
THE DEFEAT OF CENTRALIZED PATERNALISM: FACTIONALISM, ASSERTIVE REGIONAL CADRES, AND THE LONG FALL OF GOLKAR CHAIRMAN AKBAR TANDJUNG

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Introduction

One of the most striking trends in contemporary Indonesia is the increasing localization of politics. Since the beginning of the decentralization process in 2001, the devolvement of authority from the center to the regions has triggered tremendous changes in various aspects of politics, reaching from issues of local governance to revenue generation and budgeting to the participation of civil society organizations, to name but a few. One area that is undergoing particularly momentous changes on the local level is party politics. The introduction of new electoral laws for legislative elections, for example, has had a profound impact on patterns of voting behavior in 2004, significantly altering the party landscapes in many provincial and district parliaments. Furthermore, the unprecedented implementation of direct presidential elections (in 2004) and direct elections for governors, mayors, and district heads (*pemilihan kepala daerah*, or *pilkada*, in 2005) have paved the way for the emergence of

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completely new power constellations at the local level which often defy traditional, *aliran*²-based notions of Indonesian party politics.

Many of these new developments have already been documented in a number of outstanding academic studies.³ However, what most observers have so far neglected in their analyses is the question of how this creeping localization of politics affects the internal affairs of political parties on the national level. In a way, this is hardly surprising, as many Indonesian parties continue to be dominated by charismatic leaders whose leadership style has, thus far, only been mildly affected by what is happening in the regions. But it is a very different story with Indonesia's biggest and longest-serving party, Golkar. Having inherited a legacy of weak leadership and severe factionalism from its past as the New Order's electoral vehicle, Golkar today is actually the exact opposite of a personalistic party. In fact, Golkar, more than any other Indonesian party, relies primarily on its armada of local officials at the grassroots level.

Golkar's dependence on the strength of its organizational apparatus has made the party highly susceptible to the changing dynamics of local politics. This has been evident, for example, in a number of gubernatorial and district head (*bupati*) elections, both before and after the introduction of the *pilkada*. But, as former party chairman Akbar Tandjung will certainly testify, the impact of the increasing localization of politics has not only been felt at the local level itself, but also right at the party's headquarters in Slipi. Throughout 2004, Akbar had been at the receiving end of a gradual yet relentless rebellion from the regions, which began with his defeat at the presidential convention in April and culminated in his ouster from the chairmanship at Golkar's seventh national congress in Bali in December of that year. This article will recapitulate the events that led to Akbar's eventual political demise, arguing that the key to understanding the downfall of one of Indonesia's most experienced politicians lies in Akbar's apparent failure to comprehend that power politics at the national level can no longer be easily separated from the growing assertiveness of local party cadres. While this shift from old-style centralized paternalism to a gradual empowerment of the regions marked a significant change in the vertical communication patterns of Indonesia's largest party, the ouster of Akbar Tandjung was, however, also characterized by some very familiar elements of Indonesian party politics, such as patronage, money politics, and the power-oriented pursuit of self-interest.

The fall of Akbar Tandjung was a prolonged political drama that unfolded over a period of eight months in a sequence of three enthralling acts. In view of his reputation

² Originally coined by Geertz as an anthropological concept to distinguish between pious Muslims (*santri*), nominal Muslims (*abangan*), and aristocrats (*priyayi*), the term *aliran* (streams) has long been used by political scientists to structure Indonesian political thinking and its manifestations in party politics. Accordingly, Islamic parties were seen as drawing their support overwhelmingly from *santri*, whereas parties with a secular/nationalist orientation tended to be more appealing for the *abangan*. In the post-New Order era, however, patterns of party alignment and voting behavior are changing, and even though *aliran*-based voting did still occur in 1999 and 2004, it seemed as if the results of the elections were not so much determined by prevalent *aliran* structures, but rather by the charismatic appeal of national or local party leaders and by the power of patronage and clientelism.

³ See for example, Nankyung Choi, *Local Elections and Democracy in Indonesia: The Case of the Riau Archipelago*, Working Paper No. 91 (Singapore: Institute of Defence and Strategic Studies, 2005); Jim Schiller, "What is in an Election? A Local Perspective on Indonesia's 2004 Representative Elections" (paper presented to the Nineteenth Biennial Conference of the Asian Studies Association of Australia, Canberra, June 29–July 2, 2004); or Marcus Mietzner, "The 2005 Local Elections: Empowerment of the Electorate or Entrenchment of the New Order Oligarchy?" (forthcoming article).

as one of Indonesia's shrewdest political tacticians, Akbar's political demise came as a surprise to many observers, but in actual fact it was anything but surprising. For in fact, despite all the credits he often received for his cunning political maneuvers, Akbar Tandjung had never been an undisputed leader. On the contrary, his chairmanship and his leadership style had been at the center of controversy ever since he rose to the party's top job in July 1998. To stick with the analogy from the performing arts, the drama that unfolded in 2004 did not happen out of the blue, but was actually preceded by a lengthy prologue that featured, among other riveting episodes, a leading Golkar executive's tearful outburst on national television, a full-scale court trial, and an election victory with a bittersweet aftertaste. Hence, in order to fully understand how and why Akbar Tandjung disappeared from Indonesia's political landscape, we first need to look briefly at a few key developments in Golkar's recent post-New Order history.

The Prologue: Factionalism, Corruption, and a Bittersweet Election Victory

As an organization founded and developed to incorporate a great variety of political, economic, and societal interests,⁴ Golkar has never been a model of unity and coherence. On the contrary, the party has always been prone to factionalism and severe internal frictions. The origins of this tendency can be traced back to the early New Order days, when former president Suharto deliberately stimulated personal and organizational animosities within Golkar in order to prevent the emergence of alternative power centers. During the Suharto era, the fiercest and most enduring factional rivalry transpired between the military, on the one hand, and Golkar's civilian representatives, on the other hand. In the 1990s, new dividing lines formed along religious (secularism versus Islam) and regional (Java versus Outer Islands) lines, but as long as Suharto reigned supreme, all factions ultimately remained loyal to the president.

After the fall of Suharto, the nature of factionalism in Golkar changed considerably. While divisions based on regional sentiment remained, the importance of socio-cultural and professional dividing lines decreased as the military withdrew from the party and the aspirations of Islamic politics could now be channeled through institutional avenues apart from Golkar. Nonetheless, the former regime party remained heavily factionalized throughout the post-Suharto era. The most prominent conflict emerged between a group affiliated with party leader Akbar Tandjung and the so-called *Iramasuka* faction, whose members hailed predominantly from Eastern Indonesia.⁵ Between 1999 and 2002, the *Iramasuka* faction's continual resistance to Akbar's leadership posed a serious threat to Golkar's organizational integrity, as members of the faction repeatedly attempted to suspend the chairman. Basically, the conflict between the two groups revolved around three main issues. Firstly, it was a matter of personal dislike between the protagonists, Akbar Tandjung and one of the leaders of the *Iramasuka* faction, Marwah Daud Ibrahim. Secondly, it was related to questions of regional and ethnic identity politics. Thirdly, it was a struggle for the

⁴ For good accounts of the genesis of Golkar, see Julian M. Boileau, *Golkar: Functional Group Politics in Indonesia* (Jakarta: Center for Strategic and International Studies, 1983) or David Reeve, *Golkar of Indonesia: An Alternative to the Party System* (Singapore: Oxford University Press, 1985).

⁵ *Iramasuka* (literally: happy melody) is short for IRian Jaya, MAluku, SUlawesi, and KAlimantan.

appropriate strategy to bring Golkar back to executive power after its loss to Megawati's PDI-P (Partai Demokrasi Indonesia-Perjuangan, The Indonesian Democratic Party of Struggle) in the 1999 general election.

Firstly, the conflict emerged as a direct result of Akbar's "betrayal" of former president B. J. Habibie. Ardent supporters of Habibie were personally hurt when Akbar abandoned Golkar's official presidential candidate in the final minutes of the 1999 MPR (Majelis Permusyawaratan Rakyat, People's Consultative Assembly) session, during which Abdurrahman Wahid was eventually elected as Indonesia's fourth president.⁶ Marwah, for example, famously burst into tears in front of the television cameras after it transpired that Akbar and his then-ally, Marzuki Darusman, had managed to persuade around eighty Golkar legislators to turn their backs on Habibie. For Marwah, the departure of Habibie from the political stage had far-reaching consequences. As a native of Habibie's home province of South Sulawesi, Marwah had risen through the Golkar ranks in the 1990s largely due to her close bonds with the ex-president, who once likened their relationship to that between a father and his daughter.⁷ Now that her mentor had left the scene, her fortunes were clearly in decline, and she blamed no one else but party chairman Akbar Tandjung for this unwelcome development. Hence, Marwah embarked upon what essentially amounted to a personal campaign to avenge Habibie.

Secondly, the conflict showed traces of regional identity politics, as Marwah sought (and found) support from a group of fellow legislators and lower-ranking party cadres who also hailed from Eastern Indonesia. Arguing that party chairman Akbar Tandjung was seeking to reimpose Javanese/Sumatran hegemony in internal party affairs,⁸ the caucus was reasonably successful in mobilizing support against the marginalization of Eastern Indonesian interests within Golkar. Even moderate cadres from the eastern regions felt that Akbar disproportionately rewarded his closest loyalists from Java and Sumatra. One leading member from Golkar's central board (Dewan Pimpinan Pusat, DPP), for example, claimed that the appointments of pro-Akbar figures from Sumatra like Bomer Pasaribu and Mahadi Sinambela as ministers in Gus Dur's cabinet had caused widespread resentment amongst Golkar cadres from Eastern Indonesia.⁹ Especially Bomer's appointment as Minister of Manpower was a bitter pill for the *Iramasuka* faction to swallow because the longtime supporter of Akbar Tandjung replaced Fahmi Idris, a leading member of the pro-Habibie group and one of the few *Iramasuka* supporters who does not hail from Eastern Indonesia.¹⁰ Other strategic appointments that smacked of regionally driven patronage and were therefore resented in Eastern Indonesia included the promotion of Mohammad Hatta as chairman of Golkar's parliamentary fraction in 2003 and the selection of Rambe Kamarulzaman as head of Golkar's youth organization AMPG (Angkatan Muda Partai Golkar, Golkar Party Youth Brigade).

⁶ Marcus Mietzner, "The 1999 General Session: Wahid, Megawati, and the Fight for the Presidency," in *Indonesia in Transition: Social Aspects of Reformasi and Crisis*, ed. Chris Manning and Peter van Diermen (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2000), pp. 39-57.

⁷ Interview with B. J. Habibie, July 18, 2003.

⁸ Akbar Tandjung is a native Batak from North Sumatra, but he is sometimes described as more Javanese than his Solo-born wife.

⁹ Personal communication with a member of Golkar's central board, May 4, 2004.

¹⁰ Fahmi, a former student activist and successful businessman, was born in Jakarta.

Thirdly, and closely related to the second factor, there was growing friction between the pro- and anti-Akbar groups within Golkar in debates about “how and when to resurrect”¹¹ the party. Under Akbar’s leadership, Golkar had entered the immediate post-Suharto era with a relatively cautious low-profile approach, as the chairman was well aware of the prevalence of widespread anti-Golkar sentiment among the population in Java and parts of Sumatra. In 1999, Golkar had suffered its biggest electoral losses in the provinces of these two islands, whereas support in Eastern Indonesia had remained comparatively strong.¹² Party representatives from the Outer Islands therefore disagreed with Akbar’s cautious actions and pushed for a more assertive stance for Golkar in Indonesia’s post-authoritarian party system. But the chairman and his Javanese supporters preferred to maintain a relatively low profile, especially since an early attempt to show a slightly more aggressive political attitude had backfired in late 2000.¹³ As one observer noted, “Golkar members in Jakarta and the rest of western Indonesia would prefer to rebuild the party’s image slowly and stealthily, recognizing that a period of *purdah* must be endured before it can hope to return to power.”¹⁴

In sum, the emergence of the *Iramasuka* faction was certainly different from previous occurrences of factionalism in Golkar. In contrast to the Suharto era, when dividing lines had been defined primarily according to either professional affiliations (civilian versus military) or religious/ideological orientations (Islamic versus secular/nationalistic), the divisions were now based on the interplay of three different, yet directly intertwined, factors, all of which tended to convince more party members that Akbar Tandjung should be removed from the chairmanship. Between 1999 and 2002, members of the faction repeatedly tried to replace or at least suspend Akbar Tandjung. After a number of futile attempts, the activities of the faction reached a new climax in 2002, when the party chairman was implicated in a highly embarrassing corruption scandal and sentenced to three years in jail for embezzling forty billion rupiah (US\$ four million) from the State Logistic Agency (Bulog) into a Golkar electoral slush fund.

The verdict led to a widening of the anti-Akbar movement, as more and more Golkar cadres began to regard Akbar as a liability to the party’s future. In parliament, at least fifteen members of the Golkar fraction were reported to support an initiative to suspend Akbar as house speaker.¹⁵ In the central board, Marwah was joined by fellow vice-chairmen Fahmi Idris and Theo Sambuaga in her demand to bar Akbar from party affairs.¹⁶ Both Fahmi and Theo were former Habibie supporters who had been robbed of their cabinet posts by Akbar and his allies in 1999, but they had been mostly quiet until Akbar’s corruption scandal erupted. Now that they saw a chance to hurt the chairman, they eagerly spoke out in favor of his suspension.

Another vice-chairman who was rumored to support the bid to unseat Akbar was Agung Laksono, a successful businessman from Semarang who had served the party

¹¹ “Golkar Plots its Comeback,” *The Economist*, August 4, 2001.

¹² Leo Suryadinata, *Elections and Politics in Indonesia* (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2002).

¹³ At the occasion of the party’s thirty-sixth anniversary, Akbar harshly criticized the Wahid government for its failures in combating corruption. A public outcry followed, forcing Golkar back on the defensive. See “Akbar: Gus Dur Lebih Jelek Dari Orba,” *Media Indonesia*, October 23, 2000.

¹⁴ “Golkar Plots its Comeback,” *The Economist*, August 4, 2001.

¹⁵ “Golkar ‘rebels’ join call for Akbar’s suspension,” *The Jakarta Post*, October 23, 2002.

¹⁶ “Golkar to Finish Fourth due to Akbar Factor: Fahmi,” *The Jakarta Post*, October 26, 2002.

in a multitude of positions since the late 1970s. Like Fahmi and Theo, Agung too had been axed from a lucrative cabinet post in 1999, but in contrast to his colleagues, Agung was not known to be cross with Akbar. In fact, Agung was not known to be cross with anybody, just as no one seemed to be cross with Agung. Somehow, the mild-tempered Agung had earned himself a reputation as a man with no enemies within the party. That he was now frequently mentioned as a potential supporter of the anti-Akbar group was mainly due to the fact that, as head of Golkar's powerful organizational department, he would have been the most likely person to succeed Akbar if the chairman were to be suspended. However, Agung never expressed his ambitions publicly and as usual kept his cards close to his chest.

Regardless of whether Agung was in the anti-Akbar camp or not, by late 2002 the movement had certainly grown in size and influence. It was no longer just a group of disgruntled backbenchers from Eastern Indonesia, but was now supported by some high-ranking powerbrokers within the party. Fahmi, in particular, was believed to have strong and far-reaching patronage networks in the party, while the Manado-born Theo Sambuaga was a valuable addition to the group because of his religious background as a Protestant.¹⁷ But just when the movement had gathered real momentum, the cornered chairman fought back. In an impressive display of pertinacity and political skilfulness, Akbar (mis)used his position as parliamentary speaker to impede the debate about the petition to suspend him and vowed to continue leading Golkar even if he had to go to jail.¹⁸ He appealed against his conviction to a higher court and remained a free man throughout 2003. When he was eventually acquitted by the Supreme Court in February 2004,¹⁹ the anti-Akbar camp had all but given up their efforts to undermine the authority of their chairman. Beneath the surface, however, resentments continued to simmer.

The failure of the *Iramasuka* faction to unseat Akbar Tanjung even after a scandal as embarrassing as the Bulog corruption case spoke volumes about the distribution of power within the party. Ultimate authority still rested with the chairman, and it seemed as if no one in the party would be able to challenge this. That Akbar was able to keep such an iron grip on the party was mainly due to the fact that the conflict with the *Iramasuka* faction was, despite its regional dimension, fought almost exclusively at the national level in Jakarta. Local elites were barely involved in the various episodes of the conflict, partly because of Golkar's highly centralized organizational infrastructure and partly because the party's grassroots membership lacked confidence to demand a bigger say in national party affairs.

Thus, by the time Akbar finally got off the judicial hook in early 2004, he was in cruise control, adored by his supporters and grudgingly accepted by his opponents. His confidence was further buoyed by promising polling results for Golkar and the growing public discontent with the performance of the Megawati administration, a phenomenon the Indonesian media somewhat misleadingly dubbed the "I miss

¹⁷ Most members of the *Iramasuka* faction were Muslims, some with ties to the Islamic think tank ICMI (Ikatan Cendekiawan Muslim se-Indonesia, Indonesian Muslim Intellectual Association).

¹⁸ "Akbar Ready to Lead Golkar from behind Bars," *The Jakarta Post*, October 14, 2002.

¹⁹ The final judgment was given against the dissenting opinion of Abdul Rahman Saleh, one of five judges at the Supreme Court. See "Akbar Tanjung Bebas—Abdul Rahman Saleh Ajukan Dissenting Opinion," *Kompas*, February 13, 2004.

Suharto syndrome" (*Sindrom Amat Rindu Suharto = SARS*).²⁰ Just a few months before the election, Golkar was widely expected to win the upcoming polls by a large margin,²¹ and Akbar was ready to take the credit for this victory just two weeks afterwards at Golkar's presidential convention. Yet, as it turned out, Akbar's confidence was a bit premature. Although Golkar did win the election, the result of 21.58 percent was a far cry from the 30 percent observers had predicted and the party had adopted as its official election target. Moreover, compared to the 1999 election, Golkar had actually lost votes and only emerged on top of the voting tally because of the disastrous performance of Megawati Sukarnoputri's PDI-P.

Golkar's relatively feeble performance in the elections provided some interesting insights into the strengths and weaknesses of the former regime party. Most notably, it showed that the party's frequently praised party machinery is, in actual fact, not as superior as the public has often assumed. While Golkar certainly has an impressive organizational apparatus, comprised of thousands of offices down to the lowest administrative level, the real core of the party's power in the regions was never grounded in the sheer number of its offices but rather in its ability to accommodate informal local power holders into the party's patronage networks. In 1999, most of these patronage networks had essentially remained intact, but in 2004 numerous local dignitaries, wealthy businessmen, and religious leaders started to turn their backs on Golkar. The main reason for these defections was a small but significant change in the newly revised election law, which prescribed that the 2004 paper ballots would no longer feature just party names and symbols, but would publish full candidate lists with photos.

This revision of the ballot apparently enticed many local politicians to seek nominations from other parties where competition for top places on the legislative candidate list was not as tight as in Golkar. In particular, many lower ranking Golkar backbenchers who could not compete with the patronage power of the richest candidates were willing to jump ship simply because they saw their interests better accommodated by smaller parties. As these politicians took their own followers with them to the new parties, Golkar suffered some remarkable losses in areas where traditional local power holders remain influential.²² Significantly, this new development illustrated how immensely porous the basis of Golkar's party machinery actually is.

The Long Fall of Akbar Tandjung. First Act: Golkar's Presidential Convention

Despite this somewhat bittersweet aftertaste, the results of the 2004 parliamentary elections certainly strengthened Golkar's position in the party system compared to what it had been since 1999. Even though the party's performance at the ballot box was weaker than had been expected, the former hegemonic party had clearly reasserted its dominance in parliament (*Dewan Perwakilan Rakyat, DPR*) where it now formed the

²⁰ The term was misleading because only a minority of those who were disillusioned with Megawati actually favored the return of Suharto. Rather, they were longing for the return of some of the concomitant features of the New Order, such as political stability and economic prosperity.

²¹ Lembaga Survei Indonesia (LSI), *Disturbing Voters' Tendencies for the Coming 2004 General Election* (Jakarta: LSI, 2003).

²² Dirk Tomsa, "Bloodied but Unbowed," *Inside Indonesia* 83, July-September 2005, pp. 17-18.

largest fraction with 127 seats.²³ But the biggest prize in Indonesian politics, the presidency, was still up for grabs, and for party chairman Akbar Tandjung, winning this prize had always been a top priority. The problem, however, was that Akbar was not exactly the kind of indisputable and popular leader who could easily secure his party's nomination by acclamation. Moreover, at the time when most parties had nominated their candidates, Akbar was still in the midst of his legal problems, which would certainly complicate any bid for greater power. Therefore, Akbar and his allies in Golkar's central board had to dig deep into their bag of political tricks in order to allow the chairman to pursue his presidential ambitions.

The search for an alternative format to be used for nominating Golkar's presidential candidate had begun back in 2002, when Akbar's involvement in the Bulog graft case had tainted his already compromised image, transforming him from a dull career politician into a reputed crook. In view of widespread adverse public sentiment and the chairman's ongoing legal battle, many party cadres believed that a direct nomination for Akbar by acclamation was a risk too great to take. Hence, party strategists started to explore other ways to fix the process and satisfy the chairman's aspirations. What they sought to create was a nomination process that had the appearance of an open contest, but that in essence would be designed to ensure smooth passage for Akbar Tandjung. The solution was an American-style presidential convention, yet with some distinctive Indonesian features.²⁴ Such a convention would not only buy time for Akbar, but it would also give Golkar a chance to present itself as an innovative force for democratization. Moreover, a convention had the potential to generate large amounts of money for the party, as all prospective contestants would be required to finance their own campaigns.

After a small working group had recommended the format of the convention to the central board, the details were formalized at a national leadership meeting (Rapat Pimpinan, or Rapim) in late April, early May, 2003. The debate about the format was heated until the very end, as Akbar's opponents, led by Fahmi Idris and Marwah Daud Ibrahim, tried to prevent approval of convention procedures that would effectively rubberstamp Akbar's nomination. Representatives debated, among other questions, the composition of the convention's organizing committee and whether the convention should be held in one or two stages and whether voting rights should be granted only to the party's national and provincial leadership boards or to the national, provincial, and district chapters.²⁵ At the end of a tense meeting, a compromise was eventually

²³ The final number of DPR seats was only determined by the election commission after a number of disputes about the correct distribution of seats had been settled by the Constitutional Court. Golkar was affected by one of these disputes and, as a consequence of the Court's ruling, the party lost one seat in Papua. Therefore, Golkar is now represented in the DPR by 127 legislators and not, as some observers have misleadingly stated, by 128 legislators. See "KPU Tetapkan Anggota DPR, DPD Terpilih," *Media Indonesia*, August 30, 2004. For a list of all current members of parliament, see the DPR website (<http://www.dpr.go.id>).

²⁴ As Golkar vice-chairman Slamet Effendy Yusuf explained, "a settled system like the one applied in the United States may not be suitable for a country like Indonesia." He did not elaborate, though. See "The Show Must Go On, With or Without Akbar," *Van Zorge Report*, February 24, 2003, p. 11.

²⁵ In view of Akbar's control over the DPP and most provincial boards, Fahmi and Marwah favored a convention that would also give voting rights to the more than four hundred district chapters. Officially, they argued that this would enhance the legitimacy of the elected candidate, but basically they knew that only with the inclusion of the district chapters did they have a realistic chance of challenging Akbar. See "Beringin Mencari Presiden," *Tempo* 9, 32, April 28–May 4, 2003.

agreed upon, but most analysts believed that this compromise still benefited Akbar Tandjung.

According to the Rapim's final solution, the convention would start with local conventions on the district and provincial levels. Here, Golkar's regional chapters would propose a number of candidates to be selected for the national convention. Based on the results of these local conventions, the party would then organize a national pre-convention in October 2003 in order to determine five contestants for the final convention to be held in early 2004. The crucial issue of voting rights at the national convention was solved by granting suffrage to the national, provincial, and district chapters, as demanded by the opposition. The catch, however, was that Akbar pushed through a regulation that increased the value of the national and provincial leadership board votes. While all district chapters were given just one vote each, the national and provincial boards were granted so-called voting blocks which gave the national board eighteen votes (to be cast as a block and therefore surely for Akbar) and each provincial board three votes (also to be cast as a block).²⁶ Finally, Akbar was given ultimate supervisory authority over the implementation of the convention procedures, as the organizing committee was staffed with a number of his most loyal allies. In fact, the composition of the committee read like a "Who's Who" of Akbar's closest confidants, with people like Mahadi Sinambela, Rambe Kamarulzaman, Rully Chairul Azwar, Ferry Mursyidan Baldan, and Yahya Zaini all in leading positions, while more critical party cadres had to make do with positions in the toothless Monitoring Committee.²⁷

Thus, the stage was set for Akbar's smooth progress through the nomination process. When the convention was eventually held on April 20, the chairman was challenged by two former army generals, Wiranto and Prabowo Subianto, and two business tycoons, Aburizal Bakrie and Surya Paloh.²⁸ But despite the strong competition, Akbar entered the race as the red-hot favorite. Some observers even argued that Akbar "deserved to win"²⁹ because of his long-standing commitment to the party. Yet, the majority of delegates thought otherwise and elected the former commander-in-chief of the Armed Forces, Wiranto, as their presidential candidate.³⁰

²⁶ In return for agreeing on the voting right for the district chapters, Akbar initially demanded that the national board be granted ninety-seven votes, corresponding to the actual number of members of the extended leadership board. This was clearly unacceptable to most regional chapters, who demanded that the central leadership board should simply have one vote. In the end, a compromise giving the national board eighteen votes was agreed on. See "Kandas, Penggelembungan Hak Suara DPP di Konvensi," *Kompas*, 1 May 2003.

²⁷ See DPP Partai Golkar, *Keputusan DPP Partai Golkar Nomor KEP-333/DPP/GOLKAR/VI/2003, June 4, 2003* (Jakarta: DPP Partai Golkar), 2003.

²⁸ Another contender, Jusuf Kalla, had pulled out of the convention at the last minute after teaming up with Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono on a separate ticket. See "Kalla Siap Dampingi SBY," *Suara Merdeka*, April 19, 2004.

²⁹ Most observers argued that it was only natural for Akbar, Golkar's chairman, to win the convention since he had guided the party throughout the troublesome post-1998 transition period. See for example, "Siapakah Pemenang Konvensi Partai Golkar?," *Suara Pembaruan*, April 19, 2004; or "Akbar dan Wiranto Bersaing Ketat," *Suara Merdeka*, April 15, 2004.

³⁰ After none of the five candidates had received an absolute majority in the first round, the former commander-in-chief of the Armed Forces thrashed Akbar in the second round with 315 to 227 votes. Four votes were spoiled, while one delegate abstained. See "Wiranto Capres Golkar," *Media Indonesia*, April 21, 2004.

The retired general owed his victory mostly to strong support from Golkar's district chapters, and these members sided with him for a number of reasons. In order to understand why so many of the party's local functionaries voted for a candidate who possessed neither an organizational track record nor an established support base within the party, several things need to be kept in mind. First and foremost, it should be noted that the result was primarily a defeat for Akbar Tandjung rather than a victory for Wiranto. That Akbar was anything but an ideal candidate for many Golkar cadres in the regions had already been made clear after the preconventions at the provincial level, in which the chairman had only finished fourth behind Aburizal Bakrie, Surya Paloh, and Wiranto.³¹

But obviously, this early warning sign was ignored by Akbar. After the national preconvention in October 2003, the ongoing uncertainty over his corruption case further eroded his chances of winning. Even his eventual exoneration did little to alleviate the damage to his reputation, as many people believed that the case had been too heavily politicized to allow for an unbiased judgment. When two months after Akbar's controversial acquittal Golkar only garnered a disappointing 21.58 percent in the general election, many party members saw a direct link between the prolonged court case and Golkar's electoral performance. In their view, Akbar's low popularity and his reputation as a corrupt operator had had a negative impact on Golkar's campaign and therefore directly contributed to the party's failure to reach the election target of 30 percent.³² Thus, by the time the convention was held, many delegates had already come to the conclusion that, in a direct presidential election, Akbar Tandjung might actually be a liability rather than an asset.

Secondly, many regional delegates resented the controversial convention rules that gave district chapters only one vote whereas provincial chapters and the national leadership board enjoyed voting blocks. Indeed, for some this proved that the party had ignored the aspirations of its local-level cadres. Blaming Akbar for the formulation of the rules, they saw no reason to give their vote to the chairman. Their dissatisfaction with the chairman was further fueled by Akbar's speech during the convention. Emphasizing his own role in consolidating the party after 1998, Akbar portrayed himself as the sole savior of Golkar. He attacked his rivals for hiding out during the chaotic days after Suharto's resignation and bluntly demanded to be given credit for his personal achievements.³³ This attitude did not go down well with a lot of local cadres, who felt that their own contribution to the survival of the party was not properly appreciated by the chairman.³⁴ Consequently, many district chapters

³¹ Significantly, seven provincial chapters did not even include Akbar in their lists of five nominees for the national convention. These seven provinces were West Sumatra, Central Java, Yogyakarta, South Kalimantan, East Nusa Tenggara, Southeast Sulawesi, and North Maluku. See "Tiba di Mata, Konvensi Dipicingkan," *Tempo* 34, 32, October 20–26, 2003.

³² Personal communication with convention participants, April 20, 2004.

³³ During his campaign in the run-up to the convention, Akbar had repeatedly accused his competitors of showing little commitment to Golkar in the immediate aftermath of Suharto's fall. Pointing to his role as the most conspicuous target for criticism directed at Golkar after 1998, Akbar frequently stressed that only he himself had shown the courage to defend Golkar against widespread criticism from nongovernmental organizations, student activists, and other political parties. At the convention, he repeated these accusations in his final speech to the assembled delegates from all over Indonesia.

³⁴ I am grateful to J. Kristiadi for pointing out this factor to me.

withdrew their support for Akbar and voted for Wiranto or one of the other candidates.

A third factor that most certainly affected the voting behavior of the delegates was the distribution of money by the candidates. In fact, it was widely believed that Wiranto had basically bought his victory, as he allegedly paid millions of *rupiah* to every district chapter that supported him. According to one estimate, each vote in the decisive second round of the convention was sold at around five hundred to seven hundred million rupiah.³⁵ This generous distribution of *gizi* (literally: "nutrition," here referring to money) was in fact not just confined to the convention as such. As part of a well-planned, long-term strategy, Wiranto had already started to drum up support for his campaign long before the actual convention circus began as he crisscrossed the archipelago in an attempt to drag local party chapters into his camp. In contrast to most other candidates, Wiranto was able to dedicate an immense amount of time and money to this endeavor since he was not preoccupied with practical politics (as was Akbar) or business activities (as were Aburizal and Surya). Significantly, the cadres' expectation that they would receive money in exchange for their support was so explicit that one prominent preconvention participant, respected Muslim intellectual Nurcholish Madjid, pulled out in disgust.³⁶

Finally, the convention saw the revival of old factional divisions within the DPP as several board members from the anti-Akbar camp threw their weight behind Wiranto. Rumors of tentative cabinet lists for a prospective Akbar Tandjung-led government had further deepened already existing splits, for these lists almost exclusively carried the names of Akbar's loyalists from the North Sumatra and HMI (Himpunan Mahasiswa Islam, Muslim Student Association) factions. Furthermore, critical members of the central board, like Marwah Daud Ibrahim, Fahmi Idris, and Marzuki Darusman,³⁷ were also unhappy about the fact that the votes of the DPP were to be cast as a block. Since Akbar was supported by a majority of the board, critical members were thus unable to express their support for other contestants at the convention. With their own hands tied, they used their clientelistic networks, which reached into the regional chapters, to mobilize support for Wiranto.

In sum, the convention result was essentially a vote of no confidence for Akbar from the regional delegates. By shattering Akbar's presidential ambitions, Golkar's local party cadres had laid bare just how shallow the chairman's structural support in the party actually was. Throughout his years in power, Akbar had concentrated his network-building activities predominantly on the national and the provincial levels, ensuring sound support in the parliamentary fraction, the central board, and a great number of provincial boards. But Indonesian politics in the post-Suharto era has become increasingly localized, and the rebellion of Golkar's district chapters against their own chairman was a clear indicator that this trend was spilling over into national party affairs. In fact, the events during the convention demonstrated that the party leadership in Jakarta could no longer control the rational calculations of lower level

³⁵ "Menang Berkat Jual Beli Suara," *Fajar*, April 26, 2004.

³⁶ "Nurcholish Urung Ikut Konvensi Golkar," *Kompas*, July 31, 2003.

³⁷ Marzuki Darusman, who back in 1998–1999 had been one of Akbar's closest allies in the effort to oust Habibie, had abandoned the party chairman as soon as the latter's corruption scandal unraveled in 2001. When the convention marathon began, he switched his allegiance to the Wiranto camp.

party cadres and that a gradual adjustment in the power balance between the local and national party elites had begun to take shape.

Akbar failed to acknowledge this trend since he obviously still believed in the prevalence of established top-down patterns of communication and decision-making processes. While a party outsider like Wiranto correctly calculated that the district chapters would vote independently, the long-time party stalwart Akbar Tandjung apparently hoped that securing the support from a certain provincial branch would lock in support from all district chapters of this particular province, as the provincial chairman would instruct his subordinates on the district level to vote in accordance with the provincial chapter's choice. But, as Akbar Tandjung had to learn the hard way, these New Order-style maneuvers no longer work that easily today, at least not in Golkar.

The Long Fall of Akbar Tandjung. Second Act: The Presidential Election

After the convention, the defeated chairman publicly vowed to support Wiranto, but this was generally perceived as obligatory rhetoric. In fact, Akbar and his loyalists in and outside Jakarta had no interest whatsoever in supporting Wiranto and undermined the ensuing campaign wherever they could. With the next national party congress scheduled for December 2004, Wiranto was regarded as a serious threat to Akbar's political career, for many believed that a victorious Wiranto would use the upcoming congress to oust Akbar from the central board. In view of this bigger picture, it was hardly surprising that assistance from Golkar for Wiranto's campaign was rather limited. Those local chapters that were serious about supporting their candidate soon complained about delays and obstructions in the provision of money and logistical support for the campaign. In South Sulawesi, for example, several local campaigners expressed their disappointment about the reluctance of the central board to provide assistance, while in North Sulawesi's capital, Manado, a member of the local Golkar branch described the coordination between the party and Wiranto's own campaign team as "pretty chaotic."³⁸

Golkar's central board in Jakarta of course rejected claims that they had deliberately attempted to obstruct Wiranto's campaign,³⁹ but the signs were there for everyone to see. For instance, Akbar's seemingly relentless shadowing of Wiranto on the campaign trail appeared less like genuine support than like an attempt to control the candidate's activities. Given Akbar's constant companionship, Wiranto must have felt as if he was under permanent surveillance by the Golkar chairman. Even in areas where Akbar was hugely unpopular, like Sulawesi, the sore loser insisted on accompanying Wiranto, which effectively damaged rather than benefited Wiranto's electoral chances. Had Akbar been sincere in his advocacy of the retired general, he could have played a much more helpful role in Wiranto's campaign if he had drummed up support for the candidate in those areas where he himself was popular, for instance in North Sumatra or parts of Java. Yet, while Akbar at least publicly denied any disloyalty towards Wiranto, some of his closest aides were less reluctant to

³⁸ Personal communications with local Golkar cadres in North and South Sulawesi between June and July 2004.

³⁹ "Golkar-PKB Bantah Tidak Kompak," *Kompas*, June 9, 2004.

show their contempt for the retired general and, in obvious anticipation of things to come, more or less openly supported PDI-P candidate Megawati Sukarnoputri.⁴⁰ In the end, Wiranto finished only third in the election, just behind Megawati, but far behind runaway leader Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono (SBY), another military candidate.

For Golkar as a party, Wiranto's failure to proceed to the second round of the presidential election had the dual effect of strengthening unity within the Akbar camp while at the same time reducing the potential for reconciliation with its opponents, both at the national as well as the local level. How deep the rifts between the two groups had grown became apparent shortly after the first round, when the two remaining presidential contenders, SBY and Megawati, started making overtures to Golkar leaders in order to forge a coalition for the decisive second round. Faced with the options of either openly supporting one of the two candidates or maintaining a neutral stance until after the election, the party leadership had to weigh its tactical considerations carefully.

In the opinions of many neutral observers, the best option for Golkar would have been simply to sit back and relax. In view of the fact that Golkar had won the largest number of parliamentary seats in the April legislative election, it seemed logical that whoever won the decisive second round of the presidential election would be likely to seek parliamentary support from Golkar afterwards in order to insure a stable government. Making a premature coalition commitment before the final round, on the other hand, was widely regarded as strategically imprudent, as it would put Golkar's advantage unnecessarily at risk. In accord with this overall consensus, Golkar's very own research department reportedly recommended to the party leadership that it was in the party's best interest not to pledge allegiance to either candidate before the election, but rather to remain neutral.⁴¹

Among members of Golkar's central board, however, this option had little support. Akbar Tandjung, in particular, had other plans. Long before the unholy alliance with Wiranto was officially terminated, he had already made it clear that he would like to see Golkar supporting Megawati in the second round. For Akbar, a coalition with Megawati was attractive for a number of reasons. First of all, Akbar and Megawati had a long history of good relations, which had begun in 2001, when the Golkar chairman was instrumental in elevating Megawati to the presidency. Megawati returned the favor later when she refused to become involved in the fuss about Akbar's corruption scandal. Her silence was widely interpreted as tacit support for Akbar's acquittal. In early 2004, then, after Akbar's judicial ordeal had finally come to an end, the Golkar chairman announced that he would not mind running as Megawati's vice-presidential candidate in case he won Golkar's presidential convention. Now that Megawati was fighting for her political survival, Akbar was happy to offer support again.

⁴⁰ After the presidential election, a close confidant of Akbar's indirectly confirmed that Golkar had held back funding for Wiranto. Alleging that Wiranto had simply miscalculated his budget and spent too much money for vote buying at the convention, he argued that it was not the responsibility of Golkar to provide the funds for Wiranto's campaign. Confidential interview with a former member of Golkar's central board, August 6, 2004.

⁴¹ Personal communication with member of Golkar's Research and Development Department, August 11, 2004.

Secondly, Megawati had offered Golkar not only a large amount of money,⁴² but also a substantial number of cabinet posts in a prospective new government.⁴³ In case of victory, Akbar himself would have taken over a new position as special advisor to the president, which would have endowed him with broad authority over key political decision-making processes. Thirdly, and most importantly, supporting Megawati was attractive for Akbar because of the fact that Megawati would only have been eligible for one more term in office, as the amended Indonesian constitution only allows a maximum of two consecutive terms for the president. According to Akbar's calculation, a stable Golkar-PDI-P coalition would provide the right environment for him to orchestrate politics safely from behind the scenes for a while and then run as the coalition's presidential candidate in 2009.⁴⁴ In view of this long-term goal, Akbar was determined to fight all-out to help Megawati win another term as president.

In mid-August, he aggressively pushed through his agenda at a tense national leadership meeting in Jakarta, which was attended by all provincial chapter leaders, but not by the district leaders. Although a significant number of the provincial chapters, as well as some DPP members, clearly preferred a coalition with the SBY-Jusuf Kalla pairing, Akbar eventually secured support from all provincial branches except West Java. Four other provincial chapters that had earlier either openly supported SBY (South Sulawesi and Papua) or had preferred to stay neutral (Yogyakarta and North Maluku) backed down and eventually agreed to support the decision reached at the national leadership meeting.⁴⁵ However, doubts about the sincerity of their acquiescence continued to linger, and it quickly became clear that Akbar's success at the leadership meeting was little more than a Pyrrhic victory.

In fact, Akbar was fighting for a lost cause. His plan to support Megawati was doomed from the beginning, simply because the Golkar chairman greatly overestimated the power of party machines to influence voting behavior in a direct presidential election. After patching together the so-called "Nationhood Coalition" (*Koalisi Kebangsaan*) with Megawati's PDI-P and two smaller parties, Akbar seemed to be convinced that the incumbent would indeed be able to win the election because these coalition parties would mobilize exactly those same 57,000,000 people who had voted for these four parties in the April election. Such simplistic computations, however, revealed a flawed understanding of a direct presidential election, as this logic not only disregarded the increasingly rational voting behavior of the Indonesian electorate, but also the fact that traditional, established configurations of loyalty and power at the local level can no longer be taken for granted. The success of any party machine is based on certain tenets: firstly, a party must possess a coherent and disciplined local network that is able fully to implement policy decisions made at the

⁴² According to a report in the *Tempo* newsmagazine, Megawati had offered Golkar at least one hundred billion rupiah if the party supported her bid for the presidency. Many observers, however, believed that the actual amount was likely to be much higher. See "Lain Pucuk, Lain Akar dan Ranting," *Tempo* 25, 33, August 16-22, 2004; interviews with Ryaas Rasyid, August 31, 2004 and Faisal Basrie, September 14, 2004.

⁴³ At least eight cabinet positions were rumored to be reserved for Golkar, and not surprisingly, all of them were to be distributed amongst Akbar's loyalists. See "Koalisi Bermesin Iming-Iming," *Tempo* 27, 33, August 30-September 5, 2004.

⁴⁴ Though the Golkar leader never publicly confessed his ambitions, most observers and fellow politicians were convinced that Akbar was indeed still driven by the dream of becoming Indonesian president one day. Interview with Salim Said, August 10, 2004.

⁴⁵ See "Rapim Golkar Dukung Penuh Pencalonan Mega-Hasyim," *Kompas*, August 16, 2004.

top level; and, secondly, a party must command a broad constituency that is loyal to the party simply for its own sake. But as the general election has shown quite clearly, Golkar's track record in these two categories is not exemplary, so that the party was actually in a very weak position to deliver what its leader had promised in his solemn pledge of allegiance to Megawati.

In short, the main problem with the leadership's decision to support Megawati's candidacy was that, in order to be successfully implemented, it required a solid and coherent party structure that Golkar simply did not have. In view of the party's long history of frictions and factionalism, it was indeed highly unlikely that the Golkar leadership would be able to mobilize sufficient support for such a controversial choice. And indeed, fierce resistance against the alliance with Megawati was noticeable everywhere in the party, from the national to the provincial to the district levels. At the grassroots, many cadres questioned why they should suddenly support the very candidate they had been instructed to criticize in the previous elections. Furthermore, many campaigners in the regions argued that SBY was a more suitable candidate to support since he had nominated a Golkar figure (Jusuf Kalla) as his running mate. Finally, many local chapters in Golkar's strongholds in Eastern Indonesia genuinely wanted to support the SBY-Jusuf Kalla pairing not only because Kalla represented a real chance for them to gain direct access to the government, but also because of their ethnic bond with Jusuf Kalla. Many had already silently supported Kalla during the first round of the presidential election, but now that SBY and Kalla were clearly making headway, and Sulawesi's favorite *putra daerah* (son of the region) was knocking loudly on the door to the vice-presidential palace, the choice was even easier. As one local legislator had said on the eve of the first round of the election, "it will be impossible to prevent people from defecting from Golkar if we can have a vice-president who speaks Buginese."⁴⁶

In view of such sentiment, it was hardly surprising that local Golkar chapters in Sulawesi were sceptical about the Rapim decision to support Megawati. Muhammad Roem, one of Golkar's provincial deputy chairmen from South Sulawesi, responded to the decision by warning that he could not guarantee strong support from the grassroots in his province, regardless of the instructions from the center.⁴⁷ But it was not only in Sulawesi where the decision to support Megawati was criticized. In West Java, for example, a province where Golkar had made a strong showing during the legislative elections,⁴⁸ disappointment with the central leadership was now rife. During the Rapim, West Java's provincial party chapter had been the only one to remain steadfast in its rejection of a coalition with Megawati. Now that the decision had been finalized, local Golkar politicians were harshly critical of the party's central board. Dr. Avip Saefullah, a local Golkar cadre who openly supported SBY and Jusuf Kalla, explained:

⁴⁶ Personal communication with member of DPRD (Dewan Perwakilan Rakyat Daerah, the provincial parliament) South Sulawesi, June 30, 2004.

⁴⁷ See "Koalisi Menabrak Tembok," *Gatra*, August 20, 2004.

⁴⁸ West Java had been one of the few real success stories for Golkar in the legislative elections. With 27.9 percent, the party gained 4 percent compared with the 1999 election results, when it had only managed to win 23.6 percent of the vote. In fact, West Java was one of only eight provinces where Golkar actually gained votes compared to 1999, and one of only five where these gains exceeded one percent. The other provinces were Bali (up from 10.4 to 16.8 percent, +6.4), West Sumatra (up from 23.6 to 28.7 percent, +5.1), Central Java (up from 13.4 to 15.9 percent, +2.5), and Lampung (up from 19.4 to 21.6 percent, +2.2).

It has to be understood that the Great Golkar Family today is different from the Great Golkar Family of the past. Our cadres today are already very rational in truly observing the unfolding aspirations of the public. It is only natural if the provincial leadership board of West Java decides to stay neutral in the upcoming second round of the presidential elections.⁴⁹

On the national level, the conflict between the pro- and anti-Akbar factions escalated soon after the national leadership meeting, when a group of party officials loyal to the two central board members Fahmi Idris and Marzuki Darusman established the so-called “Golkar Party Reform Forum” (Forum Pembaruan Partai Golkar).⁵⁰ Members of the group openly defied the central board’s decision to support Megawati and lobbied regional cadres to join them in their support for SBY and Jusuf Kalla. In the opinion of Fahmi Idris, the instruction to support Megawati was primarily driven by Akbar Tandjung’s personal ambitions and therefore indicative of a party elite that ignores the aspirations of the grassroots.⁵¹ Furthermore, Fahmi resented what he called “Akbar Tandjung’s increasingly authoritarian approach to pushing through crucial decisions in the party leadership.”⁵² Consequently, according to Fahmi, someone had to stand up against the chairman, if only to test to what extent the leadership was willing to tolerate dissenting opinions within its own ranks. And finally, supporters of the forum asserted that Golkar ought to be naturally inclined to advocate a candidate who, even though he was not nominated by the party, was in actual fact a long-time Golkar cadre.

While all these points may have had some relevance for Fahmi and his colleagues, it is likely that the most compelling reason for them to rebel against the official party line and join the SBY-Kalla camp was actually the simple fact that SBY was favored to win and that neither Fahmi nor his fellow defectors were inclined to support a losing candidate. Fahmi and Marzuki, in particular, reckoned that supporting SBY would later translate into direct access to power, as they were tipped to be rewarded for their activities with positions in the next cabinet.⁵³ As for Fahmi, there were rumors he might also become SBY’s preferred candidate if he sought to win the Golkar chairmanship at the upcoming national party congress in December 2004.

It is these broader implications of the latest factional dynamics that most likely accounted for the unprecedentedly harsh sanctions that were imposed on the members of the Reform Forum. On September 15, 2004, just five days before the crucial second round of the presidential election, officials attending a plenary meeting of Golkar’s central board decided to dismiss Fahmi Idris and Marzuki Darusman, as well as a few of their supporters. Furthermore, Jusuf Kalla and Muladi, both members of Golkar’s Advisory Council, were suspended from their positions on the central board.⁵⁴ To

⁴⁹ “Hasil Rapimnas Golkar Abaikan ‘Akar Rumpit,’” *Pikiran Rakyat*, August 18, 2004.

⁵⁰ See “‘Perpecahan’ di Partai Politik: Buah Personalisasi Politik,” *Pikiran Rakyat*, September 6, 2004.

⁵¹ “Ibarat Daud Melawan Goliat,” *Tempo* 28, 33, September 6-12, 2004.

⁵² Interview with Fahmi Idris, August 13, 2004.

⁵³ After SBY’s victory, Fahmi Idris was appointed Minister of Manpower and Transmigration. In 2005, he survived a cabinet reshuffle and moved on to become Minister for Industry. In contrast to Fahmi, Marzuki Darusman was not included in SBY’s cabinet.

⁵⁴ Interestingly, Kalla and Muladi were only suspended from their positions in the central board, but not from their party membership. Conversely, Fahmi Idris, Marzuki Darusman, Burhanuddin Napitupulu, Yuniwati Maskur Sofwan, Anton Lesiangi, Abu Hanifah, Abu Hasan Sadjili, Priyo Budi Santoso, and Yuslin Nasution were all dealt the ultimate penalty—dismissal from the central board *and* from the party.

insure that the controversial decision would be approved at the plenary meeting, Akbar only invited selected board members to be present. Not surprisingly, none of the eleven board members whose fate was to be discussed at the meeting received an invitation. But even with these precautionary measures in place, it was tough work for Akbar to push through his will. In the end, only twenty-nine out of fifty participants voted for the dismissal of the eleven colleagues, just enough to make the decision binding in accordance with the relevant party regulation.⁵⁵

No previous disciplinary measures enacted against recalcitrant or dishonest Golkar party members had ever been as harsh as the expulsion of the Reform Forum supporters. The harshest sanction so far had been the reprimand of Marwah Daud Ibrahim in 2002,⁵⁶ while evident breaches of official party policies by supporters of Akbar, as exemplified by Mahadi Sinambela's and Ade Komaruddin's open support for Megawati during the first round of the presidential election, had always been tolerated. That Akbar was now keen on dismissing his opponents as quickly as possible was a clear sign that he was growing increasingly anxious about his own political future. With the next national party congress looming at the end of the year, Akbar obviously considered it necessary to unify the party ranks by force in order to protect his already decreasing chances of retaining the chairman's post. However, despite his desperate efforts, he was unable to stop his own downward spiral. As SBY was swept to the presidential palace in a landslide victory, Akbar's political fortunes took yet another turn for the worse. Responding to Megawati's defeat, he vowed to lead Golkar into parliamentary opposition, but that was more than most party members were ready to take. As the national party congress drew closer, the opposition inside Golkar was preparing its final onslaught.

The Long Fall of Akbar Tandjung. Third Act: Golkar's 2004 National Congress

Yet this opposition was by no means a unified movement. Certainly, a significant number of top officials and an even larger number of local functionaries bitterly resented Akbar's leadership. But among these discontented factions, there was no real political heavyweight capable of consolidating widespread organizational support for a realistic challenge. As a matter of fact, the opposition remained splintered, and there were no efforts whatsoever to form a collective movement that could unite behind a common candidate. Instead, all the usual suspects who were left after the expulsion of Fahmi Idris decided to struggle for power individually, including Marwah Daud Ibrahim, Wiranto, and Surya Paloh.⁵⁷ Other potential candidates—such as newly elected vice-president and convention drop-out Jusuf Kalla, vice-chairman and DPR

Additionally, three other supporters of the Reform Forum who did not hold any positions in the central board were temporarily stripped off their party membership. These were Edison Betaubun, Yorris Raweyai, and Malkan Amin. See "Golkar Pecat Pengurus dan Kader 'Mbalela,'" *Suara Merdeka*, September 16, 2004.

⁵⁵ "Mega Flounders, Golkar Suspends Executives," *Laksamana Net*, September 15, 2004.

⁵⁶ After Akbar was convicted for his involvement in the Bulog corruption case, Marwah had repeatedly urged the chairman to step down from his positions as party chairman and DPR speaker.

⁵⁷ The lack of cooperation between oppositional figures was criticized by one of the dismissed Reform Forum founders, Muladi, who argued that Akbar could only be toppled if Wiranto and Surya Paloh united and agreed on some sort of power sharing deal. See "Wiranto, Akbar Tandjung, dan Surya Paloh Dominasi Bursa Calon Ketua Umum Partai Golkar," *Kompas*, November 24, 2004.

speaker Agung Laksono, or convention participant and newly appointed Coordinating Minister for Economic Affairs, Aburizal Bakrie—initially remained noncommittal.

Of the remaining candidates, Wiranto was widely regarded as the most promising, since memories of the presidential convention in April were still fresh on everyone's mind. But his eligibility as a candidate was far from certain. Akbar had appointed a fervently loyal organizing committee to prepare for the national congress, and it was not only given the task of setting the overall agenda for the congress but also of determining the eligibility criteria for potential contenders seeking the chairmanship.⁵⁸ The most contentious issues to be discussed in this regard were the organizational experience of the candidates and the question of who should have the right to vote in the election for party chairman.

Raising the issue of experience, Akbar advocated a rule that would require a potential candidate to have at least five years' experience on a party board at either the national, provincial, or district level. If approved by the delegates, this regulation would immediately disqualify Wiranto from running for the chairmanship, as the former general had never held any leading position in the party.⁵⁹ As for voting rights, Akbar was keen on following the model that had been used in 1998, when he rose to the chairmanship in a tense battle against Edi Sudrajat. Back then, only the heads of the provincial chapters—there were twenty-seven at the time—had been eligible to vote. The plan for 2004 was to award thirty-six votes altogether, distributed as follows: one vote for each of Golkar's now thirty-three provincial chapters, one vote for the central board, one combined vote for Golkar's youth and women's organizations, AMPG (Angkatan Muda Partai Golkar, Golkar Party Youth Brigade) and KPPG (Kesatuan Perempuan Partai Golkar, Golkar Party Women's Association), and one vote for the so-called *Hasta Karya*.⁶⁰

Wiranto and his followers were eager to revise these quotas, as they knew that their chances of beating Akbar were certainly better if Wiranto could mobilize his grassroots supporters in the party. Long before the national congress was held, Wiranto, as well as various local party officials, began to urge Akbar Tandjung to extend the right to vote for the next chairman to all district chapters. Such a reform had in fact already been "recommended" by the delegates of the 1998 extraordinary party congress, but as there was no written documentation of this recommendation, Akbar rejected the plea, arguing that the party's constitution did not allow for such a sweeping change of the rules. The issue was widely discussed in the Indonesian media, with several observers arguing that Golkar was trying to turn back the clock and reinstate centralized decision-making.

⁵⁸ Chairman of the committee was the head of Golkar's DPR fraction, Mohammad Hatta, while other Akbar confidants like Agun Gunandjar Sudarsa also played key roles in the committee.

⁵⁹ "Belum Ada Calon Pantas Untuk Pimpin Golkar," *Kompas*, December 10, 2004.

⁶⁰ The so-called *Hasta Karya* consists of Golkar's three founding organizations: Soksi, Kosgoro 1957, and MKGR (Musyawarah Kekeluargaan Gotong Royong, Mutual Aid Family Association), plus five autonomous mass organizations that had been founded by Golkar during the New Order: AMPI (Angkatan Muda Pembaharuan Indonesia, Indonesian Renewal Youth Brigade), HWK (Himpunan Wanita Karya, Workers Women's Association), MDI (Majelis Da'wah Islamiyah, Islamic Propagation Council), Al-Hidayah, and Satkar Ulama. For details of the proposed voting mechanism, see "Munas Golkar, Konvensi Babak II?," *Kompas*, December 9, 2004.

Obviously, Akbar did not care about these debates, as he was preparing his strategy to stave off the impending challenge from his convention nemesis, Wiranto. Five days before the start of the congress, Akbar's bid for reelection seemed to have gained crucial additional momentum when a "streamlined"⁶¹ national leadership meeting backed the chairman's propositions concerning the distribution of voting rights and the formal eligibility requirements for prospective contestants.⁶² The passing of these rules basically eliminated Wiranto's hopes to contest the race and confirmed Akbar as the favorite, ahead of the remaining competitors: Marwah Daud Ibrahim, Surya Paloh, and Slamet Effendy Yusuf.⁶³ But in an unexpected twist of events just two days before the congress, vice-president Jusuf Kalla suddenly entered the fray, thereby changing the whole configuration of power among the candidates.

Initially, Kalla had preferred to take a back seat in the chairmanship competition. Instead of running for the top job himself, he intended to back his closest confidant among the contenders, Surya Paloh, and only aspired to be nominated as the chairman of the Advisory Council. But as the congress drew closer, Kalla realized that the package as it stood would not get sufficient support. In order to tip the balance against the incumbent chairman, delegates would need to be assured that the vice-president himself was really deeply involved in the campaign. When he realized that he could not outmaneuver Akbar simply by backing another candidate, Kalla decided to run himself and give Surya the Advisory Council position instead. Additionally, the pair enticed another party leader, vice-chairman and recently elected DPR speaker Agung Laksono, into joining them.

That Agung suddenly joined forces with Kalla and Surya was particularly interesting. Just two months before the party congress, when the Indonesian parliament elected him as its speaker, it had seemed as if the notoriously noncommittal head of Golkar's organizational department had finally chosen to join Akbar Tandjung's camp, for he had actively sought the chairman's support in order to win the powerful house speaker post. Surely, Akbar had expected Agung to return the favor at the congress, but that proved to be yet another miscalculation. Instead of supporting Akbar's bid for reelection, Agung even briefly contemplated running against him, but he gave up that plan when Jusuf Kalla entered the fray.⁶⁴

Kalla's involvement made possible a strategy that had seemed unworkable for so long, namely the formation of a team with a genuine chance of beating Akbar Tandjung. Together the three formed an immensely powerful troika, not only because they were all extremely wealthy businessmen, but also because they could offer access to hugely diversified organizational and geographical networks. While Kalla was the drawcard to open up the Eastern Indonesian branches (and basically anyone who was

⁶¹ After the dismissal of the members of the Reform Forum, resistance against Akbar in the DPP was far less pronounced than before.

⁶² "DPD II Partai Golkar Tak Punya Hak Suara," *Pikiran Rakyat*, December 11, 2004.

⁶³ In the run-up to the congress, comments by several political observers further strengthened the notion that Akbar had the best chance to win the leadership contest. See for example statements by Arbi Sanit and Syamsuddin Haris, quoted in "Belum Ada Calon Pantas untuk Pimpin Golkar," *Kompas*, December 10, 2004. See also Fachry Ali's comments in "Akbar Tandjung 'too strong to unseat'," *The Jakarta Post*, December 15, 2004.

⁶⁴ Just one day before he surprised the media by joining forces with Kalla and Surya, Agung had announced that he wanted to run for the chairman post himself. However, once Kalla had thrown his hat into the ring, Agung knew he had no chance to win and opted to team up with Kalla.

keen on getting access to the vice-presidential palace), Agung was the link to some of Golkar's most important cadre recruitment pools, especially AMPI and Kosgoro 1957.⁶⁵ Surya Paloh, finally, is an Acehnese with strong connections to the military-affiliated lobby organization FKPP (Forum Komunikasi Putra-Putri Indonesia, Communication Forum of the Sons and Daughters of Indonesian Veterans) and the media community,⁶⁶ and he was also said to be close to the Golkar chapters in Central Java and Yogyakarta.

On December 15, the trio announced at a joint press conference that they would cooperate in a troika supporting Kalla in his bid for the chairmanship; if he won, Agung and Surya would take over new positions as deputy chairman and Advisory Council chairman, respectively. More importantly, however, at the same press conference the trio also announced that they had already secured the support of twenty-eight provincial chapters.⁶⁷ This statement sent shock waves through the Akbar camp. It may have been a bluff in order to trick Akbar into changing the rules again and allow the district chapters to vote, but given Kalla's newly acquired prestige as vice-president and the massive patronage resources he commanded, it seemed quite likely that it was not a bluff at all. In any case, time was too short for Akbar to check the truth of the claim, leaving him with no choice but to take Kalla's statement at face value and react.

It did not take him long to realize that if Kalla had really secured the support of twenty-eight out of thirty-three provincial chapters, his own last hope was to solicit help from those party members whom he had treated with disdain for most of the year: the district chapters. Yet at the same time, Akbar also knew he had little chance of winning their support, given the history of local resistance against his leadership. Within the last eight months, he had provoked so much anger at the grassroots that wooing these members now appeared almost like mockery. But Akbar had no choice. In a last desperate attempt to avert inevitable defeat, he approached former archrival Wiranto and persuaded him to join forces. With the help of Wiranto and his allies at the grassroots level, Akbar hoped to give the course of events yet another twist. As soon as Wiranto had agreed to support him, Akbar astonished the congress participants with the announcement that he would like to change the electoral rules and now grant voting rights to all district chapters. But it was too little too late. The initiative was, unsurprisingly, accepted by acclamation, but that had little impact on Akbar's fortunes. In the end, Jusuf Kalla won the contest by a landslide, defeating Akbar by 323:156 votes.⁶⁸

⁶⁵ Agung was chairman of AMPI between 1983 and 1988 and is currently chairman of Kosgoro 1957 (elected for the period 2002-2007), one of Golkar's founding organizations. For more details on Agung Laksono, see <<http://www.tokohindonesia.com/ensiklopedi/a/agung-laksono/index.shtml>>, accessed February 1, 2006.

⁶⁶ Surya Paloh, who was never an active member of the armed forces, was one of the founding members of FKPP and chaired the organization between 1979 and 1983. He also has links into AMPI, where he is a member of the advisory council. Surya, however, is most famous for his media empire, which comprises, among other companies, the newspaper *Media Indonesia* and the television channel Metro TV. For more details, see <<http://www.tokohindonesia.com/ensiklopedi/s/surya-paloh/index.shtml>>, accessed February 1, 2006.

⁶⁷ "Kalla-Agung-Surya Bergabung," *Kompas*, December 16, 2004.

⁶⁸ After the last-minute changes, voting rights had eventually been granted to the central board, all provincial and all district boards, the youth and women's organizations founded by Golkar (AMPG and KPPG), and the entire *Hasta Karya*. Altogether, the number of votes eventually amounted to 484. In the final round of the contest, there were two abstentions and three invalid votes. See "Jusuf Kalla Ketua

Significantly, Jusuf Kalla's triumphant "blitzkrieg"⁶⁹ reflected both continuity and change in Golkar. On the one hand, Kalla's victory showed that, in essence, the political culture of Golkar has changed fairly little since the end of the New Order. Despite all the reformist rhetoric, Golkar still remains a party that is primarily driven by its immense appetite for power.⁷⁰ Clearly, Jusuf Kalla did not win the leadership contest because he had a convincing political program, but because he could promise direct access to lucrative government resources. This prospect was obviously much more appealing to the delegates than Akbar's invitation to form an oppositional alliance with Megawati's PDI-P. As one delegate put it, "Akbar asked us to listen to our hearts, but Kalla gives us vitamins."⁷¹ Indeed, the irresistible power of money could be sensed everywhere during the congress. While reliable figures are not available,⁷² a bitter comment by Akbar Tandjung shortly after his defeat spoke volumes about the corrupt nature of the contest: "Corruption is like a fart—it is easily detected by its smell, but no one can see it".⁷³

But despite the prevalence of money politics and old-style patterns of patronage at the congress, not everything was business as usual. In fact, the result of the leadership contest also showed that earlier events surrounding Golkar's presidential convention and the presidential election were not isolated incidents, but rather manifestations of an emerging trend away from long-established centralized paternalism to more decentralized party politics. As a matter of fact, Golkar's local party functionaries have grown increasingly assertive in their responses to the formerly almighty national party elites on the central leadership board, and, as a result of that, traditional patterns of top-down decision making have become more and more difficult to uphold. Akbar Tandjung was reluctant to acknowledge this trend, and at the 2004 party congress, he paid the ultimate price for this reluctance. In the end, he not only lost the chairmanship but also the respect of his party, as his final speech at the congress was rowdily booed down by what observers described as a "rabid audience."⁷⁴

Conclusion

This article has shown how the increasing localization of Indonesian politics had an impact on the internal affairs of the country's biggest party, Golkar. Throughout 2004, from the general elections and the presidential convention in April to the two-stage presidential elections in July and September, through the national party congress in December, political developments within Golkar have been strongly shaped by the growing assertiveness of local political forces, who have eagerly tried to leave their

Umum DPP Golkar 2004-2009," *Tempo Interaktif*, December 19, 2004; "Akbar Mengaku Dikeroyok," *Suara Merdeka*, December 20, 2004.

⁶⁹ "Blitzkrieg' Jusuf Kalla Berhasil," *Kompas*, December 20, 2004.

⁷⁰ This may be true for all parties, but Golkar's appetite seems to be particularly fierce. In contrast to other parties—such as, for example, PDI-P—Golkar has demonstrated that its cadres will not hesitate to remove their leader if he fails to deliver access to power.

⁷¹ "Akbar Tandjung's event-filled political career grinds to halt," *The Jakarta Post*, December 20, 2004.

⁷² Not surprisingly, congress participants were generally tight-lipped about the prevalence of money politics. Newspaper reports alleged that candidates and their allies paid up to Rp. 350 million to secure the support of provincial boards, whereas district boards received up to Rp. 75,000,000. See "Penguasa dan Pengusaha kuasai Golkar," *Kompas*, December 22, 2004.

⁷³ "Akbar Tandjung's event-filled political career grinds to halt," *The Jakarta Post*, December 20, 2004.

⁷⁴ "Kalla's Rise Reignites Fears," *The Jakarta Post*, December 20, 2004.

mark on politics at the national level. For older party elites in Jakarta who learned to navigate Indonesia's political system during the New Order years, this process has been difficult to comprehend, for they continued to view local players as mere subordinates to the dominant center. But local officials no longer blindly follow instructions issued by a narrow-minded party oligarchy that is primarily interested in personal enrichment. Buoyed by the overall localization of politics, they have grown increasingly confident about their own role in the party and are now more inclined to challenge the authority of the central leadership board if it is in their own personal interests.

Unfolding in three consecutive acts, the drama of Akbar Tandjung's downfall has shown that national elites can be shoved aside if they do not adjust to this new assertiveness from the margins. More generally, Akbar's political demise demonstrates that old-style centralistic patterns of vertical communication are no longer viable in Golkar. While other Indonesian parties continue to be dominated by charismatic leaders or their hand-picked successors, Golkar has a markedly different institutional structure and is therefore more dependant on its local officials. As the process of decentralization continues with the direct elections of governors, mayors, and district heads, the new party leadership around Jusuf Kalla cannot afford to neglect the aspirations of its local cadres. Early reports from a first series of local elections have already shown that, just like in the 2004 parliamentary elections, many aspiring local politicians have left Golkar and sought nominations for gubernatorial, mayoral, or *bupati* posts from other parties. Those who stay with Golkar, and especially those who win elections for Golkar, are likely to become even more confident in the future, and it is certainly not inconceivable that they will further press their demands for a greater, more institutionalized role in national party affairs. At this stage, it remains to be seen whether Golkar's new chairman will be amenable to these demands. Judging by his background as a pragmatic entrepreneur from Eastern Indonesia, we can guess that Jusuf Kalla is better prepared than his predecessor, but only time will tell.