

Dewi Fortuna Anwar and Bridget Welsh, eds. *Democracy Take-Off: The B. J. Habibie Period*. Jakarta: Sinar Harapan, 2013. 594 pp.

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The fall of Suharto and the New Order regime led to a shift in Indonesia's socio-political and economic arrangements. The immediate years of transition were a critical and crucial period that shaped the future of Indonesian development under B. J. Habibie's presidency, which lasted for less than a year and a half (May 1998–October 1999). This book, which documents Habibie's presidency through a variety of experts' writings, is divided into three parts: the man himself, his domestic political achievements, and the world's perspective.

The first chapter provides an interesting analysis of Habibie's background and thinking. This essay argues that Indonesia was lucky to have Habibie—a trained engineer with scientific and managerial capacity—manage the country in transition because he lacked political ambition. Habibie helped Indonesia start the post-authoritarian period with an intellectual outlook that reengineered and reformed the country's politics and economy. The second chapter describes Habibie's leadership style: his relaxation process, approximation approach, and redundancy strategy. The paper highlights Habibie's personal and mutual-dependence relationship with the military, and his goals for Indonesia's democracy, such as introducing a free press, protecting human rights, and establishing an independent judiciary. In his chapter, Marcus Mietzner provides an interesting report about the political and economic underpinnings of regime change in Indonesia. The paper suggests that Habibie's weak legitimation was due to his involvement with the New Order regime (109). In particular, his reelection attempt failed due to a fund-raising scandal involving his aides. Yet he played a decisive role in forming Indonesia's post-authoritarian system. Overall, the book's first section argues that Habibie, a reformist, was good for Indonesia's new system. His focus was on an outward-looking policy that embraced freedom of speech and political and economic reforms.

The second part of the book provides a complete picture of Habibie's domestic policy and his approach to an unstable Indonesia. The first chapter examines the history of Indonesian politics and why that legacy was a burden during Habibie's presidency. The paper shows how serious the Habibie administration was to reform the country and describes the important decision to dissolve the body that managed the indoctrination program, Badan Pembinaan Pendidikan Pelaksanaan Pedoman Penghayatan dan Pengamalan Pancasila (BP7, Board for Developing Education and the Implementation of Guidelines for Instilling and Applying Pancasila) and strengthen the civil society as actors to balance and oppose the state. In addition, this chapter shows how Habibie could be mistaken for a follower of Hatta, as they both support civil society and a state that is close to the people. The author rejects that idea, however, as Habibie never read the first vice president's work. The next important issue was the struggle to promote press freedom. The minister of information, Yunus

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Yofiah, supported press freedom and proposed the press bill. He even allowed journalists to testify before the House of Representatives (Dewan Perwakilan Rakyat, DPR) to encourage passage of the bill. Overall, the paper argues that no president before or after Habibie did more to secure freedom of the press in Indonesia (218). Similarly, popular culture was also given new freedom of expression, as popular culture reflects the relative influence of political, economic, and social movements. In particular, live performances and television programs that continuously displayed the spirit of reform acted to desacralize the state and, to some extent, helped to balance the state–society relationship. The radical change in the media and politics through popular culture allows both religious and economic value of commodified goods that represent Islam (241).

About the sensitive issue of the labor movement, Timothy Ryan wrote two important arguments. First, Habibie's administration introduced three labor-related laws to shape the labor movement in Indonesia for the coming years (p. 265). Second, the international labor network learned the importance of being on the ground to change workers' circumstances, and shows how programs for upper-management levels are wasted. Resources should instead be aimed at the local level and also used to establish and operationalize legal aid, such as the Indonesian Legal Aid Institute (Lembaga Bantuan Hukum, LBH). The following chapter examines the history of the Indonesian Association of Muslim Intellectuals (Ikatan Cendekiawan Muslim Indonesia, ICMI) during the Suharto era, and its struggle between the New Order and Habibie periods. The ICMI, despite being supported by Suharto, did not use its political power until the last term of Suharto's administration. As ICMI found opportunities for influence under Habibie, it also faced the emerging arena of non-identity politics that characterized the reformation era. The era witnessed a general step toward democratic politics that dampened ICMI's potential power, yet Muslim intellectuals nevertheless played an important role in national politics (310).

Another important legacy of Habibie's is the decentralization of regional development. The next paper, from R. Siti Zuhro, explores the background and political dynamics of creating the decentralization law. The paper highlights several implications of the law, including the decreasing central power over local development plans and direct election of local leaders, which leads to an increasing number of local leaders who gain experience in dealing with the government and its bureaucracies (321). The last chapter in this section examines Habibie's in-depth and detail-oriented involvement in economic policies, despite the full trust he gave to his economic ministers (341). The chapter highlights that his focus on economic growth was to ensure the independence of the central bank, Bank Indonesia (BI), and describes how he curtailed his interest in industry and technology policies.

After examining the person and his domestic achievements, in part three the book goes on to analyze Habibie's administration from an international perspective. The first chapter emphasizes how Habibie's administration managed Indonesia's reputation after losing its role as the *de facto* leader of ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asian Nations) following the fall of the New Order regime. The paper also suggests that Habibie remained firm with Indonesia's neighbors in certain sensitive cases, such as the imprisonment of Anwar Ibrahim in Malaysia. Thus, Indonesia's international posture was to move from a noninterference policy to being a proponent

of greater openness, democratic principles, and human-rights protections in the region (392–93). A crucial issue during Habibie administration was his handling of East Timor, which he treated with two options: special autonomy and independence. This chapter argues that Indonesia's political configuration at the time and Habibie's personal background allowed the idea of East Timor's independence to become the government's preferred policy. In addition, the essay highlights how Habibie and especially ICMI were reluctant to subsidize East Timor further due to the financial crisis, and they sharply suggested the idea that Indonesia could no longer develop the region as a charity (411).

The next chapter is a German-centric paper written as a reflection of the German mission leader who facilitated and supported Habibie's administration. The paper argues that Habibie's experience in studying and living in Germany played a crucial role in shaping his value system and thinking, and which therefore influenced his desire to introduce democratic structures in Indonesia (458). The last chapter examines the US-Indonesia relationship that shows how Habibie's presidency was a highpoint of cooperation between the countries. In particular, Ann Marie Murphy suggests that it is hard to imagine how another political figure could have enacted such dramatic political reforms and hold a fair and free election within a year of the post-Suharto era (493). The paper further argues that the period was a critical juncture in US-Indonesia relations and that it shaped the current close ties between Jakarta and Washington.

The book achieves its aim to show that Habibie is largely responsible for democratic reforms inherited from the period. In particular, the book provides insights of Habibie's achievement in both domestic and international politics. Furthermore, a collection of Habibie's writings helps readers to understand aspects of his background and personality that shaped his thinking and thus the policies that redefined the world's view of Indonesia. For instance, Heinrich Seemann suggests that German culture influenced Habibie's personality, thinking, and policies during his presidency (458).

Despite the high quality and diverse collection of views presented in this volume, I found two issues in particular missing from the book. First, the book neglects the technology industry that once was Habibie's brainchild and the engineers who supported him. Initially, Habibie returned to Indonesia to address the enhancement of Indonesia's technology capacity. He envisioned that support could be provided by the New Order political economy to form a technological state through mobilization of state resources (political, financial, intellectual, and institutional). From that would flow specific agencies and projects designed to enhance basic scientific research and technological innovation and to transform research outputs into industrialized high-tech products.¹

Habibie envisioned Indonesia achieving its development goals through high-technology capacity. This is an important topic, as it is a critical aspect of any analysis about how politics and the economic crisis forced President Habibie to neglect his passion and dream. Second, the repetitiousness among chapters potentially reduces the

¹ Sulfikar Amir, *The Technological State in Indonesia: The Co-constitution of High Technology and Authoritarian Politics* (London: Routledge, 2013), 15.

reader's enthusiasm for the book. For example, a few chapters discuss political dynamics and decentralization policies (especially chapters 3, 4, and 5).

These minor issues notwithstanding, this book makes a great contribution to our understanding of Habibie's leadership and presidency during the transition period. The book invites readers to understand Habibie's policies and decisions during critical moments by linking those with his personal, educational, and intellectual background. In particular, the book succeeds in bridging the gap between Habibie's as a president and as an engineer, the profession for which he was best known and will be most remembered.