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Horowitz, Donald L. (2013), *Constitutional Change and Democracy in Indonesia*

Cambridge: Cambridge University Press (= Series: Problems of International Politics, 4), ISBN: 9781107641150, 342 pages

Fifteen years after the fall of Suharto, Indonesia is widely regarded as a success story of democratisation. Despite seemingly unfavourable odds at the time of the regime change in 1998, the country averted disintegration and authoritarian regression and has instead reformed its polity from a military-backed dictatorship into a reasonably well-functioning electoral democracy. Over the last few years, scholars have analysed many individual aspects of this multifaceted reform process, but, with a very few exceptions, there have been no chronologically systematic overviews of the political developments in Indonesia since 1998. In attempting to provide such an account, Donald L. Horowitz's *Constitutional Change and Democracy in Indonesia* now delivers an incredibly detailed and often fascinating narrative which, in the words of one of the cited reviewers, "engages the reader at every step of the story."

The book traces Indonesia's democratisation process from its beginnings in 1998 to the most recent institutional changes in 2012. Highlighting the unusually gradualist and largely insider-driven character of the transition process, Horowitz argues that Indonesia's path to democracy was successful precisely because it defied much of the conventional wisdom on democratisation. By holding elections before initiating constitutional changes and by entrusting the then elected legislators (rather than a specially assembled commission with drafting and passing the constitutional amendments), Indonesia chose a very distinctive path that bore many risks, but ultimately produced a relatively stable new democracy. Key to completing this process without major disruptions was the successful translation of Indonesia's multiple overlapping social cleavages into a system of multipolar fluidity, which has helped to minimise polarisation and mitigate potential conflict between large social groups. The most important elements that support this system are "the joint result of list-PR for legislative elections and the plurality and majority requirements, reinforced by stringent nominating requirements, for executive elections" (p. 274). The resulting multipolar fluidity is reflected in, amongst other things, low levels of party allegiance amongst both voters and politicians as well as a fragmented party system which Horowitz, in contrast to many other scholars, regards as an institutional asset that helps to preserve democracy in Indonesia.

All in all, the argument is sound and coherent, although some readers may find the overall thrust of the narrative perhaps a bit too optimistic. In particular, the tone of the discussion of some of the problems that have arisen during the democratisation process (religious intolerance, corruption,

weaknesses in the rule of law) raises questions. Though always carefully articulated, Horowitz's depiction of these problems as largely temporary phenomena that will disappear over time seems to imply that the consequences of corruption and poor law enforcement (such as, for example, impunity for corruptors and vigilantes) are little more than necessary evils that, for the time being, need to be endured for the sake of stability in broader inter-group relations. Arguably, such a depiction plays down the actual extent of some of the current problems in Indonesia and tacitly condones what often amounts to outright criminal behaviour amongst Jakarta's and regional elites.

The book has its strongest passages where it chronicles the lengthy deliberations in the House of Representatives (*Dewan Perwakilan Rakyat* (DPR)), which between 1999 and 2002 resulted in no less than four rounds of constitutional amendments. Here, Horowitz uses a wealth of information gathered from extensive field notes and relevant background literature to produce a vivid account of the political dynamics in Jakarta's corridors of power. The reader is provided with valuable insights into the positions of key players during these deliberations and learns how some of these players changed their positions over time. Horowitz also masterfully links the narrative to broader political developments that affected the negotiations in parliament, thereby creating a powerful argument about the importance of historical and socio-political context for the choices of key political actors. Thus, the book superbly elucidates not only how Jakarta's elites struggled over several years to craft a new political system, but also why they ultimately created a system that looked very different from the one envisaged at the outset.

The transformation of the Indonesian political system, however, extends far beyond Jakarta. Horowitz acknowledges this and dedicates significant attention to the process of decentralisation and devolution. But on balance, his discussion on local politics lacks a bit of the rigour that characterises the rest of the book. First, one may take issue with the description of Indonesia's decentralisation process as an "area in which, over time, the creators of the new Indonesian constitution did not succeed in ironing out anomalies" (p. 141). The problematic word here is "anomalies", which gives the impression that Indonesia's decentralisation process has deviated from some kind of generally accepted norm. What this kind of norm should be, however, remains unclear. Instead, Horowitz merely provides a list of well-known shortcomings and problems inherent in the decentralisation process, including corruption, communal violence, discriminatory local regulations and the troublesome special autonomy for Papua. By focusing exclusively on these problems without balancing this depiction with accounts of local success stories, he effectively backs similarly one-sided assessments by Ha-

diz and others who, ironically, have described these aforementioned problems not as deviations but as the de facto norm in local politics. In other words, if Horowitz believes that decentralisation has brought nothing but problems, it then seems inappropriate to describe these as anomalies. If, on the other hand, he feels that these problems really are anomalies, then the discussion would have benefitted from a more differentiated evaluation of the decentralisation process – one that takes into account both achievements and failures and offers suggestions for ironing out the so-called anomalies now that they are so very obvious.

A second and more specific criticism pertains to the nature and the extent of party fragmentation at the local level, which is insufficiently recognised in the book. As mentioned above, Horowitz generally argues that fragmentation is actually not a bad thing as it solidifies multipolar fluidity and thus helps minimise polarisation and conflict. However, his rather succinct statement that “the party fragmentation prevailing at the national level is often replicated, but in varying configurations, at the regional level” (p. 135) does not at all capture the reality of many local parliaments in Indonesia, which often feature much higher numbers of parties (both absolute and effective) than the national parliament in Jakarta. Especially in eastern Indonesia, fragmentation is often so extreme that parties merely represent individuals or family clans rather than broader communities. In this context, fragmentation contributes fairly little, if anything at all, to conflict management between social groups. Instead, it simply renders parliamentary processes meaningless and paralyses regional development. The most recent changes to the election laws, which will lead to the elimination of most small parties from local parliaments, should therefore not simply be seen as a threat to multi-polarity and regional autonomy, but as a necessary adjustment to a flawed electoral rule.

These minor issues aside, the book is a great contribution to the literature on contemporary Indonesian politics. Coherently structured, convincingly argued and unmatched in its comprehensiveness, it will appeal to a broad range of readers. Students of Southeast Asian and Indonesian politics in particular will find this an invaluable source as they get a well-rounded account of all the important political developments in Indonesia since 1998. For long-time observers of Indonesian politics much of the contents will be familiar, but they will still find immense value in Horowitz’s assessment of the overall democratisation process. Finally, comparativists and scholars of institutional engineering may at times be puzzled by the amount of detail in the early sections, but the book will still be of interest to these communities because it places Indonesia in a consistently applied comparative framework

and concludes with important suggestions about the broader applicability of the Indonesian model to other divided societies.

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