

***Problems of Democratisation in Indonesia: Elections, Institutions, and Society.* Edited by Edward Aspinall and Marcus Mietzner. Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2010. 359 pp.**

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Problems of Democratisation in Indonesia: Elections, Institutions, and Society, published in 2010 and edited by Edward Aspinall and Marcus Mietzner, convincingly introduces Indonesia's experience with democratization as both important and worthwhile to study. The essays chosen by the editors demonstrate, with Indonesia as the example, how complex the problems of democratization can be. Twelve of the fifteen pieces in the book are papers originally presented at the conference "Democracy in Practice," which was held at the Australian National University (ANU) in October 2009.

The book documents a host of problems that can arise in the conduct of elections, the development of institutions and governance policies, and the evolution of socio-political structures. The various chapters present the sorts of problems associated with how democratization emerged, manifested, and developed during the ten years after Indonesia's authoritarian regime was toppled, and the essays also discuss the implications for Indonesia's future.

Some studies have noted the failures of Indonesia's democratization process, while others have reported on the lessons learned from how Indonesia successfully confronted the challenges and complexities of democratization. However, most of the literature does not trace and portray the root problems of democratization in great detail and scope. Missing from other literature, too, are analyses of democratic processes at the local level. This book uses case studies to provide such analysis.

By focusing on Indonesia's unique political case, this book manages to avoid relying on the general theories of democratization so often featured in the introductions to other studies of Indonesian democratization. Instead, this book follows an interesting and unique path, with valid data, through narrowly focused, in-depth analyses in chapters written by non-native Indonesianists and expert Indonesians alike.

Problems of Democratisation is divided into three parts: "Managing Democracy," "Society and Democratic Contestation," and "Local Democracy." This volume does not direct readers into a single conclusion about whether Indonesia's democratization is a success or failure, making this book different from others on the same topic. Instead, the essays compiled here expose readers to broad descriptions of the problems associated with Indonesia's democratization, and readers may arrive at their own conclusions.

Rizal Sukma, in "Indonesia's 2009 Elections: Defective System, Resilient Democracy" (chapter three), argues that, in the decade after Indonesia's authoritarian regime collapsed, Indonesia displayed a considerable degree of what Sukma calls "democratic resilience."¹ This flexibility is indicated by Indonesia's capability in enforcing laws, delivering policies, and establishing democratic processes when

¹ Rizal Sukma, "Indonesia's 2009 Elections: Defective System, Resilient Democracy," p. 72.

confronting the problems and challenges of democratization. With a somewhat different point of view, Larry Diamond praised the success of Indonesia's democratization.² Even though Indonesia, as a participant in the "third wave" of global democratization, is a latecomer to democracy, Diamond suggests that Indonesia has, surprisingly, been more successful than other developed emerging market countries in creating its democratic institutions. Diamond argues that among East Asian countries, Indonesia's improvements in governance and socio-economic development are more recognized and appreciated by the citizens. However, Indonesia's democratization can be ruined, reversed, or diminished not because of the public's attitude toward democracy but because of the elite's lack of behavioral, attitudinal, and constitutional commitment to democracy.³

The section "Managing Democracy" explores the problems of the election system, voters, political parties, and parliament. Sukma's chapter indicates that Indonesia's elections in the last decade have been accomplished without any major violence because voters abide by the rules. Unfortunately, the election process itself suffers from technical and logistical problems, such as incorrectly printed ballots, too few ballots for the number of potential voters, and ballots that are distributed to the wrong districts.⁴ In a similar vein, Adam Schmidt agrees that Indonesia's overall progress in holding elections is laudable, but he suggests that, since only small changes have been made to Indonesia's electoral laws and administrative procedures to fix identifiable problems, Indonesia may not meet international election standards.⁵

Somewhat in contrast to Schmidt's view that Indonesian voters possess very little information on candidates, Saiful Mujani and R. William Liddle write that Indonesian voters are increasingly rational in the ways they approach elections. Mujani and Liddle argue that the voters shaped their individual choices in the 1999 and 2004 elections based on the candidates' leadership traits or self-identification with a political party.⁶ But, these authors note, political parties themselves are subject to party-system volatility, administrative incompetence, fragmentation, authoritarian domination or charismatic leadership, and too little responsiveness to the electorate.⁷ Accordingly, Dirk Tomsa discusses the fact that Indonesia has, paradoxically, staged successful elections over the last decade even as political parties have performed feebly. Some contributing factors to this condition are a lack of organizational coherence and programmatic distinctiveness among political parties, corruption and money politics, and the growing personalization of politics in Indonesia, all accompanied by the media's exaggeration of these problems.⁸

While political parties are less compelling than are individual candidates, the role of polling organizations and political consultants, according to Qodari, has had increasingly significant effects both on the parties and voters. The consultants are the

² Larry Diamond, "Indonesia's Place in Global Democracy," p. 46.

³ Ibid., p. 47.

⁴ Sukma, "Indonesia's 2009 Elections: Defective System, Resilient Democracy," pp. 55–56.

⁵ Adam Schmidt, "Indonesia's 2009 Elections: Performance Challenges and Negative Precedents," p. 109.

⁶ Saiful Mujani and R. William Liddle, "Voters and the New Indonesian Democracy," p. 75

⁷ Ibid., p. 97.

⁸ Dirk Tomsa, "The Indonesian Party System after the 2009 Elections: Towards Stability?" p. 146.

central locomotive of election campaigns because they are the ones who define and design candidates' campaign strategies.⁹ Some see this as evidence of the professionalization of politics, but, on the contrary, it can also be seen as depoliticization, since consultants prioritize candidates' personal images and personalities over their political ideologies. This condition discourages ordinary citizens from becoming involved in the political process, including running for office. Qodari, by contrast, argues that Indonesian polling organizations and consultants are actually responsive to the population's political preferences.¹⁰

Stephen Sherlock documents the positive influence that democratic elections and constitutional reform have had on the parliament. However, the power of the parliament is limited, since parliament shares a role with the executive in making new laws. Worse, the parliament is still dominated by a number of personal oligarchies, which are particularly evident in the committee structure, and the fact that parliament has not yet implemented open votes renders the institution more susceptible to the charge that it is merely a chamber of cronies.¹¹

In part two, "Society and Democratic Consolidation," Ariel Heryanto identifies the disempowerment of the masses during the election campaign period in the post-Suharto era.¹² Heryanto shows and discusses how political liberalization, or democratization, does not increase the power of the masses. The politics of entertainment, he claims, actually fragments of the masses. During the New Order regime, mass disempowerment was actually a goal of the Suharto regime, but it could never be achieved.¹³ Heryanto concludes that there is no direct causal relationship between the new electoral laws and the enthusiasm of anyone from the under classes to run for election.

Peaceful progress is highlighted by Ian Wilson, who claims that democratization in Indonesia in the post-Suharto period has been influenced and strengthened by a low level of violence and a significant decline in the level of intimidation and mass mobilization. During the New Order, violence and intimidation were the rough strategies preferred and frequently used by *preman* (thugs, petty gangsters) to get out the vote for their chosen candidates. Now, however, violence is down because some of the *preman* have joined or formed their own political parties.¹⁴ Wilson does not analyze whether this could create other problems for the mainstream political parties.

The book also notes the positive development of women's involvement in politics, particularly in the national parliament, as explained by Sharon Bessell and in local government as argued by Hana A. Satriyo. Bessell writes that the considerable effort to increase women's participation in politics, and the remarkable achievements stemming

⁹ Muhammad Qodari, "The Professionalisation of Politics: The Growing Role of Polling Organisations and Political Consultants," p. 123.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 138–39.

¹¹ Stephen Sherlock, "The Parliament in Indonesia's Decade of Democracy: People's Forum or Chamber of Cronies?," p. 177.

¹² Ariel Heryanto, "Entertainment, Domestication, and Dispersal: Street Politics as Popular Culture," p. 181.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 188.

¹⁴ Ian Wilson, "The Rise and Fall of Political Gangsters in Indonesian Democracy," p. 200.

from those efforts, do not necessarily generate gender equality.¹⁵ At the local level, using nine Indonesian women as examples, Satriyo explores how some women who shared similar resources were able to win local government elections between 2005 and 2008. The key to success for those women was, first, having the money to secure the nomination of a political party and, second, organizing an effective election campaign.¹⁶

Most of the authors in the third section, "Local Democracy," describe Janus-faced conclusions regarding the problems of democratization. Michael Buehler, for example, concludes that the ambitious decentralization program coupled with direct local elections in the post-Suharto period present a mixed picture.¹⁷ Despite institutional reforms that strengthen vertical accountability, and the real electoral competitions that are increasingly evident at the local level, Buehler argues that oligarchical elites remain dominant. Acknowledging the institutional and socio-economic factors—such as minimum level of education requirements and high financial costs to run for campaign and election—citizens are actually limited in their influence and ability to shape local politics.

Judged from another point of view, however, elections in Aceh, Papua, and Morotai North Maluku generated positive change despite numerous political restrictions. Blair Palmer, in his examination entitled "Services Rendered: Peace, Patronage, and Post-conflict Elections in Aceh," notes that holding elections has played an important role in the Acehnese peace process and in implementing the Helsinki Memorandum of Understanding (MOU), by which the former armed rebels of Gerakan Aceh Merdeka (GAM, Free Aceh Movement) were allowed to participate in elections and local government. Palmer observed that, when voting for national and provincial offices, voters tended to support those parties that contributed to Aceh's peace process or might best maintain peace in Aceh. By comparison, in district elections in rural areas, voters chose individuals based on the candidate's personal background rather than their political party's background. Richard Chauvel's "Electoral Politics and Democratic Freedoms in Papua" reports that electoral politics triggered political competitions, not only among Papuans but also between Papuans and Indonesian settlers. Electoral politics, in Chauvel's view, potentially distract Papuans by swinging them away from national issues in order to discuss issues of representation, the meaning of autonomy, and the control of local governments. Chauvel further highlights the ways in which a full discussion of issues related to Papuan nationalism and independence was stifled during the election. In her chapter, Sidney Jones reveals a local perspective on the 2009 presidential elections. In "The Normalisation of Local Politics? Watching the Presidential Elections in Morotai, North Maluku," Jones observes that there is no single driving force that motivates voters; rather, she says, voting behavior may be influenced by primordial affiliations, material or service-based compensation, and other rational considerations.

¹⁵ Sharon Bessell, "Increasing the Proportion of Women in the National Parliament: Opportunities, Barriers, and Challenges," p. 240.

¹⁶ Hana A. Satriyo, "Pushing the Boundaries: Women in Direct Local Elections and Local Government," p. 260.

¹⁷ Michael Buehler, "Decentralization and Local Democracy in Indonesia: The Marginalization of the Public Sphere," p. 282.

Unfortunately, this collection did not discuss the most frequently debated issue regarding the recent progress of democratization, which is: did corruption at the national and local levels affect the quality of governance and thereby change Indonesian society? Among the contributing authors, only Diamond, Heryanto, Tomsa, and Buehler, who contribute the most on this topic, address the manifestation of corruption and collusion. Diamond presents data on control of corruption in Indonesia and other emerging democracies in 1998 and 2008.¹⁸ Heryanto discusses electoral gangsterism,¹⁹ while Tomsa mentions inter-party competition as contributing to collusion.²⁰ Buehler posits that corruption in local elections was supported by weak legal and social sanctions of the corruptors.²¹ Also, Buehler highlights the widespread corruption and rent-seeking that are indicated by tax regimes, illegal fees, and other forms of bribes in local governance and public service.²²

The book might also have devoted some attention to how military-reform issues affect society at large, as the military has inherent influence in Indonesia's politics (given its dual function in the New Order regime). Sukma touches briefly on that topic by describing how the military committed to remain neutral both in electoral processes and in the politics of the post-Suharto period.²³ With the freedom of the press evident in the post-Suharto period, that subject deserves greater emphasis in this book, too.

Even though Indonesia's achievements in implementing democratic measures (especially relative to other countries) are impressive, as argued by Diamond, this book does not discuss Indonesia's democratization with respect to foreign policy. As foreign policy is interrelated with domestic politics, it is important to examine whether Indonesia's foreign policy and diplomacy meet particular challenges in a democratic post-Suharto era. For example, as a direct consequence, has democratization in domestic politics generated a more democratic Indonesian foreign policy? Have Indonesia's problems related to democratization significantly influenced Indonesia's standing on the international stage? Or has Indonesia's progress on democratization positively affected its political standing? One additional issue this book might have considered is how external actors influenced or supported Indonesia's democratization process.

Problems of Democratisation in Indonesia is an important reference for scholars of political science, students of Indonesia, and for people who are interested in understanding how the progress of democratization has generated both significant problems and heartening potential benefits for the nation over the last decade. The ongoing process of democratization is likely to remain complex and to generate mixed results—dilemmas and benefits. Given the complexities experienced during the last decade of Indonesia's democratization, readers cannot expect this book to offer hard and fast solutions regarding how best to create a democracy. Indeed, the comprehensive elaboration of Indonesia's problems with democratization offered by

¹⁸ Diamond, "Indonesia's Place in Global Democracy," p. 36.

¹⁹ Heryanto, "Entertainment, Domestication, and Dispersal," p. 216.

²⁰ Tomsa, "The Indonesian Party System after the 2009 Elections," p. 154.

²¹ Buehler, "Decentralization and Local Democracy in Indonesia," p. 277.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 282.

²³ Sukma, "Indonesia's 2009 Elections: Defective System, Resilient Democracy," p. 72.

this book suggests that it would be difficult to present any country as a perfect illustration of successful democratization. With that in mind, readers will nevertheless find that this volume is a valuable and significant tool for studying closely Indonesia's democratization from a variety of angles.