

MARTIAL AND RITUAL ARTS GROUPS IN THE FORMATION OF POLITICAL PARTIES IN TIMOR-LESTE

GRUPOS DE ARTES MARCIAIS E RITUAIS NA FORMAÇÃO DE PARTIDOS POLÍTICOS EM TIMOR-LESTE

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Abstract: Martial and ritual arts groups are a set combination of sports activities in both physical and spiritual accomplishments to protect or defend themselves. This activity was banned a few years ago and decriminalized recently in 2022. However, the existence of these two sports activities reveals a significant controversial debate. This article attempts to analyze the relationship between political parties and martial and ritual arts groups. For this, secondary data collected from government reporting documents, non-governmental organizations and similar academic research publications were used. The results of this study indicate that there is indeed an interest in political parties. However, despite the motivation that mobilized this organization's mass into political party affiliation, the influence of martial arts and ritual groups began to be the backbone of political parties' support.

Keywords: political parties; martial and ritual arts groups; Timor-Leste.

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Resumo: As artes marciais e os grupos rituais são uma combinação de atividades esportivas que envolvem aspectos físicos e espirituais com o objetivo de autodefesa. Essa atividade foi proibida há alguns anos e descriminalizada recentemente em 2022. No entanto, a existência dessas duas atividades esportivas revela um debate controverso. Este artigo analisa a relação entre partidos políticos e grupos de artes marciais e rituais. Para isso, foram utilizados dados secundários coletados de documentos de relatórios governamentais, organizações não-governamentais e publicações de pesquisas acadêmicas similares. Os resultados deste estudo indicam que há de fato um interesse pelos partidos políticos. No entanto, a despeito da motivação que mobilizou um grande número de filiações partidárias, a influência das artes marciais e dos grupos rituais passou a ser a espinha dorsal do apoio dos partidos políticos.

Palavras-chave: partidos políticos; grupos de artes marciais e rituais; Timor-Leste.

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INTRODUCTION

As a newly independent country in Southeast Asia, Timor-Leste restored its independence in 2002 with formal official name of the Democratic Republic of Timor-Leste (RDTL). This youngest nation adopted a state system based on law and uses a democratic system of government. In recent years, democracy in Timor-Leste has performed well domestically, regionally, and internationally. In a democratic role, political actors like political parties take a vital position in this country. Regardless of the political Party's existence, they must uphold the value of justice and become the agents of political recruitment, functioned to support human resources, recruiting political actors in government institutions and parliament.

In a democratic system, citizen participation in politics is vital and become one of the democratic values stipulated in the national constitution of Timor-Leste that gives the privilege of political and civil rights to the citizens. Moreover, it is regarded a vibrant instrument for the formation of state building. It is because the participation of citizens in promoting good governance is part of the qualities of a democratic state that adheres to the principle of the rule of law. Promoting good governance is essential in a democratic system because it will guarantee the rights of citizens, such as civil, individual, and group rights, including the formation of individual and group activities, in this case, such as martial and ritual arts in Timor-Leste.

In recent years, the dynamics of the formation and development of political parties in Timor-Leste have produced an interesting phenomenon to be discussed beyond the border of political discourse. Like the emergence of new players in Timor-Leste politics, as the involvement of new interest groups, namely martial and ritual arts groups, in the real political arena. This situation differs from what happened in several years in Timor-Leste politics, that the involvement of martial and ritual arts groups that are not directly in the Timor-Leste political arena through the formation of political parties.

Political parties crucially become the pillars of democracy; both political parties will be good as well as democratic processes organized by a state, and vice versa; when the political parties have complex problematic, then democracy will limp the political process. Because in this case, as a pillar of democracy, political parties play an important role as a link between the State government and its citizens because, in this case, political parties are a means for citizens to participate in the process of managing the State (Ramadhanti, 2018).

With a point, this article seeks to discuss political parties and martial arts groups and rituals because academically, the role of interest groups such as martial arts groups and rituals is rarely discussed in academic discussions about political parties in Timor-Leste, although its role in the political practice of Timor-Leste is very important. There is some literature and research that has been discussed about political parties in Timor-Leste but not or not much has been captured about how the relationship between political parties and martial and ritual arts groups. Therefore, it is very interesting to discuss political parties and martial arts and rituals groups.

In Timor-Leste, martial art refers to all of the various systems of sports training designed for one ritual of self-protection and physically defeating opponents and defending against threats. However, the martial and ritual art can be manipulated by the political party with distortion of transparency which undermined the democratic system.

This article attempts to analyze the relationship between political parties and martial and ritual arts groups. For this, secondary data collected from government reporting documents, non-governmental organizations and similar academic research publications were used.

The analyzes presented here aim to contribute to the understanding of how political parties have used their interests by using martial and ritual arts groups, and how this relationship is established. This article structuralized its analyses by exploring the: history, roles, and functions of political parties, then analyses the existence of martial and ritual arts groups as preeminent social groups in Timor-Leste.

POLITICAL PARTY IN TIMOR-LESTE: HISTORY, ROLES, AND FUNCTIONS

In 1974, when Timor-Leste was under the Portuguese rule, the global political landscape was polarized with so-called *the “Cold War”*. This world political setting was motivated by the ideological confrontation of the two big superpowers, the Soviet Union and the USA. This international feud also affected its impact on a small country like Timor-Leste for many reasons. The first was with the *‘Flower Revolution’* on April 25, 1974, in Portugal, which began to pave the way for the decolonization process and gave Timor-Leste people the freedom to form and gather ideas to form political parties so that Timor-Leste could choose its future based on the will of the majority.

Second is the *Occidental Bloc*, and there is the intention to prevent the ideology of ‘Communism’ from spreading widely in various corners of the world, including Timor-Leste. Numerous Timor-Leste people understand what Communism is, and they do not understand why Indonesia has a great obsession with *Frente Revolucionaria de Timor-Leste Independente* (FRETILIN), a party that has a desire for none other than Timor-Leste to be independent. Thus, at that time, many Timorese supported FRETILIN because they wanted Timor-Leste to be independent (CEPAD, 2010).

This situation reveals an immediate response with an emerging political parties to adopt ideologies that were very distant from each other. For example, the Timorese Democratic Union (UDT) appeared first to support a continuation with Portugal, then the Timorese Social Democratic Association (ASDT), which later changed to the Independent Timor-Leste Revolutionary Front (FRETILIN) on September 11, 1975, as a political party defending independence (Tylor, 1990; Dunn, 2003; Boarcaech, 2013).

In those days, there were also three smaller political parties such as the Timorese People’s Democratic Association (APODETI) who wanted integration with Indonesia, *Klibur Otas Timor Asuwain* (KOTA) which defended relations with royal traditions with several kings, and *Trabalhista*

wanted a transitional federation with Portugal to prepare Timor-Leste before it came to independence.

There was a party called the Democratic Association for Timor-Leste's Integration with Australia (ADITYA) that wanted to integrate Timor-Leste into Australia, but because it did not get support, it disappeared by itself in the process of independence. There is a group that wants Portugal to hand over its territory known as (Provincia Ultramarino) to Indonesia for economic reasons and admits the mistakes made by Portugal and the Netherlands in the past when it concerns Timor both parts (Timor-Leste-Portugal and East Timor-Indonesia) (CEPAD, 2010).

When become sovereign country, Timor-Leste immediately adopted a multiparty system in its Constitution (CRDTL) in article 7º (Universal Suffrage and Multiparty System), as we can see from the political parties in the constituent assembly in 2002: the Timorese Social Democratic Association (ASDT), the Free Timor-Leste Revolutionary Front (FRETILIN), *Klibur Oan Timor Asuwain* (KOTA), the Democratic Party (PD), the Christian Democratic Party (PDC), the Liberal Party (PL), the Timor Nationalist Party (PNT), the Timor People's Party (PPT), the Social Democratic Party (PSD), the Timor Socialist Party (PST), the Timorese Christian-Democratic Union (UDC/PDC), and the Timorese Democratic Union (UDT).

All these political parties were elected on August 30 2001 from a transitional government called the United Nations Transitory Administration in East Timor (UNTAET) through the United Nations Security Council mandate (CRDTL, 2002).

A new government of this tiny nation adopted multiparty system which have been well implemented in Timor-Leste under the principle of rule of law. As a result, the government creates Decree-Law N. 3/2004 about political parties to assure and guarantee the implementation multiparty system in Timor-Leste (Jornal da República, 2016). This Decree-law allows the Timorese people to establish political parties as long as in line with this law. No doubt that this law has given the chance and space to the formation of political parties in Timor-Leste.

According to the National Election Commission (CNE) of Timor-Leste has certified the following political parties that participated in parliamentary elections in 2017, here are the political parties that have passed the verification of the Timor-Leste National Election Commission (CNE):

Popular Unity Bloc (coalition) of Democratic Millennium Party (PMD)
Party to liberate the People of Aileba (PLPA)
Democratic Party of the Republic of Timor (PDRT)
Timorese Monarchy Popular Association Party (APMT)
Timorese National Unity Party (KHUNTO)
Party of Hope of the Fatherland (PEP)
Timor Socialist Party (PST)
Popular Development Party (PDP)
East Timor Reconstruction National Congress Party (CNRT)
Republican Party (PR)
Timor Democratic Unity Party (UDT)
Christian Democratic Party (PDC)
Maubere People's Liberation Movement Party (MLPM)
Popular Liberation Party (PLP)
Democratic Party (PD)
Timorese People's Resistance Democratic National Unity Party (UNDERTIM)
Democratic Development Unit Party (PUDD)
Democratic Timor Party (PTD)
Frenti-Mudansa (*Frenti-Change*) Party
Social Democratic Party (PSD)
East Timor Democratic Action Center Party (CASDT)
National Development Party (PDN)
Independent East Timor Revolutionary Front (FRETILIN)

(source: Lao Hamutuk, 2019).

In the same way, there are several new upcoming political party currently in the verification stage from the Ministry of Justice to become a new political party, as such: Os Verdes Party, Partido Timor Forte/The Strong Timor Party (PATIFOR), and so on. Thus, most of the formation of these political parties is interconnected with the martial and ritual arts group as they are considered one of the most socially prominent groups in Timor-Leste.

MARTIAL AND RITUAL ARTS GROUPS IN POLITICAL PARTIES OF TIMOR-LESTE

According Belun (2014), in Timor-Leste are an estimated 15-20 MAOs, each with long and complex histories, both pre-and post-Independence. While some are celebrated for their contribution to the resistance struggle, a number were introduced from Indonesia – such as Persaudaraan Setia Hati Terate (PSHT), Perisai Diri (PD), Serling Dewata, Padjajaran, and Ikatan Keluarga Silat Putera Timor-Leste (IKS-PTL) – further complicating members' political and personal affiliations (see Scambary, 2006; Myrntinen, 2010; Carapic & Jütersonke, 2012; Belun, 2014; Pawelz, 2015).

Some observers say these groups were introduced to complicate the social fabric, cause internal divisions and distract people from resistance politics. For example, Indonesia introduced PSHT and formed a clandestine network named Fuan Domin to support the self-determination process, as did Padjajaran (Kombat). Other organizations were founded within Timor-Leste, such as Kmanek Oan Rai Klaran (KORK), which was established in Ainaro. A number of MAOs were introduced from abroad, such as Korea (Taekwondo) Japan (Karate), and China (Kempo). Ritual Arts groups, such 77 and 5-5, also arose locally around the same time.

Timor-Leste is home to a huge array of social organizations, including martial arts groups. The common ground for martial arts groups is the practice of a particular form of sports, such as karate, pencak silat, judo, or taekwondo. They have complex

histories dating back to the Indonesian occupation, were partly involved in the liberation struggle, and are politically and personally affiliated, creating a complex, nationwide network of alliances. (Pawelz, 2015, p. 123).

In many countries, martial and ritual art are organizations that are for the purpose of sports, and very rarely link between martial and ritual arts groups plunge into politics until they establish a political party. Timor-Leste society is a fertile and interesting field for discussing the link between martial arts and ritual groups and the political elites.

[...] ritual and martial arts groups, mostly originating from the period under Indonesian occupation, play an important role in East Timorese society – most youths are part of one of these groups, and their leaders have links with (or indeed are part of) the political and economic elite. (Belun, 2014, p. 39).

It is no longer an open secret that there is a link between political interests and martial arts groups and rituals in Timor-Leste politics. According Myrntinen (2010, p. 18), MAO's were one of those “responsible for much of the violence in the aftermath of the outbreak of the 2006 political crisis in the country.” Belun's policy report stated that:

There groups are hierarchically organised in chapters of national martial arts clubs, they tend to be affiliated (formally and informally) with political parties, and have branches that go down to the community and even aldeia level. Their membership tends to be holistic, with individuals being of all ages, both genders, and coming from different socio-economic backgrounds (including academics and government ministers). (Belun, 2014, p. 40).

The relationship between political parties and groups of martial arts and rituals will look very real and clear in election times when every political party in Timor-Leste approaches martial arts groups and rituals and vice versa to use them as party masses or political mites. As a result, several martial arts groups and rituals established political parties using mass groups of martial arts and rituals.

KHUNTO POLITICAL PARTY WITH KORK MARTIAL ARTS GROUP

KHUNTO Political Party Ideology

Kmanek Haburas National Union of Timor Oan (KHUNTO) (Indonesia: Enrichment of the Unity of the Timorese Nation) is a political party in East Timor. KHUNTO was officially registered on June 22, 2011 (Shoemsmith, 2011) and has close ties to the KORK martial arts group. In the 2012 parliamentary elections, the Party won 2.97% of the vote, below the electoral eligibility requirement of 3% (James, 2017). However, in the 2017 parliamentary elections, the Party's vote increased to 6.43%, and it won (occupied) five seats in the National Parliament (Strating, 2018).

KHUNTO ideology has made eradicating corruption at the core of its program. The Party combines a democratic system with traditional Timorese beliefs as interpreted by ritual and martial arts groups in recent years. Although almost all East Timorese adhere to Catholicism, these ideas are widespread. Voters declared their loyalty to the Party with a "blood oath" (*juramento*). If not obeyed, according to the conviction, the offender of the oath threatens misfortune, illness, and death. Instead, politicians are obliged by the oath of their voters to help them overcome problems and not enrich themselves through political office.

Fewer details of the implementation of political objectives are relevant to voters than the trust placed in KHUNTO members. In the event of a government takeover, the Party aims to have state officials swear to be *juramentos* so that in the event of corruption, they must fear punishment from supernatural powers. KHUNTO supporters do not consider the vows already in the Bible so effective because, according to Christian belief, the punishment for wrongdoing only occurs after death in the afterlife.

On KHUNTO's relationship with martial arts groups Michael Leach in 2017 for ABC News stated that "the new party is very much based around some of those groups, in terms of its network and leadership" (James, 2017).

KHUNTO has sparked curiosity among Timor-Leste's political observers. While the rise of another new party, the Popular Liberation Party (PLP) led by former president Taur Matan Ruak, is widely predicted, KHUNTO is poorly understood.

Unlike other parties that won seats in parliament, KHUNTO is not associated with organizations that play a major role in the struggle for independence against Indonesian rule or are led by older generation leaders who are leading in that struggle.

Instead, KHUNTO has the support of members of several martial arts groups, especially the State Sage Children (KORK) – headed by the KHUNTO leader's husband – and from related family networks. The martial arts group is an important social institution among young people, especially youth, in Timor-Leste. They provide friendship, recreation, and a way out of masculine identity. In line with that, some observers talk of KHUNTO as the Party of disenfranchised young people – especially unemployed youth in Dili and other cities. (Aspinall & Scambary, 2017).

In fact, polls and polling results show that this story is only partially true: while it is true that KHUNTO is disproportionately supported by young voters, most of its votes come from rural areas.

Moreover, much of its appeal can be attributed to cultural practices borrowed directly from the quasi-mystical cultures of martial arts organizations, and the people of rural Timor: KHUNTO supporters take the *juramento* (blood oath) emphasizing their loyalty to the Party and inviting misfortune if they betray it.

This oath, from the point of view of the party leadership, is an attempt to lock their votes and prevent poaching by other parties. From a supporter's perspective, they signal that KHUNTO is more than just a political vehicle.

Instead, through this oath, KHUNTO supporters bind themselves as relatives, becoming like brothers and sisters who swear to help each other in times of financial or personal difficulties. So, from everything described above, it shows that the KHUNTO political party has a close relationship with KORK martial arts. (Aspinall & Scambary, 2017).

PUDD POLITICAL PARTY WITH MARTIAL ARTS GROUP IKS PTL KERA SAKTI TIMOR-LESTE

In addition to KHUNTO political party, there is also a PUDD political party. Where there has been no research on the bonding of political parties with martial and ritual arts with the PUDD party but based on observations and discussions conducted, it is confirmed that there is a connection between the PUDD political Party and the IKS PTL KERA SAKTI TIMOR-LESTE martial arts group.

Indications that show a relationship between the PUDD political Party and IKS PTL KERA SAKTI TIMOR-LESTE martial arts group can be seen from the leadership and party members. The most accurate and clear fact is that the leader (president) of the IKS PTL KERA SAKTI TIMOR-LESTE martial arts group is also the Head interim (president) from the PUDD political party, namely Silvester X. Sufa Efi. Also, during campaigns often party militants often use the attributes of the IKS PTL KERA SAKTI TIMOR-LESTE martial arts group.

OS VERDES POLITICAL PARTY WITH RITUAL ARTS GROUP 77

The last is a new political party candidate who is in the registration stage to become a political party, is the Green Political Party or *Os Verdes*. Where, many issues exist that the Green political party has ties to the ritual art group 77. Where the time of this political party comes from the ritual art group 77.

However, no research has confirmed the attachment between the Green political party and the 77 ritual art group. But the fact found that from 77 ritual art group leaders and many members of the ritual art group 77 became members and militants of the Os Verdes party.

Current Developments

The recent presidential election in 2021, this situation shows a reality that the involvement of martial and ritual arts groups in the presidential election through supporting presidential candidates, namely: Ritual Art group 77 declared supported presidential candidate José Ramos Horta from the CNRT party (Cardoso, 2022), the KORK martial arts group supported presidential candidate Armanda Berta from the KHUNTO party (Antil Tatoli, 2022), then the presidential candidate who supports from FRETILIN party Francisco Guterres “Lu Olo” allegedly supported by the PSHT martial arts group where the Secretary General of PSHT became a member of the campaign team of presidential candidates Lu Olo (Klibur-Post, 2022).

Moreover, martial arts group IKS PTL KERA SAKTI TIMOR-LESTE, which supports presidential candidate former priest Dr. Martinho Gusmão, who was founded by the PUDD party (GMNTV, 2022), where we know that the PUDD party has been linked with the IKS PTL KERA SAKTI TIMOR-LESTE martial arts group.

Furthermore, the resolution issued by the government by reactivating martial arts groups and rituals that were closed or deactivated by the previous administration. Similarly, Prime Minister Tauk Matan-Ruak stated that the purpose of reactivating this martial and ritual group is to contribute to the country’s development and stability and sports activities (Fonseca, 2022). Recently, the government also allocated USD 2.6 million (Amado, 2022) for the construction of places or offices for them but on the other hand the government displaced youth groups *Arte Moris*.

The policy made by this government raises many discussions in the community there are sayings that martial and rituals groups are sports organizations that must be noticed by the government by providing headquarters for them. On the other hand, some people see this as the purpose and intention of the government to use or utilize martial and ritual arts groups in parliamentary elections, which is scheduled to take place in the first half of 2023.

CONCLUSION

Political parties can be said to be the pillars of democracy, both political parties will be good as well as democratic processes organized by a state, and vice versa if political parties are problematic then democracy will limp the political process. Because in this case, as a pillar of democracy, political parties play an important role as a liaison between the State government and its citizens, because in this case political parties are a means for citizens to participate in the process of managing the State.

Martial and ritual arts groups are basically sports organizations. However, they are now one of the most influential prominent social groups in Timor-Leste politics through their involvement in the formation of the Party in Timor-Leste.

Recently, the government of Timor-Leste has officialized its existence and soon will build its headquarter. Finally, we will see how they play their role in the upcoming Parliamentary Election in 2023.

Link between martial and ritual arts groups and politicians or political parties are often denied and remain fluid, informal, and tied to personal alliances. However, most relationships remain secret, some are open secrets.

The information obtained throughout this article shows that the relationship between political parties and martial and ritual arts groups aims at mutual support and gains. At times – due to the prominent position that some individuals play in both organizations – it becomes difficult to delimit where the interests and objectives of one begin and the interests of the other end. We will have one more opportunity to observe this relationship in the next parliamentary elections in 2023.

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