

DEMOCRACY IN INDONESIA: FROM STAGNATION TO REGRESSION? EDITED BY THOMAS POWER AND EVE WARBURTON. SINGAPORE: ISEAS YUSOF ISHAK INSTITUTE, 2020. SOFTCOVER: 371pp.

Democracy in Indonesia: From Stagnation to Regression? raises questions on the meanings and consequences of the decline of democratic institutions in Indonesia. The book provides a range of cases and analyses that build well-sounded arguments at the macro, meso, and micro levels. With its focus on Indonesia, this book contributes to the debates around a global trend of democratic decline and populist approaches to governmentality.

This book is divided into five chapters based on its umbrella topics, including, first, historical and comparative perspectives that highlight the democratic status (i.e. through the liberal democracy index) of Indonesia amongst Southeast Asian countries and globally (Allen Hicken), as well as temporal comparative study in explaining the relative success of Indonesia's democratic transition in 1998 (Dan Slater). The second chapter discusses polarization and populism. Eve Warburton argues that the rise of populism in Indonesia indicates latent ideological divisions that have turned into political conflicts, followed by Nava Nuraniyah highlighting the roles of Indonesian Islamist and pluralist fractions in contributing to a downwards-spiralling to authoritarian pluralism. Liam Gammon adds the element of electoral rules and institutional frameworks' roles in reducing the force of populism in Indonesia, which he also argues might be weakening Indonesian democracy from the grassroots upwards (i.e. the emergence of populist grassroots movements). Lastly, rather different from other authors who emphasize identities and ideological differences, Abdil Mughis Mudhoffir argues that the rise of populism is a symptom of undemocratic institutions in redistributing resources. Mudhoffir views that widening socioeconomic inequality has contributed to the more polarized society in Indonesia.

The third chapter discusses societal-level popular support for democracy, which highlights acceptance of election results by electoral losers as an indicator of democratic deconsolidation (Burhanuddin Muhtadi), and people's conception of multidimensional democracy in the Indonesian context (Diego Fosatti and Ferran Martinez i Coma). The fourth chapter discusses Indonesia's democratic institutions by examining the roles of political parties as vehicles of the peoples' aspirations, the mass media, redistribution policies among regions, as well as state surveillance regulation and practices. Marcus Mietzner observes the rise of electoral personalization, or the reliance on personal charisma, networks, financial resources, and capabilities, to mobilize voters has weakened political parties' roles in a

democratic setting. Ross Tapsell highlights the concentration of power, which relates to the political economy of media ownership, and how partisanship of the media has weakened the media's ability to provide checks and balances in a tripartite democratic system. A study by Puspa Delima Amri and Mochamad Pasha shows that there is no definitive relationship between the level of the democracy index and income inequality within and across the regions. Ken M.P. Setiawan highlights the trend of increasing state surveillance on citizens and civil society through the enactment of the Information and Electronic Transaction Law.

The last chapter emphasizes the phenomenon of how policing of law enforcement, policing of religious offences, identity and electoral violence have been observed in the Indonesian political landscape. Thomas P. Power argues that power highly concentrated in the executive branch of tripartite democracy, 'the executive aggrandizement', has been observed and has enabled politicization of law enforcement. Sana Jaffrey proposes three stages of vigilantism against religious offences as part of broader suppression of civil society dissent and opposition. Irsyad Rafsadie, Dyah Ayu Kartika, and Siswo Mulyartono provide a case in point on how identity politics, based on ethnicity and local-migrant status, and misinformation resulted in horizontal conflicts and co-optation in exerting control over election outcomes in West Kalimantan. Risa J. Toha and S.P. Harish close the book by reflecting on the dynamics and forms of violence incidents associated with direct elections since the country's *Reformasi* in 1998/9.

Democracy as a means or ends?

This book feeds into the policy debates around democracy's positionality for human welfare. There has been an ongoing debate on the role of 'basic structures', borrowing Rawls term (1971), or as Sen addressed it, 'democratic institutions' (2009), in delivering good outcomes for society. Fraser (2008) stressed that meta-political representation justice is critical to enable a democratic process in defining and realizing or, in other words, contesting, justice and its meanings. As Stiglitz put it 'good politics brings good policy'. This conversation raises the question of whether democracy should be treated *eo ipso* or as a means to increase human welfare (Rawls 1971; Sen 2009; Stiglitz 2012).

Following recent developments in Indonesia, the overall argument of the book can help to make sense of the slow response of the government that has dragged out the pandemic and caused loss of life and economic stagnation. Executive aggrandizement and the lack of effective checks and balances on power from the legislature and the media seem to hinder pressure to deal with the pandemic. Despite several critical media and civil society movements to urge the government to focus

on people before the economy in dealing with Covid-19, the responses are rather slow and remain ineffective. In many places, prerequisite conditions have hampered individuals, households, and communities in dealing with the pandemic without adequate government support. For instance, there remain hundreds of thousands of households without access to clean water, especially in Eastern and remote areas in Indonesia. The informality of work has put workers in a more vulnerable situation, facing termination without adequate compensation. This is when social protection becomes vital to provide essentials, such as food and cash, to enable households and communities to float amidst the pandemic. Finally, borrowing Pippa Norris' (2011) question, and refocussing the debate about democracy and democratic institutions as processes to enable democratic decision-making: to what extent, without the presence of liberal democracy, will the people be suffering?

References

Fraser, Nancy. 2008. *The Scales of Justice: Reimagining Political Space in a Globalizing World*. UK and USA: Polity Press.

Norris, Pippa. 2011. *Democratic Deficit*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Rawls, John 1971. *The Theory of Justice*. Massachusetts: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press.

Sen, Amartya. 2010. *The Idea of Justice*. UK: Allen Lane.

Stiglitz, Joseph. 2012. *The Price of Inequality: Today's Divided Society Endangered Our Future*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company.

Naimah Talib is a Ph.D. Candidate at School of Geography, Earth, and Atmospheric Science, Faculty of Science, the University of Melbourne, Australia. Naimah is also a Research Fellow in the Research Centre for Society and Culture at the National Research and Innovation Agency of Indonesia (BRIN).