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Aspinall, Edward and Marcus Mietzner (eds.) (2010), *Problems of Democratisation in Indonesia: Elections, Institutions and Society*, Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies

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The scholarly debates on how to characterise the Indonesian polity after the breakdown of the authoritarian Suharto regime in 1998 are as complex and diverse as the country itself. Their least common denominator is that – despite concerns of Indonesia breaking apart – the country has somehow managed to stay unified and today constitutes a more open and free regime than ever before. Beyond that there is very little common ground.

Recognising this diversity of opinion, Aspinall and Mietzner broadly identify three schools of thought in contemporary political science studies on Indonesia: The first one deems democratic change to be “superficial, with core structures of power remaining unchanged” (p.1). In this view, mainly the old New Order elite have managed to adapt themselves to the new system and safeguard their privileges connected to public office. The second school of thought originates from a comparative perspective and results in a rather positive assessment of the Indonesian democratisation process. It postulates that “Indonesia has done exceptionally well in consolidating its democracy” (p.2). Third, Aspinall and Mietzner identify a medium position, whose advocates believe that “while Indonesia has made democratic progress, it remains crippled by severe structural problems, most notably corruption and weak law enforcement” (p.2).

The editors refrain from explicitly positioning themselves in any of these schools of thought; they also do not aim to promote one or the other with this volume. On the contrary, Aspinall and Mietzner do not strive to place Indonesia on any scale of democratic transition or to apply one predefined framework to its interpretation. Their objective, rather, is to mirror the multitude of opinions that exist on the topic and to leave it to each of the various contributors to develop his or her own approach to his or her respective chapter. Despite this open concept, the edition aims to provide detailed micro-analyses of the inner workings of Indonesia’s democratic system. Particularly fine examples of this approach are Muhammad Qodari’s article on changing power structures in election-campaign management and Stephen Sherlock’s contribution on the functioning of the national parliament, although most other chapters meet the edition’s goal as well. Another way in which this edition distinguishes itself with the depth of its micro-analyses is by including many chapters written not by scholars but rather by people who have extensive backgrounds as consultants and/or professionals in non-governmental and international organisations. Their knowledge and

experience helps the reader significantly in gaining insight into everyday challenges beyond the usual academic perspectives.

In their introductory chapter, Mietzner and Aspinall provide a valuable review of the current academic discussion and the most recent literature focusing on the overarching topics of the various parts of the edition: Indonesia's democracy in comparative perspective; the state of national and local elections; parties and parliaments; (un-)civil society and gender issues; and local democracy. Consequently, in Chapter 2, Larry Diamond places Indonesia in the context of the global development of democracy by thoroughly analysing an elaborate range of quantitative data.

These two overviews are followed by a section on democracy management with an article by Rizal Sukma on the 2009 presidential and parliamentary elections and their wider implications; an article by Saiful Mujani and William R. Liddle on developments in Indonesian voter behaviour; a chapter by the Indonesia Country Director of the International Foundation for Electoral Systems, Adam Schmidt, which focuses particularly on the quality of administrative electoral management in 2009; and a detailed insight into the inner workings of election-campaign management steered by rising polling organisations and political consultants, written by the campaign consultant Muhammad Qodari. Chapters on the Indonesian party system by Dirk Tomsa and the national parliament by Stephen Sherlock complement this section.

The next part of the edition deals with various aspects of civil society influencing or being influenced by electoral politics: Ariel Heryanto assesses the interplay of the "subversive power of the masses" (p.196) and the media in election campaigns in light of the ongoing consolidation of democracy. Ian Wilson writes about an aspect of Indonesian politics usually less attention is paid to – how political gangsters (*preman*) adapt to the changing political environment and find a way to position themselves within it. In their respective chapters, Sharon Bessell and Hana A. Satriyo pay attention to the role women play and the obstacles they face as candidates and office holders in the Indonesian national parliament and as local executive heads.

The final section of the book is dedicated to local democracy development. Here, Michael Buehler leads with a reassessment of the Indonesian decentralisation process. This is followed by three case studies: First, Blair Palmer describes how the former Aceh rebel movement, the Free Aceh Movement (*Gerakan Aceh Merdeka*, GAM), adjusted to its new role as legitimate political actor in the 2009 local parliamentary elections in Aceh. Second, Richard Chauvel illustrates the severe lack of democratic freedoms in Papuan politics, keeping Papua an exception by Indonesian democratic standards. A final study by Sidney Jones on the perception of the 2009

presidential elections and voters' choices on the remote island of Morotai in North Maluku concludes the volume by showing that the "normalisation of politics" (p.348) has finally arrived in most of Indonesia, but democratic processes and patterns remain complex, often "defying theoretical models developed by comparative political scientists" (p.347).

As shown above, most of the chapters focus on aspects of electoral politics in one way or another, thus leaving a wide range of elements of democratic consolidation out of the discussion. Being aware that there are always limits to the scope of any volume, this alone would not provide justification for criticism. However, apart from their subtitle – "Elections, Institutions and Society" – Mietzner and Aspinall do not suggest that the book was designed to focus on electoral aspects of democratisation to the extent that it does. Thus, readers who expect a broader discussion along the lines of conventional criteria of democratic quality – such as the rule of law, checks and balances, or civil society development *apart* from electoral issues – might be disappointed. In this regard, a summarising chapter placing the individual findings into a wider perspective within the current democratisation discourse on Indonesia would have been useful.

Nevertheless, all authors provide high-quality research in their respective fields. Taking relevant developments over a longer period of time into account, each article focuses on the most recent developments in the immediate lead up to, or the immediate aftermath of, the 2009 elections in Indonesia. For that reason, this anthology offers a remarkably up-to-date collection of analyses that is rather unusual for edited volumes. A minor point of criticism remains: Few articles cite more than half a page of references. This might in part be due the originality of thought and the currentness of the issues discussed; however, more elaborate bibliographies would have been valuable, particularly for those new to the topic. Certainly, this by no means diminishes the overall quality of the book and the fact that it should be essential reading for anyone interested in the Indonesian democratisation process in general and its electoral politics in particular.

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