's presidency. Indonesia's identity as a democratic country was projected outward and led to its leadership in pushing ASEAN towards a more democratic path. However, such efforts were not accompanied by reflections on challenges encountered within Indonesia.

Ms. Krisman observed that there has been a shift in how Indonesia's foreign policy promotes democracy as it no longer features prominently in Indonesia's foreign policy. ASEAN has become increasingly pragmatic by heavily focusing on fulfilling targets within the different pillars. Efforts to achieve meaningful progress in democratic values have remained stagnant and Indonesia lost its vigour to project democracy in the region. Measures taken towards promoting democracy in ASEAN have therefore been largely performative.

Ms. Krisman explored what reasons have led to the regression in democratising ASEAN and promoting democratic values in the region. One possible reason is the declining quality of democracy which she notes has occurred for a considerable period of time in the region. She pointed out that ASEAN Member States, particularly



Myanmar, have been less open to pursuing discussions on democracy. Efforts for substantive discussions on domestic issues have largely been shielded by the non-interference norm which the region has long adhered to. Restrictions towards freedom of speech have also limited enthusiasm to keep discussions on democracy afloat. Lastly, discussions on democracy have found less resonance among the public in many ASEAN Member States.

Two solutions were proposed to address this issue. First, Ms. Krisman considered that having a member state lead the democratic agenda in the region was important. Said member state should be willing to highlight the importance of democracy and advocate for people's representation in the region. Second, she also viewed having a member state that could ensure that other member states would benefit from upholding democracy in the region.



QUESTION AND ANSWER SESSION



Question 1

The audience offered his view that the reason why political parties are popular despite high levels of distrust is because he views that most of the people are engaged by representatives in the regional house of representatives.

Responses

Titi Anggraini (Member of the Board of Supervisors, Perkumpulan untuk Pemilu dan Demokrasi (PERLUDEM)):

Ms. Anggraini viewed that the audience's observation stems from differences in regulations between the systems in place for regional and national elections. The high threshold for political parties to enter the House of Representative limits their engagement with voters, whereas the absence of a parliamentary threshold at the regional level promotes greater engagement between politicians and their voters. She proposed that eliminating the fraction system may be a viable solution.

Question 2

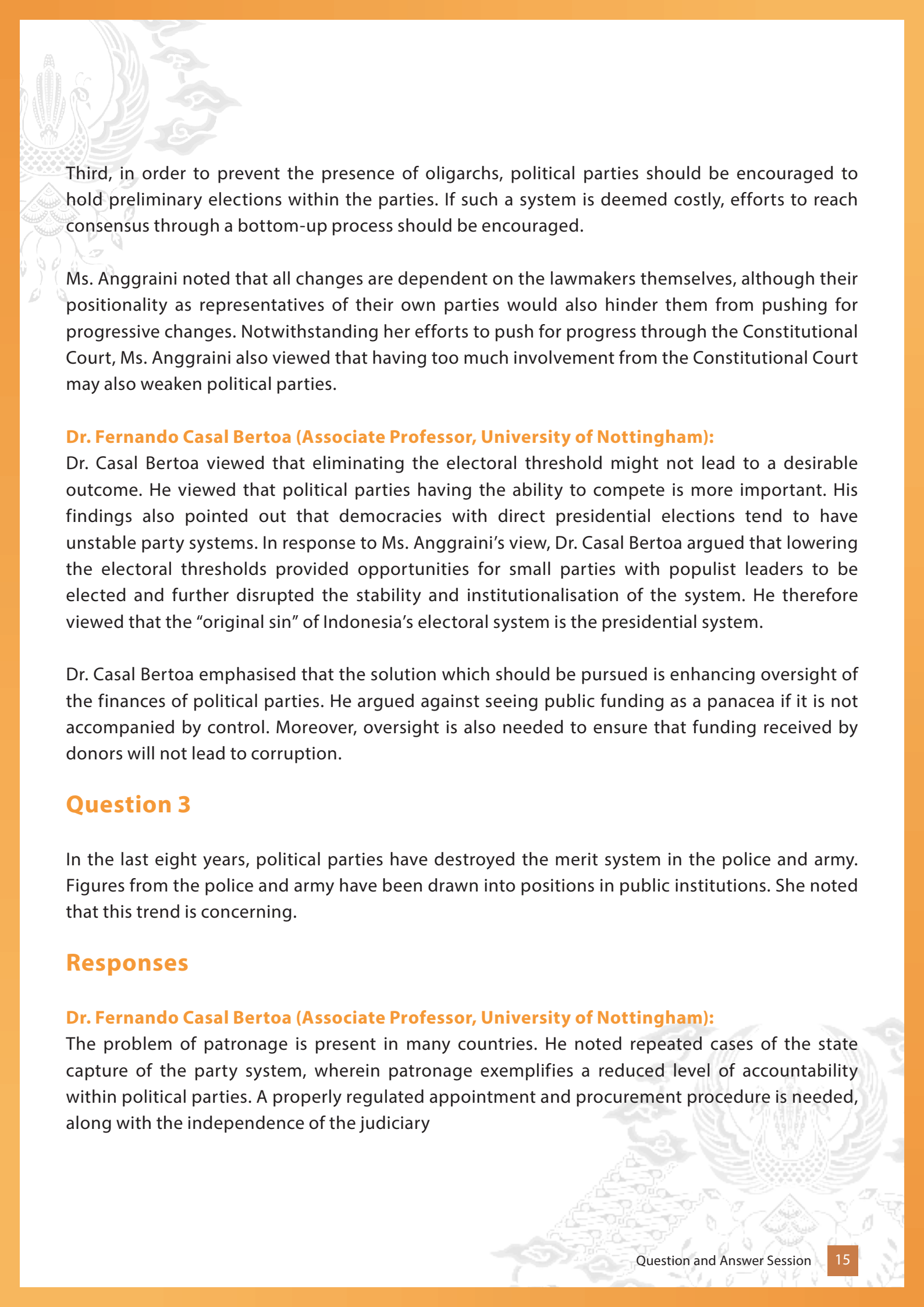
Given that the presidential nomination threshold has been removed, what is the next low-hanging fruit that should serve as the next focus? What should be done next to promote regeneration among the political parties, given that providing public funding for political parties is not within the current administration's priorities?

Responses

Titi Anggraini (Member of the Board of Supervisors, Perkumpulan untuk Pemilu dan Demokrasi (PERLUDEM)):

First, it is hoped that the next election will be more substantial by focusing on ideas and programs. New requirements for political parties should be prevented in order to facilitate candidates with adequate capability to compete in such an election, given that political parties are the primary vehicle to nominate presidential candidates.

Second, Ms. Anggraini viewed that, given that candidates are nominated through political parties, elections should be organised credibly. General Elections Commission of Indonesia/Komisi Pemilihan Umum (KPU) should be credible in managing and supervising the verification process of political parties.



Third, in order to prevent the presence of oligarchs, political parties should be encouraged to hold preliminary elections within the parties. If such a system is deemed costly, efforts to reach consensus through a bottom-up process should be encouraged.

Ms. Anggraini noted that all changes are dependent on the lawmakers themselves, although their positionality as representatives of their own parties would also hinder them from pushing for progressive changes. Notwithstanding her efforts to push for progress through the Constitutional Court, Ms. Anggraini also viewed that having too much involvement from the Constitutional Court may also weaken political parties.

Dr. Fernando Casal Bertoa (Associate Professor, University of Nottingham):

Dr. Casal Bertoa viewed that eliminating the electoral threshold might not lead to a desirable outcome. He viewed that political parties having the ability to compete is more important. His findings also pointed out that democracies with direct presidential elections tend to have unstable party systems. In response to Ms. Anggraini's view, Dr. Casal Bertoa argued that lowering the electoral thresholds provided opportunities for small parties with populist leaders to be elected and further disrupted the stability and institutionalisation of the system. He therefore viewed that the "original sin" of Indonesia's electoral system is the presidential system.

Dr. Casal Bertoa emphasised that the solution which should be pursued is enhancing oversight of the finances of political parties. He argued against seeing public funding as a panacea if it is not accompanied by control. Moreover, oversight is also needed to ensure that funding received by donors will not lead to corruption.

Question 3

In the last eight years, political parties have destroyed the merit system in the police and army. Figures from the police and army have been drawn into positions in public institutions. She noted that this trend is concerning.

Responses

Dr. Fernando Casal Bertoa (Associate Professor, University of Nottingham):

The problem of patronage is present in many countries. He noted repeated cases of the state capture of the party system, wherein patronage exemplifies a reduced level of accountability within political parties. A properly regulated appointment and procurement procedure is needed, along with the independence of the judiciary



Question 4

The “illnesses” found by Dr. Casal Bertoa in current political parties seem to have historical precedence. Do the speakers think that society is not able to move forward and is experiencing a setback?

Moreover, the political parties in Indonesia do not have ideological orientations. The audience viewed that political parties should have some level of idealism and promote some form of advocacy for specific subsets of the population they focus on.

Responses

Titi Anggraini (Member of the Board of Supervisors, Perkumpulan untuk Pemilu dan Demokrasi (PERLUDEM)):

Ms. Anggraini viewed that pursuing more collaboration between youth and academics in safeguarding the election is pivotal by promoting advocacy in the parliament, petitioning in the Constitutional Court, and enhancing digital activism.

Dr. Fernando Casal Bertoa (Associate Professor, University of Nottingham):

Dr. Casal Bertoa noted the cartelisation of political parties which has led to the illnesses. Moderate political parties are needed to moderate radical ideas.

Question 5

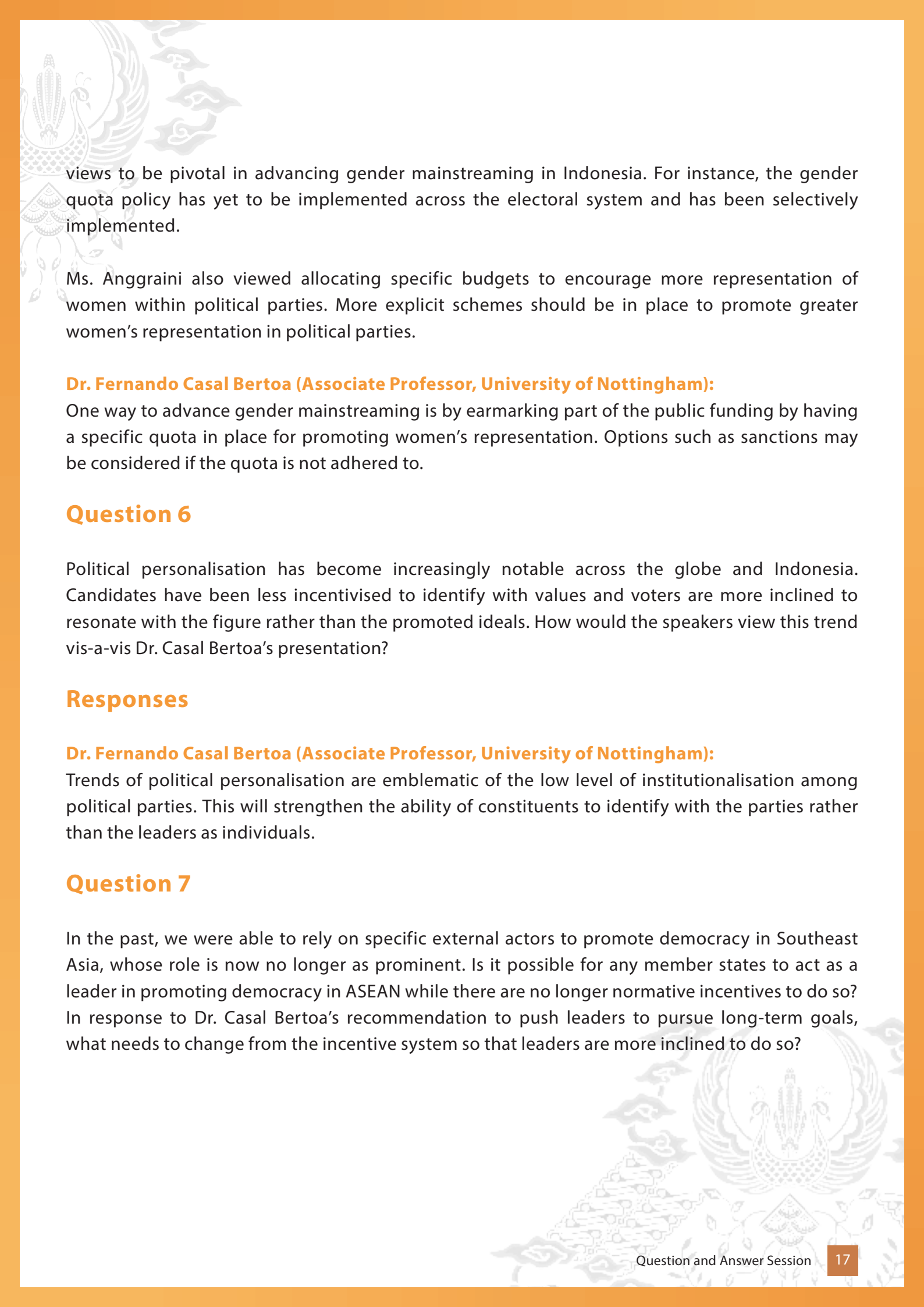
Financing within political parties is often not inclusive. What mechanism should be implemented to address power imbalance and take a more gendered lens?

Over the next 20 years, we will likely see two presidents, serving two terms each. Do the speakers believe that the “Asta Cita” and the vision of Golden Indonesia 2045 can be sustained and achieved within this timeframe?”

Responses

Titi Anggraini (Member of the Board of Supervisors, Perkumpulan untuk Pemilu dan Demokrasi (PERLUDEM)):

She viewed that the problem lies in the commitment among the elites to pursue reform. Various changes have been put forward and implemented since the 1998 Reform. One example is the limitations imposed by the KPU in promoting the gender quota in the parliament, which she



views to be pivotal in advancing gender mainstreaming in Indonesia. For instance, the gender quota policy has yet to be implemented across the electoral system and has been selectively implemented.

Ms. Anggraini also viewed allocating specific budgets to encourage more representation of women within political parties. More explicit schemes should be in place to promote greater women's representation in political parties.

Dr. Fernando Casal Bertoa (Associate Professor, University of Nottingham):

One way to advance gender mainstreaming is by earmarking part of the public funding by having a specific quota in place for promoting women's representation. Options such as sanctions may be considered if the quota is not adhered to.

Question 6

Political personalisation has become increasingly notable across the globe and Indonesia. Candidates have been less incentivised to identify with values and voters are more inclined to resonate with the figure rather than the promoted ideals. How would the speakers view this trend vis-a-vis Dr. Casal Bertoa's presentation?

Responses

Dr. Fernando Casal Bertoa (Associate Professor, University of Nottingham):

Trends of political personalisation are emblematic of the low level of institutionalisation among political parties. This will strengthen the ability of constituents to identify with the parties rather than the leaders as individuals.

Question 7

In the past, we were able to rely on specific external actors to promote democracy in Southeast Asia, whose role is now no longer as prominent. Is it possible for any member states to act as a leader in promoting democracy in ASEAN while there are no longer normative incentives to do so? In response to Dr. Casal Bertoa's recommendation to push leaders to pursue long-term goals, what needs to change from the incentive system so that leaders are more inclined to do so?



Responses

Khanisa Krisman (Researcher, Research Center for Politics at the National Research and Innovation Agency):

Ms. Krisman noted that projecting and implementing democracy are two different actions. Moreover, rather than promoting a unitary form of democracy, democracy is promoted contextually in ASEAN.

A low-hanging fruit solution which Ms. Krisman promotes is addressing elitism in ASEAN by making ASEAN more people-oriented and -centered. In this respect, civil society needs to be actively strengthened. One notable example where contributions from civil society were noted as positive was the success in advancing three consensus on addressing protection for migrant workers on the sea in 2023.

Dr. Fernando Casal Bertoa (Associate Professor, University of Nottingham):

Dr. Casal Bertoa asserted that constituents have to show that it pays off to pursue long-term goals and not pushing for institutionalisation will lead to electoral and political loss. Everyone needs to show why democracy is the better option than other alternative systems, and this view needs to be heeded by the political parties in pursuing reform.

Question 8

There has been a rise of female leaders at the top of conservative leadership. Do you see these events as a trend? Is it a paradox for leading parties who advocate for traditional gender roles?

Responses

Dr. Fernando Casal Bertoa (Associate Professor, University of Nottingham):

Dr. Casal Bertoa did not necessarily see having more female leaders in conservative parties as negative as there are women with conservative ideas as well. He viewed that the problem lies in the fact that women are under greater scrutiny and encounter greater expectations from the public in comparison to those placed upon men. He emphasised that the double standard is the issue rather than having women in leadership positions among conservative parties per se.



Question 9


What are the major causes that lead to the symptoms of the “illnesses” of political parties? Can it be traced back to other historical backgrounds in the past?

Responses


Dr. Fernando Casal Bertoa (Associate Professor, University of Nottingham):

Dr. Casal Bertoa wrote a paper about the legacies of political parties, where he argued that historical legacies clearly have an impact on the system of political parties. A country that democratises following a long period of dictatorship will encounter great challenges in maintaining the stability of the party system. Such challenges especially hold true with countries with the precedence of being led by militaristic dictators. Colonial legacies also have negative impacts on the stability of the party system.

However, Dr. Casal Bertoa emphasised that history predetermines the beginnings, but agency directs the future. So long as democracy is consolidated, the effect of the negative legacies will fade away.



CLOSING STATEMENT





Titi Anggraini (Member of the Board of Supervisors, Perkumpulan untuk Pemilu dan Demokrasi (PERLUDEM)):

The problem with Indonesian political parties stems from the fact that they are led by the same elites who have been in power. Therefore, the elites are not “reformed” yet. Moreover, the shift from the closed-list proportional system to the fully-opened list proportional system, in combination with a large number of electoral districts, contributed to weakening the ideologies of political parties.

Democracy is highly contextualised. It is a system of values which should be safeguarded by a strong legal system. The supremacy of law in safeguarding democracy has largely not been in place. Moreover, direct presidential elections and the multiparty system sustain Indonesia’s democracy. Such a system ensures that the entire nation has a common political agenda.

Dr. Fernando Casal Bertoa (Associate Professor, University of Nottingham):

The solution to democracy is not more democracy. More reforms weaken political parties, and weak political parties tend to become more populists in fear of losing constituents. Fragmentation of the party systems also leads to the rise of new parties who are not as institutionalised and who will pursue populist strategies.

Dr. Casal Bertoa maintains that presidentialism is the original sin of Indonesia’s political system. Constantly changing the rules of the game prevents opportunities for learning and understanding whether the system works.

Khanisa Krisman (Researcher, Research Center for Politics at the National Research and Innovation Agency):

Ms. Krisman reminded the audience of the importance of keeping the discussion on democracy alive in the region, as democracy is highly interlinked with discussions on human rights.



ABOUT ASEAN STUDIES PROGRAM

The ASEAN Studies Program was established on February 24, 2010, to become a center of excellence on ASEAN related issues, which can assist in the development of the ASEAN Community by 2015. The Habibie Center through its ASEAN Studies Program, alongside other institutions working towards the same goal, hopes to contribute to the realization of a more people-oriented ASEAN that puts a high value on democracy and human rights.

The objective of the ASEAN Studies Program is not merely only to conduct research and discussion within academic and government circles, but also to strengthen public awareness by forming a strong network of civil society in the region that will be able to help spread the ASEAN message. With the establishment of ASEAN Studies Program, The Habibie Center aims to play its part within our capabilities to the ASEAN regional development.

ABOUT TALKING ASEAN

Talking ASEAN is a monthly public dialogue held at The Habibie Center in Jakarta. Covering a wide array of issues related to ASEAN, Talking ASEAN addresses topics of: Economic Integration, Socio-cultural, & Democracy, human rights and regional peace, among others. Featuring local and visiting experts, Talking ASEAN is one of a series of twelve dialogues regularly held each month and open to a target audience consisting of ASEAN officials, foreign ambassadors & diplomats, academics, university students, businesses, and the media.

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