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## **Institutions and Collective Action in Divided Labour Movements: Evidence from Indonesia**

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### **Abstract**

Under what conditions do trade unions in divided labour movements cooperate? Does cooperation in one domain increase the likelihood of cooperation in the other? Do institutions facilitate or discourage cooperation? We explore these questions through an examination of collective action across federation and confederation lines in post-Suharto Indonesia. Using a comparison of union cooperation in the policy and electoral domains, we demonstrate that tripartite wage-setting institutions have played a central role in facilitating collective action in the policy domain, encouraging unions to look beyond shop-level issues to policy issues identified by their respective national organizations as affecting workers. The relative absence of collective action across organizational divides in the electoral domain, meanwhile, can be explained by the institutional context, which creates higher barriers to unions working together.

### **Introduction**

Despite the harsh global environment and a history of authoritarianism, Indonesia's unions have become increasingly prominent on the national scene since the fall of the New Order dictatorship (1967–1998). Organizing a tiny fraction of the workforce, fragmented into many competing federations and lacking political allies, the increasing prominence and effectiveness of Indonesia's unions is surprising. One reason for their unanticipated achievements is that they have developed an impressive mobilizational capacity and on many occasions collaborated across deep organizational divisions. This cooperation among unions has helped labour to secure among the strongest legal protections for workers in the region, block efforts to pass more flexible labour laws, win huge increases in local minimum wages and press for the passage of a new social security law. Collaboration has, however, been confined largely to shared policy goals. Unions have been far less successful in working together in the electoral domain, where efforts to establish a labour-based party and place candidates in local and national office have yielded minimal results.

In this article, we examine an understudied aspect of labour's collective action: cooperation among unions in divided labour movements. We explore this issue through an analysis of the labour movement in post-Suharto Indonesia, asking why unions have been successful in

building associational power through cooperation across organizational lines in the policy domain but not in the electoral domain. We contend that the reason for the variation in collaboration across these domains is that unions face different institutional and strategic constraints in each. This variation in outcomes suggests, moreover, that associational power in one domain does not translate easily into another (Lawrence, 2014), and that institutions can facilitate cooperation among unions in divided labour movements (Chun, 2009; Wright, 2000). We develop this argument in a series of steps. We first discuss how institutions can facilitate cooperation among unions in divided labour movements and provide an overview of the data that we utilize in this analysis. We then proceed to an examination of collective action among unions in the policy and electoral domains. We conclude with some reflections on the double-edged nature of institutions and on recent institutional transformations that present a serious challenge to Indonesia's labour movement.

### **The theoretical terrain**

Cooperation across organizational lines is a vital but overlooked aspect of working-class collective action. Union competition is a common explanatory variable in many comparative studies (e.g. Murillo, 2001; Robertson, 2004), but comparativists have not focused their attention on the conditions under which divided labour movements set aside their deep divisions to work collaboratively.<sup>1</sup> For example, Frege and Kelly's (2004) important study of varieties of unionism discusses a multitude of strategies for labour revitalization, but strengthening cooperation among unions is not one of them. Moreover, explicit analyses of cooperation across organizational lines typically focus on building coalitions with other community organizations (e.g. Fine, 2006; Seidman, 1994; Waterman, 1993) or with unions or groups of workers abroad (Anner, 2011; Armbruster-Sandoval, 2004; Bronfenbrenner, 2007; Gordon and Turner, 2000; Kay, 2011; McCallum, 2013; Moody, 1997; Munck, 2000; Nissen, 2002).

The relative neglect of the study of union cooperation in countries with divided labour movements is puzzling, since deep divisions among unions exist in many countries. In countries with divided labour movements, unions often compete with each other for members and political influence. In addition to the organizational challenges of recruitment and mobilization, then, unions must decide whether or not to cooperate across federation and confederation lines. Failure to bridge these divides hampers their ability to achieve shared goals and facilitates efforts to weaken the labour movement through divide and rule tactics. As Sil's analysis in this special issue illustrates, Poland's labour movement failed in its efforts to resist flexibilizing reforms in part because its two largest unions, each linked to a different political party, chose not to cooperate. By contrast, Indonesia's unions, despite organizing a much smaller share of the workforce, being far more fragmented, and having no strong links to political parties, thwarted flexibilizing reforms because they acted in concert.

The problem of generating collective action across organizational divides in the labour movement does not correspond well to the classic collective action problem in which free riding is the primary obstacle to achieving shared goals (Olson, 1971). Even divided labour movements typically involve a relatively small number of organizations, which should facilitate collective action. The difficulty of bridging organizational divides despite shared

interests, then, is puzzling when analysed through the lens of the classic collective action dilemma. But it is less puzzling if we consider that unions may take different ideological positions, often have rancorous histories that produce both antipathy and mistrust, and in many cases compete with each other for members and influence. Under what conditions, then, does cooperation across organizational lines occur, and what role do institutions play in promoting or discouraging cooperation?

Institutions can provide a framework or architecture for cooperation, create incentives for participation and potentially resolve certain coordination problems.<sup>2</sup> Institutions can also distribute power, but the way they do so cannot be read off the formal institutional structures and depends on the context in which they are embedded. In the policy domain, corporatist structures have been perhaps the most common institutional mechanism for unifying labour organizations. However, corporatist structures do not bridge divides among diverse organizations so much as they recognize one peak federation (or confederation) that bargains on behalf of all workers (Schmitter, 1974; Stepan, 1978). In cases of societal corporatism, the recognized organization may represent the vast majority of workers. In cases of state corporatism, the state typically structures the labour movement with the intent of mobilizing it (inclusionary state corporatism) or demobilizing it (exclusionary state corporatism) (Collier and Collier, 1977) – the latter being the case in Suharto’s Indonesia (Ford, 2009; Hadiz, 1997). In democratic countries with divided labour movements, freedom of association and more pluralistic politics make the construction of the organizational monopolies of highly centralized corporatist institutions less tenable. In contexts where centralized peak organizations do not exist, ‘liberal corporatist’ tripartite institutions can bring diverse unions together to formulate policy (Royo, 2002). By creating a structure that both encourages cooperation and that focuses the energy of disparate organizations on a shared goal, tripartite institutions can thus serve as focal points that make cooperative outcomes more likely (Keohane and Martin, 1995; Schelling, 1960; Steinmo, 2001).

Tripartite institutions are not created equal. Tripartite committees with little authority to formulate policy that merely rubber stamp decisions made by others – or that governments consult and then disregard – may foster temporary cooperation among divided unions. Ost (2000), for example, has described Eastern Europe’s tripartite institutions as ‘illusory corporatism’ because they have rubber stamped and legitimated neoliberal policies. However, these kinds of institutions are unlikely to create the kind of sustained cooperation evident in Indonesia; in fact, they may even deepen divisions because the unions that boycott these enfeebled committees criticize those that choose to participate. Tripartite committees that have significant authority are much more likely to generate sustained cooperation, particularly where they are permanent bodies that meet regularly. Ad hoc commissions created to deal with an economic crisis, for example, may facilitate temporary cooperation, but unions tend to go their separate ways once the work is completed. By contrast, Indonesia’s authoritative tripartite institutions at the local level gave unions significant influence on a matter of deep concern to their membership – local minimum wages – and met annually to negotiate them, encouraging unions to cultivate habits of cooperation that carried over into other policy areas. In other words, the more institutionalized the tripartite committees are, the more likely they are to foster enduring cooperation in the policy domain.

However, the institutions that create incentives for unions to cooperate on policy matters do not necessarily translate into cooperation in the electoral domain. Unions in divided labour movements might cooperate on tripartite committees but go their separate ways come election time. Political parties are of course the primary vehicle through which unions engage in the electoral process. A strong party of the left can coordinate across labour's organizational divides in both the electoral and policy domains, and thus play a role in uniting a divided labour movement. Indeed, the importance of strong left parties for advancing labour's agenda is a defining feature of power resource theory (Korpi, 1983; Stephens, 1986). In the absence of a strong, unifying party of the left, however, unions have no obvious partisan home. In these cases, there are two modal outcomes. One is that different unions have ties to different political parties. In these cases, the histories of the various unions are usually deeply intertwined with a specific political party. This pattern is evident in many countries, including India (Gillan and Lambert, 2013; Teitelbaum, 2010), Italy (Locke, 1992), Poland (Ost, 2015), Portugal (Royo, 2002), Spain (Burgess, 2004; Royo, 2002), Taiwan (Lee, 2015) and Venezuela (Burgess, 2004; Murillo, 2001). It was also evident in Indonesia in the 1950s and early 1960s (Tedjasukmana, 1958), before Suharto severed these ties in the 1970s. Another is that unions are politically independent and have no strong partisan links. Contemporary Indonesia fits this second pattern, as do the Philippines (Hutchison, 2015), Malaysia (Crisis and Pasasuraman, 2016), East Timor (Ford, 2016) and, for many years, Thailand (Brown, 2007). In both of these scenarios, the institutional context reinforces divisions among unions.

Figure 1 synthesizes and summarizes our theoretical expectations about cooperation in divided labour movements in the electoral and policy domains. In cases where tripartite institutions are weak and there is no left party or unions are linked to different parties, we expect minimal cooperation in both domains. Conversely, we expect the most robust cooperation to take place where there are strong tripartite institutions and a unifying left party. In these cases, we should expect significant cooperation in both domains. Where tripartite institutions are strong, but there is no left party or unions are divided in their political allegiances, we expect more extensive policy cooperation and little if any cooperation in the electoral domain. When tripartite institutions are weak, but there is a unifying left party, we expect to find cooperation in both domains since the unifying left party can pursue labour's policy objectives in the legislature. However, if this left party does not have substantial representation in the legislature, policy cooperation may be less robust than in cases where tripartite institutions are strong.<sup>3</sup>

### **Mapping unions' collective action: data and sources**

Our analysis of collaboration, or lack thereof, between unions in the policy and electoral domains in Indonesia draws on research conducted between 2012 and 2016 in the capital, Jakarta, and five union-dense localities (see Figure 2). Two of these localities – Bekasi and Tangerang – are within Greater Jakarta. The third is Gresik, which is located in East Java near Surabaya, Indonesia's second largest city, and the fourth, Deli Serdang, in North Sumatra on the outskirts of Medan, Indonesia's third largest city. The final location is the

island of Batam, a free trade zone located off the east coast of Sumatra just south of Singapore and Malaysia.

		Policy Domain	
		Weak tripartite institutions	Strong tripartite institutions
Electoral Domain	No left party or multiple parties linked to unions	Minimal cooperation in both domains	Policy cooperation
	One left party	Electoral and some policy cooperation	Cooperation in both domains

**Figure 1. Cooperation in divided labour movements**



**Figure 2. Field sites in Indonesia**

All five localities are characterized by high concentrations of secondary industry, but differ in terms of both their industrial profile and their political characteristics and history of trade unionism.

In each locality, we engaged in observational fieldwork, attending union meetings and other events and activities including training sessions and discussions with grassroots members, where we, as researchers, were given opportunities to raise questions related to our research. Our findings were recorded in fieldwork diaries and cross-checked against documentary sources including government reports and newspaper articles. We also conducted a total of 185 semi-structured interviews with union leaders and politicians. The primary foci of interviews were unions’ political strategies and behaviour during local and national electoral campaigns, minimum wage negotiations, and protests, although information was also gathered on other aspects of unions’ operations. These qualitative data were supplemented by

data collected through surveys (N = 1200) of workers on their behaviour as voters, which were conducted in Tangerang and Bekasi after the 2009 and 2014 elections. Of the workers surveyed, 50% were members of a union that ran at least one candidate in an electoral race in that district; 25% were members of other unions; and 25% who did not belong to a union. Snowballing methods were used within worker communities to reach the targeted number of respondents in each category, and each respondent was interviewed by a surveyor. The iteration of the survey run after the 2009 elections contained 89 questions pertaining to voting behaviour, the political role of unions, and socio-economic background. The iteration run after the 2014 elections, which contained a total of 95 questions, excluded a small number of questions specific to technical aspects of the 2009 presidential elections and included additional questions regarding voting behaviour at the local level in legislative and executive elections.

### **Union cooperation in the policy domain**

Scattered across several different confederations, dozens of competing federations and thousands of unaffiliated enterprise unions, Indonesia's unions are a distant cry from the encompassing labour organizations that have been the focus of much scholarly work on labour movements in advanced democracies. In 2010, the government recorded approximately 3.4 million unionized workers, which is about 2.8% of the total workforce and 8.3% of the waged and salaried workforce.<sup>4</sup> About 70% of these 3.4 million union members belonged to federations that were affiliated to one of four national confederations. The largest confederation is the Confederation of Indonesian Workers (Konfederasi Serikat Pekerja Indonesia (KSPI)), the internationally backed confederation formed early on in the democratic transition by breakaway factions of the former state-backed unions. The other major confederation is the former state-backed union federation, now known as the Confederation of All-Indonesia Workers' Unions (Konfederasi Serikat Pekerja Seluruh Indonesia (KSPSI)). In addition, the Confederation of Indonesian Prosperous Labour Unions (Konfederasi Serikat Buruh Sejahtera Indonesia (KSBSI)) and the Confederation of the Alliance of Indonesian Labour Unions (Konfederasi Aliansi Serikat Buruh Indonesia (KASBI)) have high profiles but limited memberships. KSBSI was established during the late Suharto years as an independent union, and since the early transition years has stagnated. KASBI, which brings together dozens of independent unions from around the country, many with connections to labour non-governmental organizations (NGOs), is Indonesia's youngest and most radical confederation. Many other federations and thousands of independent enterprise unions are unaffiliated to a confederation.

Despite these organizational divisions, the mobilizational capacity of Indonesia's unions has been impressive, and their ability to turn out massive numbers in the streets has arguably strengthened over time. In the early post-Suharto years, unions worked together to oppose changes to Ministerial Decision No. 150/2000 on Employment Termination, which provided for more generous severance payments to workers, forcing the government to revoke the amendments in June 2001 (Caraway, 2004; Ford, 2004). The following year, unions once again united in opposition to Law No. 13/2003 on Manpower, beating back many provisions perceived to be anti-worker (Caraway, 2004), and in 2005–2006 unions poured into the

streets to prevent the government from rolling back some of its provisions (Caraway and Ford, 2014; Juliawan, 2011). Unions have also mounted large protests to derail plans to raise fuel prices, to push for the passage of Law No. 24/2011 on Social Security Providers, to oppose outsourcing and low wages, and to reject changes to the procedures for setting minimum wages. Every May Day, tens of thousands of workers turn out to celebrate their collective power and to articulate their organizing priorities for the year. At the local level, unions in industrial areas have negotiated large real increases in the minimum wage as well (Caraway et al., 2015a, 2015b).

The capacity to turn out members in large numbers across organizational lines has been key to these successes in the policy domain. But how have unions overcome divisions to cooperate on matters of shared concern? Unions' willingness and ability to flex their collective action muscle is a product of the institutional setting, most notably the influential role of tripartite institutions at the local level, which created strong incentives for unions to work together. The most important of Indonesia's tripartite committees deal with minimum wages.<sup>5</sup> The legal framework for setting provincial minimum wages was established in the mid-1970s, but it was not until the 1990s that minimum wage negotiations became a regular feature of labour relations, largely in response to a massive wave of strikes (Kammen, 1997; Manning, 1998). During the Suharto period, all seats on these tripartite bodies were occupied by the state-sanctioned union, the Federation of All-Indonesia Workers' Unions (Federasi Serikat Pekerja Seluruh Indonesia (FSPSI)) (Ford, 1999; Hadiz, 1997). FSPSI initially continued to dominate the various tripartite bodies after democratization, but the new unions demanded, and eventually received, a seat at the table.

The processes embedded in the wage committees also changed. During the Suharto period, the Minister of Manpower and Transmigration set provincial wages after receiving recommendations from governors, who in turn received input from provincial tripartite committees (SMERU, 2001). A process of decentralization, which accompanied democratization, saw the devolution of minimum wage negotiations to the district and municipality level (SMERU, 2001; Tjandra et al., 2007), where tripartite wage councils set minimum wages annually, subject to approval by the mayor or regent and then by the provincial governor. These yearly negotiations played a more important role than collective bargaining in setting wages (International Labour Office, 2015; World Bank, 2010), and were therefore the central focus of union cooperation and mobilization at the local level.

Although the local wage councils provided a framework for cooperation, it took some years for unions to win substantial wage increases for workers. For about a decade, average minimum wage increases in Indonesia tracked inflation very closely and remained below the minimum decent standard of living threshold (Caraway et al., 2015a). One reason for this is that labour representatives on the committees were not always vigorous advocates for workers. In Batam, for example, the KSPSI officials who initially dominated labour representation on the wage council signed a three-year deal to limit annual wage increases to 2.5%, which meant that workers suffered real wage cuts during this period. In Surabaya, KSPSI representatives were rumoured to have accepted bribes in exchange for agreeing to small wage increases. Since minimum wage negotiations directly affected union members,

low wage increases generated discontent, and activists in KSPSI and other unions began to demand expanded representation and more accountability from labour representatives on the wage councils (Dhamayanti, 2012). Once new blood invigorated the minimum wage councils, they became the most important venue for inter-union collaboration.

The structure of the tripartite committee encouraged unions to coordinate on strategy and tactics prior to the annual round of negotiations. Employers were unified in a single association, and they typically put forward the lowest wage proposal while unions typically wanted larger increases, positioning government representatives as a pivot. Unions increased their chances of convincing government representatives to side with them if they presented a united front. These efforts to coordinate sometimes failed. Disagreements among unions were rooted primarily in different strategic assessments of how far the government representatives would bend to accommodate union demands. In the rare instances when this happens, unions usually put forward two different figures for the next year's minimum wage, with both figures exceeding those proposed by the government and employers. The wage council's final deliberations would then culminate in a walk out by the worker members who advocated the highest wage figure. Despite ruffled feathers, all unions would be back at the bargaining table the next year, eager to work out a common negotiating position.

Collaboration among unions on the wage council went beyond establishing a shared position at the negotiation table. Unions mobilized members in large-scale demonstrations at key points in the negotiations in order to exert pressure on the district head and the government representatives on the committee to side with the worker representatives. This annual rite of mobilization around minimum wages resulted in the formation of cross-federation and cross-confederation networks in union-dense localities, the main task of which was to mobilize workers for collective protests connected to the wage negotiations.<sup>6</sup> These local union networks, once created, could be used for other policy goals. For example, in Gresik, unions transformed their informal network for union cooperation into a more formal structure, known as the Joint Secretariat (Sekretariat Bersama (Sekber)). In addition to cooperating on the wage council, the unions in Sekber work together to exert pressure on the district head on other matters of importance to them, for example, stronger enforcement of labour law and restrictions on outsourcing. Sekber also facilitates mobilization for shared concerns at the provincial level, where members engage in joint actions with workers from other industrial areas near Surabaya. In the greater Jakarta area, similar local networks help to mobilize opposition to or support for joint actions around national issues, turning out thousands of workers at strategic sites in the capital city as a means of influencing national political leaders on issues ranging from wages and social security to opposing increases in fuel prices. Cooperation at the local level therefore strengthened cooperation at the provincial and national levels as well.

In sum, the annual minimum wage negotiations facilitated collective action in two discrete ways. First, because local wage councils met regularly and shaped a policy of deep concern to unions, they created a framework for cooperation and generated incentives for unions to participate. Second, they provided a focus of mobilization for the membership of all unions and helped to develop habits of cooperation among them. The wage councils did not erase



antipathies among unions; rather, unions cooperated on them despite their ill feelings toward each other. As we shall see later, without similar levels of institutional support, unions found it much more difficult to collaborate in the electoral domain.

### **Union cooperation in the electoral domain**

While unions have successfully cooperated in the policy domain, they have failed to replicate this success in the electoral domain. One reason for this is that there are no institutions that facilitate cooperation among them. A party with a social democratic or left orientation could provide an umbrella under which unions could coalesce, but none of Indonesia's major parties have a social democratic or left orientation. The absence of such a party is a consequence both of history and of institutions put in place after the fall of Suharto. Regime change in the mid-late 1960s resulted in the effective eradication of the left (Kammen and McGregor, 2012; Roosa, 2006). Partly as a consequence of this history, the major political parties that have competed in elections have been non-programmatic, differentiating themselves primarily by whether they are religious or nationalist (Aspinall, 2005; Mietzner, 2008; Tomsa, 2010; Ufen, 2008). In addition, several parties are dominated by Suharto-era elites; indeed, some of the newer parties were established by oligarchs as a means to defend their power and wealth (Robison and Hadiz, 2004; Winters, 2014). In fact, thus far, only one major party has tried to establish a labour base, and this effort was fleeting. The Prosperous Justice Party (Partai Keadilan Sejahtera (PKS)) cut deals with two major federations to run union candidates in union-dense localities in the 2009 national elections, but abandoned this strategy in 2014. Another reason parties have not reached out to unions is that the divisions among them, and the small share of the labour force that they represent, mean that they cannot credibly commit to delivering a substantial labour vote (Caraway et al., 2015a, 2015b).

In the absence of a unifying party, unions are in the much tougher position of having to build cooperation from the ground up. Given Indonesia's fragmented popular forces (Aspinall, 2013), working-class actors are at a disadvantage in establishing political parties. In Indonesia's complex electoral system, with the exception of Aceh, new parties must prove that they are national, not local, parties in order to compete in elections (Horowitz, 2013). Political parties must therefore establish branches in the majority of Indonesia's localities before they can register.<sup>7</sup> Despite this high hurdle, there were a number of efforts to establish a labour party soon after democratization. KSBSI established a party in the lead-up to the 1999 election, which competed under various names in the next three elections. Another, the Democratic People's Party (Partai Rakyat Demokratik (PRD)), which had links to a small leftist union, emerged from the progressive student movement of the late Suharto period. Some KSPSI leaders also tried to set up political parties before the 1999 and 2004 elections (Caraway and Ford, 2014; Ford, 2005).

But establishing a new party is only the first step. Once registered, a party must win a certain percentage of the popular vote in national legislative elections in order to participate in the subsequent election. This percentage has increased over time and is currently 3.5%. For newly established parties in a large country with many parties, this is a difficult threshold to meet. Not one of the small number of parties with a left or social democratic orientation

formed since the fall of Suharto has been in a position to participate in successive elections. KSBSI's Labour Party was forced to change its name before each of the 2004 and 2009 elections, because it had failed to meet the threshold and was subsequently disbanded. A similar fate befell the PRD, which having failed to reach the electoral threshold in 1999 was frustrated in its attempt to register for the 2004 election under another name. A successor was established in January 2007, but ultimately did not contest the 2009 elections (Caraway and Ford, 2014).

The combination of registration and threshold requirements makes it very challenging to establish and sustain new parties. However, the question remains as to why none of the labour-friendly parties reached the electoral threshold. The answer lies in the fact that the various pro-labour parties were not joint projects among unions but were instead tied to particular unions or even specific individuals. Their leaders never made a concerted effort to involve other unions in the development or management of the party. In the case of the parties established by KSBSI and KSPSI cadres, they were perceived to be personal projects of the leadership (or a subset of the leadership) rather than a collective project of the union. Since the parties were seen as personal or union-specific vehicles, and not as encompassing labour parties, support for them was tepid even within KSBSI and KSPSI, and virtually non-existent in other unions. Instead, unions interested in pursuing a political strategy decided to run union cadres as candidates in existing parties.

Given the fragmentation of Indonesia's unions, electing more than a handful of union candidates would require unions to work with each other to maximize the impact of the union vote. Objectively, the strategy most likely to succeed would have been for unions to agree to run only one union candidate in each electoral district and then to pool their resources to elect these candidates. The question of how to divide up territory is a sensitive one, however, and each union would of course want to reserve the most labour-rich districts for their own candidates. Local rivalries also make it difficult for unions to cut the sorts of deals that would be necessary to maximize the number of labour representatives elected. In the absence of institutions that facilitated cooperation, the mistrust among unions used to competing with each other for members was difficult to overcome. As a consequence, the results of these electoral experiments were predictably disappointing.

In the 2009 and 2014 elections, candidates from different unions (and sometimes from the same union) competed against each other in the same electoral district (Caraway et al., 2015b; Ford, 2014). The two unions that cut deals with PKS in the 2009 national elections dealt separately with the party and did not support each other's candidates (Caraway et al., 2015b). In Batam, multiple candidates from two different confederations competed against each other in 2009, assuring that none of them would win despite Batam being the most densely industrialized locality in Indonesia (Ford, 2014). In 2014, the problem of fishing in the same pond persisted. For example, in the industrial districts of Karawang and Bekasi, candidates from different unions vied against each other in single electoral districts. Even in cases where candidates from different unions were not running against each other in the same district, unions did little to help candidates who were not from their union. There were no formal agreements for them to support each other's candidates, and it was very rare for

unions to grant candidates from other unions access to their membership base, for example, by introducing them at factory-level gatherings. Instead, each union marched to its own beat, and union candidates had to rely overwhelmingly on their own organizations and personal networks.

Despite this lack of cooperation, a small handful of candidates with union backgrounds did win seats. Among the victors in 2014 were two candidates from the Indonesian Metalworkers Union (Federasi Serikat Pekerja Metal (FSPMI)) who ran on their union identities for two different parties in the local legislative contest in Bekasi District. These candidates won because of the size of the membership base in Bekasi and the fact that just one official candidate from FSPMI ran in each electoral district they fielded candidates. These two candidates drew explicitly on their union background and FSPMI's organizational resources to win. However, most union candidates who succeeded relied more on connections with their party or community ties for victory than on union support. A candidate in Tangerang district's local legislative race from KSPSI, for example, did not draw on the confederation's local apparatus, relying instead on community ties and his influential position in the local party structure to win his seat.

Coordination around a single candidate is of course more difficult political work than staging street protests around an issue of shared concern in the policy domain. Policy outcomes are often public goods shared by all unions, which makes it easier to cooperate than in the electoral domain, which has a more zero-sum character given organizational rivalries.<sup>8</sup> However, the absence of an institutional mechanism that facilitates coordination among unions in the electoral domain helps to explain its virtual absence. With no pro-labour party under which all unions could coalesce, each union marched to the beat of its own drum. The occasional victories represent the outer limits of what unions can do in the absence of cooperation. The 'go it alone' strategy used in Bekasi can yield no more than a handful of seats, because there are few areas where a single union has a large enough concentration of membership to ensure victory. Such a strategy will not work for national legislative seats, where electoral districts are much larger. The success of the KSPSI candidate in Tangerang, and others like him, is an example of giving up on the possibility of union engagement in politics rather than an example of greater union effectiveness in the electoral domain.

The most successful example of electoral cooperation among unions across federation and confederation lines was not to support a union candidate, but to back a pro-labour candidate, Rieke Diah Pitaloka, who ran for the West Java gubernatorial seat in 2013. Rieke, a young legislator from the Indonesian Democratic Party of Struggle (Partai Demokrasi Indonesia Perjuangan (PDI-P)), had established a reputation as a fierce advocate for worker rights during her first term in the national legislature. From her seat on the parliamentary commission responsible for labour affairs, she pushed for worker causes, grilled state officials, attended worker rallies, and collaborated with unionists in the campaign for social security (Cole and Ford, 2014). When Rieke won the party's nomination, labour activists from many different unions formed a labour support network for her campaign, known as Pita Mas, an acronym formed from her name and the name of her running mate, Teten Masduki – himself a prominent civil society activist with a long history of engagement with

labour. Although Rieke narrowly lost the race to the incumbent, she did far better than expected and beat the incumbent soundly in the areas where union support was strongest.

Rieke's experience provides some insight into how the institutional structure of a widely accepted labour party might help unions to bridge the divides among them. Since Rieke was not a representative of a specific union but rather was seen as someone who rose above organizational divides to advocate for workers' interests – and since there were no union candidates running against her – her gubernatorial candidacy unified workers from disparate organizations in the electoral domain in much the same way a labour party would. Rieke's candidacy was a one-time event, but much as institutions can do, her candidacy created a focal point that helped to overcome some of the barriers to cooperation, transforming the zero-sum nature of union engagement in the electoral domain that pitted one union against another to a positive-sum game of unions cooperating to elect pro-labour candidates.

### **Conclusion**

In countries with divided labour movements, institutions can play a critical role in bridging organizational divides. In Indonesia, the tripartite wage councils at the local level facilitated cooperation in achieving collective goals and fostered the development of local and regional networks of unions that helped Indonesia's fragmented labour movement to become surprisingly effective in the policy domain. By contrast, without a unifying party, unions have worked at cross purposes and been less effective in the electoral domain.

Although institutions have been critical in facilitating collective action among Indonesia's divided unions, we recognize that they can be double-edged. As Collier and Collier (1979) observed many years ago, institutional inducements may increase dependency on the state. In his discussion of labour relations institutions in France, Howell (2009) notes that state-backed institutions may have brought its fractious unions together, but these institutions also disconnected unions from their membership. In Southeast Asia, scholars have argued that tripartite institutions serve as carrots to co-opt union leaders and to separate them from their base (Brown 2007; Hutchison 2015). Akin to Offe and Wiesenthal's (1980) insight that institutionalization 'dissociates' representation from struggle, institutions may paradoxically strengthen union leadership by recognizing their authority to represent workers while undercutting the long-term power of unions by weakening connections to their membership and enervating their mobilizational capacity. In Indonesia, however, local wage councils did not have this demobilizing effect. Instead, they provided both an architecture for collaboration and reinforced symbiotic ties between members and leaders (Caraway, 2015), although it took time to have this effect.

The transformation of the wage councils also provides an excellent illustration of institutional evolution and the danger of confusing the form and the effect of institutions. The effects of the wage councils have varied over the decade and a half in which they existed in this form. Having first fought to broaden representation on the wage councils, unions then cooperated more effectively both at the negotiating table and in the streets. The onset of direct elections for local district heads in 2005 also gave unions an additional means through which to pressure local executives to side with workers in negotiations (Caraway and Ford, 2014).

This transformation is analogous to institutional ‘drift’ in which changed environments alter how institutions function, in this case shifting the distribution of power in favour of workers (Mahoney and Thelen, 2010). Indeed, so effective was unions’ use of these mechanisms, the national government took action to undercut it. Within a year of taking office, President Joko Widodo issued a presidential order eviscerating the wage councils by tying wage increases to a formula based on inflation and gross domestic product (GDP) growth (Caraway and Ford, 2015). This instance of institutional evolution is a form of ‘displacement’ in which new rules replace old rules (Mahoney and Thelen, 2010), likely making cooperation among unions in the policy sphere more difficult to sustain going forward.

Just as tripartite institutions are double-edged, so too are political parties. Encompassing labour or social democratic parties can be essential allies in achieving policies that benefit the working class. But partisan loyalties can also lead union leaders to side with party leaders against the wishes of their base (Burgess, 2004; Murillo, 2001) or to favour political negotiation with their party allies over mobilization in the streets (Lee, 2011; Teitelbaum, 2010). The rightward drift of many labour-based parties globally reinforces the point that ‘institutional fixes’ must be coupled with member engagement and mobilization. If they are not, these institutions may weaken rather than revitalize the labour movement. What is clear, though, is that in the meantime the different party affiliations of union leaders can threaten relationships *within* and *between* politically active unions. Following the 2014 electoral cycle, Indonesia’s three largest confederations began to lay the groundwork to establish a broadly based leftist party. This development is evidence of organizational learning as described by Schmalz and Thiel in this special issue. It is too early to tell if these efforts will succeed and whether they will facilitate increased cooperation among unions, but the early signs are not promising. The first step in establishing the party was the formation of a mass organization backed by all of the confederations as an incubator for the party, but before long two of the confederation leaders had established their own mass organizations. In the electoral domain, then, organizational learning continues to crash on the shoals of organizational divisions.

The Indonesian case suggests that tripartite institutions are more likely to facilitate cooperation when they are authoritative and meet regularly to set policy. But our argument is not simply ‘If you build them they will come’. Institutions can facilitate cooperation, and we would be surprised to find sustained cooperation without tripartite institutions or a unifying left party, but there are also instances in which tripartite institutions initiate but do not sustain cooperation. In South Korea, for example, the Korean Confederation of Trade Unions withdrew from the Tripartite Commission after its membership revolted over an agreement that legalized layoffs (Kuruville and Liu, 2010). Divisions within unions about the relative benefits of tripartite institutions versus disruptive mobilization can provoke backlash against participation when militants are dissatisfied with the agreements that are produced through cooperation (Baccaro and Lim, 2007). In addition, the nature of the divisions among unions may be important since sharp differences in ideology or the industry and occupational composition could make cooperation harder. The number of organizations may also matter. Bipolarity in the union landscape in which two large unions vie for dominance, as is the case in Poland and South Korea, may make cooperation harder than in more fragmented systems such as Indonesia’s. The scope and content of negotiations may also matter. In Indonesia, the

wage councils focused on one policy area in which differences of opinion among unions were mostly of degree. Comparisons of divided labour movements in which unions are politically independent could help to assess whether our finding that cooperation in the electoral domain is more difficult than in the policy domain holds in similarly divided labour movements. For example, Indonesia's experience could be productively compared to other Southeast Asian contexts where the labour movement is also divided and does not have strong partisan links. Similarly, comparisons of divided labour movements in which unions do have strong links to political parties could yield insights into the conditions under which they cooperate in the policy domain.

Given that many countries have divided labour movements, the conditions under which unions in these contexts overcome their divisions to work collaboratively are of great importance for labour revitalization strategies and are worthy of further scholarly scrutiny. The analysis here is primarily a hypothesis generating exercise, and points to several areas of productive future research. While we highlight the role of institutions, the case analysis also demonstrates that historical legacies and the broader political context also matter. Comparative studies of similarly divided labour movements would help to tease out the relative importance and/or the interaction of institutions with specific historical legacies and political contexts. It could also help to better specify the conditions under which tripartite institutions foster cooperation in divided labour movements.

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## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> Watson (2015) argues that divisions within the left – among political parties and between parties and unions – affects the development of welfare states, but her focus is on the consequences of these divisions rather than explaining the propensity for cooperation across these divisions.

<sup>2</sup> Our analysis borrows freely from various strains of institutionalism, combining liberal international relations scholars' idea of institutions as focal points with insights from historical institutionalism, rationalist, and constructivist traditions. See Hall and Taylor (1996) and Thelen (1999) for discussions of the intersections and tensions among these distinct institutionalisms.

<sup>3</sup> See Sil, this volume, for a discussion of the importance of left party strength in the legislature.

<sup>4</sup> This figure excluded the members of the Indonesian Teacher's Association (Persatuan Guru Indonesia (PGRI)), since PGRI's members in the government sector – which at that time constituted the vast majority of its membership – are yet to be fully recognized as workers.

<sup>5</sup> The other key tripartite institutions were the labour dispute resolution committees, which were established in the 1950s and continued to operate until they were replaced in the post-Suharto period by tripartite labour courts. See Gallagher (1995), Sinaga (2004) and Hurst (2014).

<sup>6</sup> The most memorable mobilizations took place in the 2011–2012 wage negotiation cycle, when tens of thousands of workers rioted in Batam and shut down toll roads in Bekasi and Tangerang (Caraway and Ford, 2014; Ford, 2013).

<sup>7</sup> The specific requirements have tightened over time. In the 2014 elections, in order to compete parties had to have an office in every province and at least 75% of municipalities and districts. In addition, parties had to prove that they had a chapter (but not necessarily an office) in at least 50% of sub-districts.

<sup>8</sup> Here there may be some parallels to Ornston and Schulze-Cleven's (2015) comparison of employer–union cooperation in the spheres of production and policy, in which they argue that cooperation is harder in the production sphere than in the policy sphere, but once established it is more durable.