

(for delayed anthology on civil society and social capital, forthcoming. Routledge, ed Per Selle; nb that the date should now be updated based on the 2nd national survey)

Civic Action and Deficit Democracy

Olle Törnquist

Introduction

Modern projects of collective action have mostly been based on the actual and expected class relations, the logics of the market or the reasons of rational politics. The problems have been abundant. While the post-modern thesis (that nobody can understand reality in the first place) has not solved any of them, the most exciting alternative proposal seems to be the argument that 'good' joint work comes instead from the independently communicating, associating and self-managing citizens in 'civil society'. In civil society, we are told, people would not have to be brought together by the more or less devastating interests of enlightened leaders, markets, institutions, organisations or states. In the process of associating in civil society, people themselves would rather develop sufficient inter-personal trust or 'social capital'. Thereby they would solve the game theory of the 'prisoners' dilemma',¹ work together on a reasonably equal basis and thus improve on almost everything from economic development to peace and democracy.² Is this a viable proposition?

Dissidents usually draw on three basic arguments. The first is that the explanatory power of inter-personal trust is rarely compared to the standard analyses of collective action based on class, markets or rational politics. In polemic terms, the social capital paradigm rarely bothers with the huge reserves of knowledge on conflict and power, but simply suggests the alternative grand thesis that inter-personal trust through associational activity of various kinds, from cooperatives to bird watching, is the ultimate key to fruitful collective action and the best possible form of development.

The second type of critique is that that the proponents of the social capital thesis neglect different ways of explaining the rise of various forms of associational life, as well as whether all forms of associations generate inter-personal trust and 'good' development. For instance, it is common to point to the general lack of intermediary variables such as politics and ideology that exist between people getting to know each other and then acting collectively. In fact, some critics even argue that politics and institutions are the independent rather than the dependent variables. Hence, while trust may be important, its roots would be political rather than spontaneously-social. Others add

that even though different kinds of social capital like bonding, bridging and linking capital have been defined, we still do not know what fosters ‘good’ associations and ‘good’ trust.³

The third critique is against the tendency to equate civil associations with the people. To begin with this means ignoring the issue of power, including the difference between rights-bearing citizens (such as NGO activists) and the majority of the ‘populations’⁴ that lack sufficient capacity to promote and use their rights. In the worst case, moreover, the problem of political representation is also avoided, as NGOs and ‘people’s organisations’ who attempt ‘participatory direct democracy’ are often assumed to be undistorted offsprings of the people.⁵

In short, the dissidents argue that more civil society and social capital may not at all generate more democracy. Rather, civic associations may be fragmented, isolated from the people at large, and avoid or at worst oppose vital aspects of democratic politics.

Who is right and who is wrong? Much of the debate has either been on the level of theory or based on empirical indications from in-depth case studies.⁶ Wider systematic case studies and survey data remain rare. With regard to the post-colonial world, one attempt in this direction is the cross-national research study “Rights, Representation and the Poor: Comparing Large Developing Country Democracies – Brazil, India and Mexico”, directed by John Harris.⁷ Another is the national expert survey with about 330 questions answered by some 800 informants around Indonesia on the problems and options of democracy, directed by Asmara Nababan and this author.⁸ This paper will be limited to a discussion of the democratic potential of civil society and social capital – from here on ‘the civic thesis’ – in view of the results from the latter and other Indonesian studies.

Indonesia is a good case in point. First, there is nothing exceptional about the country. It harbours all the common economic and social problems associated with a ‘typical’ post-colonial developing country. It is true that Indonesia has the world’s largest Muslim population, but Islam has never been state based (with the partial exception of Aceh); and except from rather few extreme groups it remains comparatively plural. It is also true that Indonesia has suffered from massacres and authoritarian rule for more than three decades, from the early sixties till the late nineties. In a longer historical perspective, however, this is ‘only’ an important yet exceptional interlude. The independence movement fought European racism as well as Japanese fascism and was the main introducer of human rights and democracy. After independence moreover,

democracy was alive and kicking for almost a decade, supported, among others, by the rapidly expanding communist party; which thus became the world's third largest before being eliminated. And since 1998, elitist forms of democracy and popular efforts to organise have returned to the fore.

Second, Indonesia matters. It is now the world's third largest (albeit fledgling) democracy next to India and the United States. Should it stabilise, develop and enable more human and sustainable development, it would be of immense importance in the area at large. If not, there may be a severe backlash.

Third, Indonesia is a critical case. It is true that after more than thirty years of repressive depoliticisation, it is not (at least not yet) the best testing ground for strong alternatives to the civic thesis. But as for the civic thesis itself, international and domestic actors of various inclinations have for decades deemed Indonesia to be fertile ground and tried their best to promote it as a basic step to democracy. So if their theses do not hold true in Indonesia, there must be something wrong with the general paradigm.

The contextual thesis and its critics

In Indonesia the civic thesis relates to three historical phases. The first is of the fifties and early sixties, before the massacres and Suharto's full scale authoritarian rule. The second relates to the struggle against this regime. The third covers the attempts since 1998 to foster democratic development. In this section of the paper we shall present and evaluate the civic thesis with regard to each of the periods by drawing on case studies of social and political movements. In the final section we shall make a special in-depth assessment of the civic thesis about the post-Suharto period by drawing on a national survey of the current problems and options of democracy.

The various data will be presented as we go along, but four introductory points are necessary about the character of the arguments to be discussed. First, there are of course huge differences between various civil society and community oriented arguments – conservative, liberal as well as radical. In this case, however, it is 'only' the basic trust of all these arguments in the presumed pro-democratic dynamics from within civil society itself that matters.

Second, we shall only discuss the finest versions of this general argument, best represented by scholars such as Dr. Edward Aspinall.⁹ These fine versions avoid the normative problems in the mainstream literature. To begin with the improved versions discuss civil society in terms of civil rights based associational life between the state and the individual and/or family, irrespective of whether these associations are ‘good or bad’. In addition they also try to avoid ‘liberal-pluralist’ notions of writers such as Larry Diamond (1994), which assume that citizens in civil society find the existing political, social and economic order acceptable and legitimate – wherein they may try to improve the system and ask for favours, but do not try to promote radical change, seize power or overthrow the system.

Third, the critics of the civic thesis’ way of reading the development of democracy draws attention, instead, to more conflictual theories of civil society as a contested arena or public space. Prime focus is on the role of social and popular movements, the importance of social and economic conflicts as well as people’s own capacity and ability to stage efficient politics of democratisation.¹⁰

Finally, the empirical evidence come from my own comparative analyses, some forty case studies on and with the democracy movement in Indonesia itself, and, as already indicated, a national survey (once again in cooperation with the democracy movement) of the more general problems and options of democracy.¹¹ We shall return to the details as we go along.

(1) Class or cold war against civil society?

According to the scholars and activists who subscribe to the civic thesis, civil society was strong during the late fifties and early sixties. Yet it did not promote democracy since it was polarised by conflicts among the citizens in terms of class and *aliran* (‘traditional’ ideologies) and thus organised political parties. These parties attempted to capture state power to their own advantage. The communist movement was the most active and expansive and that which, as the civic thesis analysts usually put it, most seriously threatened the political and social order. Thus, it is argued, followed the showdown, the massacres and Suharto’s New Order.

Against this thesis the critics argue instead, that during the late fifties and early sixties, civil society did not contribute to democratisation since it had been severely weakened by Sukarno and the military, both centrally and locally. For many years the communists resisted this domination. From the early fifties and onwards, theirs was actually the most modern and comparatively

democratic movement that linked civil and political society, vitalised democracy, including with regard to elections, and aimed at altering those power relations that most scholars would regard as fundamental obstacles in any process of democratisation. In the framework of the cold war, however, the leftists (as most others) gave up the defence of parliamentary democracy arguing that other factors like imperialism were more basic threat. And in key sectors they were not able to develop analysis and strategies that could help them to unify the people at large along basic socio-economic cleavages to thus undermine clientelistic structures plus *aliran*- and cold-war dominated political loyalties. Hence, certain top-leaders retreated into the area of predominantly elitist manoeuvring, which exposed the entire movement to repression.

Those were the main problems – not struggles between distinctively formed classes (which anyway rarely unfolded); not the very links between civil and political society; and not the attempts at altering power relations, which, as we know, was argued by the proponents of the civic thesis¹²

Finally, the ensuing repression, including the massacres, was of course not the fault of the communist party (as indicated in the civic thesis), even though a few leaders were involved in elitist manoeuvrings. Rather the killings, for instance, was army-led, supported by most parts of the middle class and the West, and based on a combination of colonial-like indirect rule and new public management in the form of efficient sub-contracting of much of the dirty work to militias, thugs and extremist youth in parts of actual civil society.¹³

(2) Civil society a strong or weak opponent of Suharto's regime?

According to the proponents of the civic thesis, civil society slowly recovered again during the last ten years of the New Order. By now civic associations were much weaker but yet, in contrast to the earlier period, really contributed to democratisation. This was partly due to international support, but more importantly, it is argued, because civil society was less preoccupied with class and other 'internal' conflicts among the population. Rather, civil society (collectively, as it were) defended itself and opposed the authoritarian state without any aspirations of taking over state power to the benefit of any particular group or class. Meanwhile, the authoritarian state did not create serious divisions as it was relatively autonomous of the kind of class and *aliran* interests that had occupied sections of it during Sukarno's 'Old Order'. Hence, it is argued, civil society was quite important in the undermining and ousting of the Suharto regime.

Yet again, the critics are less convinced. Several civil society groups were indeed important in doing away with Suharto. But the major feature, in the dissident view, of the 'new' civil society that emerged towards the end of the New Order was not that it received international support and that some of civil society groups managed to organise in opposition of the authoritarian regime. The most notable characteristic was rather that these forces got so little support from the democratic West and that they were so divided in their opposition of the authoritarian regime. Instead of really taking on the state-facilitated primitive accumulation of capital, the 'new' and often more or less democratically oriented civil society reflected instead the uneven development of capitalism (i.e. the co-existence of advanced and poorly developed sectors) by primarily being confined to intellectuals and other sections of the middle classes with the capacity to claim their civic rights. The civic activists were quite isolated from the population in general, weak, fragmented, vacillating, and to a large extent ineffective in transforming social and economic activism into political influence and results. There were all kinds of historical, structural and institutional reasons for this, but there was also an inherent inability to tackle the difficulties.

According to this author's comparative studies of Indonesia in view of the very different contexts of the Philippines and the Indian state of Kerala, the two major factors involved appear to be the following. Firstly, the lack of coordination between impressive and important activities in civil society on the one hand and political society on the other. Secondly, the predominance of important single issues, specific interests and at times communal loyalties. This is at the expense of additional aggregation of demands and collective interests for alternative policies and governance of the society at large.¹⁴ Similar results were arrived at in more specific Indonesian case studies.¹⁵

(3) Civil society activists: successful agents of democratisation or 'floating democrats'?

Finally the advocates of the civic thesis argue that after Suharto, civil society has grown stronger and more action oriented. Groups of small farmers have even occupied land. Yet, it is argued, civil society continues to contribute to democratisation because farmers who struggle for land are not as in the sixties up against petty landlords, thus causing conflicts within civil society. Rather, these small farmers limit themselves to reclaiming land that was expropriated by the state during the New Order.

The state, however, the proponents of the civic thesis add, is no longer as relatively autonomous from societal forces as during the Suharto regime. This nourishes divisions in civil society as well

as political violence. Yet, even the radical forces in civil society (minus, one presumes, some extreme Muslim groups) are responsible enough to contain these divisions. Most groups limit themselves to the promotion of joint efforts in various local communities as well as to pressure, lobbying and fighting corruption and 'rotten politicians'. Thus they stay away from outright politics and parties and do not aim at radically changing the existing social and political order. Hence, and this is a crucial point in the argument, there is no major risk that civil society will undermine democracy again, as it did in the early sixties.

According to the critics, however, this means that the adherents of the civil society argument are not just back almost full circle in support of the 'liberal-pluralist' assumption that they began by negating – i.e. that citizens of civil society shall view the political and social order as legitimate and only opt for reforms and favours but not try to capture or fundamentally reconstruct it. Most importantly, given the limited political engagement of civil society one may also question the main thesis that civil society is well on the way to promote meaningful democracy in Indonesia.

The critics put forward three major arguments. First, empirical evidence from the so far most comprehensive review of the post-authoritarian democracy movement (in the form of a broad panel of some forty case-studies from carefully selected major frontlines of the movement, published in 2003)¹⁶ clearly indicate that there are severe problems in civil society. It is true that activity in civil society at large has expanded, but much of the expansion relates to associations that make use of civic rights but not to the benefit of equal and inclusive citizenship; some would talk of 'un-civil civil society'. In addition, the 'truly' citizen oriented organisations continue to suffer from the same difficulties as in the struggle against Suharto. The major problem seem to be that as soon as embryonic democratic political institutions such as elections were established, pro-democracy civic groups lost out, including the students and the radical NGOs. The same thing has happened in most new and restored democracies.¹⁷ In Indonesia, according to the study from 2003, many pro-democrats do not even find it worthwhile to make use of and further develop the shallow institutions of political democracy. These institutions seem to be dominated by a somewhat enlarged elite, much like in post authoritarian Thailand or the Philippines.¹⁸ Hence, progressive civil society groups remain confined to pressurising and lobbying from the outside and to relate to the least abusive patrons within. In addition, the fragmentation, capturing and localisation of state and politics by various bosses and international actors seem to be associated both with neo-liberal decentralisation and general support of civil society without altering power

relations as well as weak democratic politics and capacity to govern. Hence, civil society does *not* seem to be well on the way to promote democracy in Indonesia.¹⁹

Second among the dissident arguments, there is very little to confirm the thesis that more vibrant and civic associational life would promote more unified and democratic collective action. The activists and their associations, no matter more or less radical, remain fragmented in various issue related spheres of action as well as in different contexts

Third, according to the case-study review, the perhaps most severe difficulty facing Indonesian pro-democrats is the absence of a clear constituency in terms of a basis amongst organised popular interests and visions. From the mid sixties onwards, radical movements with roots in the struggle for national and humanitarian liberation were eradicated. Independent mass organising beyond conservative socio-religious movements was prohibited. Ordinary people were deliberately transformed into a 'floating mass' of subjects. Elitist dissidents amongst students, intellectuals and professionals benefited from certain limited citizens rights. But isolated as they were, they inevitably became a movement of almost equivalently 'floating democrats' – scattered, poorly organised and often detached from society in general. The present problem therefore, is not just one of promoting and maintaining rights and institutions, but more essentially one of turning decades of authoritarian de-politicisation into a historical parenthesis by breaking those invisible barriers between and amongst equivalently floating masses and democrats.

National survey contradicts much of the civic thesis

The critique of the civic thesis referred to so far have often been refuted with references to insufficient and perhaps even biased data. Who believes in generalising on the basis of case-studies such as those referred to in this text, even if quite many? Equally important: in assessing whether and how the democracy movement contributed to democratisation, one would have to conduct a much more comprehensive assessment of the various actors and dimensions of democracy involved.

Between 2002 and 2006, therefore, a framework for such a more wide-ranging assessment of the state and dynamics of democracy was developed and applied. This section summaries the relevant data based on the previously mentioned 330 questions to about 800 carefully selected local expert-informants of problems of favouring democracy around the country on the basis of their experience in the various sectors of the democracy movement. The informants were selected by

one leading, generally respected pro-democracy figure in each province and the names of these key-informants were made public and thus possible to criticise.²⁰ The frequent perception that these grounded informants would be biased and unusually critical in their judgement was later refuted by the fact that their statements proved quite balanced as compared to those of established metropolitan commentators. The questions focused on the intrinsic (necessary) dimensions of a meaningful democracy, identified from the point of view of normative theory and previous comparative studies of the key aspects of people's political capacity to really make use of the instruments of democracy.²¹ Since this was the first survey of its kind there was a need to learn by doing; hence the survey was carried out in two rounds meaning that informants from half of the issue areas were interviewed in the first round and the others in the second. A number of evidences from both rounds provide vital information of the civic thesis that more civil society and social capital will produce more and better democracy as well as of the critique that civic associations are instead fragmented, isolated from the people at large, and avoid or at worst oppose vital aspects of democratic politics.

Assuming benevolently that the benefits of Indonesian democracy is primarily due to the civil society oriented movement rather than to the 'pragmatic' sections of the elite, the qualities of the institutions should be to the benefit of the civic thesis while the drawbacks should signal problems. Yet, the problems may not be because the critics are right. To prove the critics rights, one also needs to bring their specific arguments to test.

The salient evidences from the survey may then be summarised in two points that speak in favour of the civic thesis, three points that signals problems and a final point that indicates that much of the problems are because the critique of the civic thesis are correct. Let us turn to the details.

(1) The civics have contributed positively to a liberal electoral democracy

On the positive side, the expert-survey shows that the new Indonesian democracy is more liberal than what it is usually assumed to be. The not so long ago much talked about 'Asian value democracy' (that not only the implementation but also the basic principles of democracy are contextual rather than universal) is largely way past and gone. In spite of partially illiberal Muslim advances,²² even a majority of quite critical pro-democracy informants deemed that the performance and scope were good or very good when it comes to rules and regulations to promote the freedoms of speech, assembly and organization as well as religion, belief, language and culture. The same applied for the freedoms to form political parties and campaign for office

as well as citizens' participation in independent civic associations. Similarly positive assessments were made of the freedom of trade unions the media, art and academic world as well as the promotion of gender equality and emancipation, all social groups' participation in public life, and free and fair elections.

Interestingly, there were more informants who maintained that the performance of the rules and regulations were good rather than their geographical and substantive scope. This indicates that the fledgling institutions have not yet reached all areas and sectors in the country and that the state after Suharto has been hollowed out. The only instruments that were given equally high rating for performance and at least geographic scope were elections, which have indeed been taking place around the country.

Generally speaking, however, while several actors must have been crucial in generating the liberties, the civil society strategy of the democracy movement seems to have made good sense.

(2) Existing democracy the 'major game in town'

Equally remarkable, local pro-democracy informants who tend to be quite critical of the establishment also admit that a clear majority of the dominant (most powerful) actors do not just by-pass but also adhere to the new rules of the game that are at least supposed to promote democracy. By-passing the emerging democratic system may be the major tendency under neo-liberalism in many Latin American and African countries as well as in parts of the former Eastern block, but not to the same extent in Indonesia. Hence, while only 16% of the dominant actors identified by the informants promote the instruments of democracy as many as 33 % at least use them. It is true that the rest abuse and avoid the system, but in general terms the fledgling democracy seems to have developed into 'the major game in town'.

Interestingly, the dominant actors' political strategies within the political system (in terms of what institutions are approached or avoided and how) are much more varied and comprehensive than those of the pro-democrats; (we shall return to the details of the pro-democrats). Sixty three percent of the dominant actors' strategies are related to the legislatures and governments on various levels, 13 percent are strategies via the judicial sector, 6 percent are a combination of activity in civil society by also 'going to court' and 13 per cent are confined to direct practices in civil society. Partial figures suggest that only 9 percent of the dominant actors simply bypass the system. In fact, as many as 15 percent of the informants' statements (i.e. they could choose more

than one alternative) in the second phase of the survey²³ indicate that while a lot of ‘money politics’ and abuse of religious and ethnic identities may be involved, the dominant actors’ anyway try to transform their economic, coercive, social and cultural sources of power into political legitimacy and authority by way of public legislative, judicial and executive institutions.

In conclusion, while it is not likely that the civil society oriented pro-democrats have been the major factor behind the remarkable adoption of the elite to the emerging democratic system, their orientation has at least not prevented it. But how far do these advances help? Democracy is not only about freedom, elections and of playing the game. One must also consider if the game is played in a fair way, if the quality of governance and representation is reasonable, and if the people at large (and not just the elite) have the capacity to make use of the various institutions.²⁴

(3) Weak operational tools of law, governance and basic needs

The first major problem is that the freedoms and the formal adherence to the new institutions that the civics have contributed to do not seem to have also generated good performance and scope with regard to all the other and more operational dimensions of democracy, including the rule of law and justice, social and economic rights, representation and responsive and accountable government. To say that fledgling democracy has become the major game in town in the sense that most actors do not avoid the institutions that are supposed to promote democracy does not mean that these institutions really do it.

The list of bad performing means of democracy is long even if we only include rights and institutions that at least 70 per cent of the informants deem to perform poorly and at least 60 percent of them say have a limited scope. In some cases the informants even indicate that the situation has deteriorated since the first post-Suharto elections in 1999. The worst instances relate to law and governance, representation and the minimum social and economic rights that are necessary for a democracy to be meaningful.

With regard to social and economic rights, 83 percent of the informants say that the institutions that are supposed to generate good corporate governance and business regulations in the public interest are performing poorly and 77 percent say that their scope is limited. Moreover, almost as many make an equally negative assessment of the instruments that shall promote the right to employment, social security and other basic needs as well as the rights of children.

The worst of the law and governance institutions are those that shall promote subordination of the government and public officials to the rule of law; 93 percent of the informants say that the performance is bad and 75 percent say that the scope is poor. In simple terms, politicians and bureaucrats are not acting in accordance with democratically decided rules and regulations but avoid or abuse them or simply operate quite arbitrarily. The figures for the attempts to fight corruption and paramilitary groups, to really promote legal justice, equal citizenship, freedom from physical violence, international human rights treaties, transparency and accountability of the civil and military administration as well as national economic independence are almost as depressing. The figures vary from 90 to 70 percent of the informants stating that the performance is poor, and from 74 to 67 percent saying that the scope is narrow.

In other words it is obvious that the civic groups have not been equally successful in contributing to some of the most crucial dimensions of democracy beyond freedoms and elections: basic social and economic rights, rule of law and democratic governance. This is confirmed by several other assessments as well. Hence, most experts, including the UNDP and the World Bank, want to promote basic needs and/or 'good governance' – with a special focus on combating corruption and promoting the rule of law. In Indonesia the latter is the hegemonic argument.²⁵

(4) Basic democratic deficit: defunct representation

However, this is not the full story. One must also consider the quality of the means to promote politically equal representation of people's views and interests to thus facilitate popular control of public affairs. According to the grounded informants these means are also among the worst performing institutions with poor scope. In terms of recommendations, our survey points therefore in another direction. Since the means of representation are the most fundamental tools of democracy, they must be given priority to.

This is not to argue that basic needs or rule of law or good governance or direct civic influence or self-management are unimportant. Of course it would be ideal if all 'proper' institutions were in place before political equality and popular control were added, but who will enforce this kind of 'sequencing of democracy' while people are asked to wait? Given that one does not want to apply undemocratic methods to handle poverty, arbitrary rule and corruption, and given that one does not think that civic self-management and direct participation is a fully-fledged alternative, the most critical problem of Indonesian democracy is no doubt that of insufficient political

representation. Moreover, irrespective of whether one wants to promote civic participation, the hard empirical fact in Indonesia is that the most important powers and decisions are through supposedly representative bodies. These are dominated by a political and economic elite that can not be voted out without improved popular representation.

On top of the ‘black list’ of poor representation is the largely defunct means to promote political parties’ independence from money politics, members’ control of them, their responsiveness and accountability to their constituencies, the contact between people and representatives and the parties’ reflection of critical issues and interests among people. This in turn is of course related to weak popular organisations to promote common interests; organisations and movements that would be able to keep parties accountable. The details are in the table below.

Table 1: The Problem of Representation According to Percentage of Informants

No.	Rights and institutions that are supposed to promote:	Percentage of informants stating poor performance	Percentage of informants stating poor scope
1.	...political parties’ independence of money politics and powerful vested interests	91	70
2.	<i>...membership control of political parties, and parties responsiveness and accountability to their constituencies</i>	84	71
3.	<i>...people’s direct contact with political representatives and the public services and servants</i>	82	71
4.	<i>...political parties’ reflection of critical issues and interests among people</i>	81	70
5.	...political parties’ ability to form and run government	80	70
6.	...government’s consultation of people and when possible facilitation of direct participation in policymaking and the execution of public decisions.	75	73
7.	<i>...political parties abstention from abusing religious or ethnic sentiments, symbols and doctrines</i>	66	58

Note: Performance and scope of rights and institutions in bold are those which are not just poor but have even deteriorated since the first post-Suharto elections, according to 30 per cent or more of the informants; italics indicate those which even less than 40 per cent of the informants say makes sense to both use and promote *Source:* Priyono, Samadhi and Törnquist, 2007.

This critical condition of the core means of democracy were given remarkably little importance to by the experts of crafting democracy who began squatting the country a few months after the fall of Suharto (see e.g. Liddle 2001). Only during the last few years have there been attempts from some donors to promote improvements of the existing parties. Yet, there are no clear ideas of what actors and movements would be able to enforce change. Almost nothing is being done to facilitate the chances for people themselves to build new interest organisations and then also well

rooted parties from below. Most remarkably: the civil society based pro-democrats have also done very little themselves to alter the picture.

(5) Oligarchic democracy

Before discussing the specific drawbacks of the civic movement it is necessary, however, to ask why the operational instruments of democracy are so poor in spite of the fact that most freedoms are at hand and the elite largely adjust to the instruments that may promote democracy. In the case of Indonesia, the general assumption among experts on economic and political development in the aftermath of the Asian Crisis and the fall of Suharto was that once the economists had 'got the prices right' and political scientists had 'got the institutions right', the vital actors would adjust to the markets as well as the new institutions and thus become reasonable democrats.²⁶ So why is it not enough to have both freedoms and elitist adherence to democracy as 'the major game in town'?

According to the informants in our survey, the immediate reason is easy. It is true, they say, that the elite have been enlarged after Suharto and thus do not just resemble the old guard minus the old leader as indicated by several scholars.²⁷ It is also true that the state-centred actors have lost much of the control of the economy in favour of private and communitarian actors. But while the elite adjust to the new rules of the game, they also monopolise, bend and abuse them. According to the informants, 36 percent of the most dominant actors in the informants' local contexts do not just use but also abuse the means of democracy, and 15 percent simply abuse or bypass them. This relates not so much to the 'good freedoms' as to the poor operational tools of democracy that we have already discussed.

Moreover, while it is true that 15 percent of the informants' statements (i.e. they could choose more than one alternative) indicate that dominant actors try to gain political authority and legitimacy by way of the legislatures, the executive governments and the judicial system less noble methods such as drawing on public budgets and regulations, ethnic and religious identities, and forces of coercion are most frequent.²⁸ In addition, people are primarily incorporated into politics by way of general and non-substantiated promises, religious and ethnic identity politics, populism and clientelism. The main method is no doubt clientelism, which is indicated by about 35 percent of the informants' statements.

Most of these methods in turn are related to religious and ethnic communitarian organisations and movements, on the one hand and to private business and the market on the other. Beyond the widely cited disagreements, neo-liberalism and Muslim (as well as Christian) communitarianism go quite well together. While the first privatise the public resources in favour of businessmen, the latter privatise the public sphere in favour of the religious leaders (Törnquist 2007). As we shall see later, this has not been efficiently countered by the pro-democratic civic forces, which tend to talk quite favourably of communities and markets against the state. There has been remarkably little emphasis on developing independent and grass-root based mediating institutions between state and people as against the current predominance mediation through communitarian groups and the market.

What are the fundamental sources of power for this dominance and pattern, which the civic action has not come to grips with? In fact, the basis for a liberal oriented civil society, supported by powerful actors within independent business and administration, remains weak. The symbiotic combination of state and business that grew out of the colonial indirect rule is still quite strong. The informants have been asked to identify the most powerful actors in their contexts and thereafter to specify their sources of power. According to the informants, 40 percent of the most dominant actors belong to the public executives on various levels, 16 percent are actors within the police, military, militia groups and hoodlums, about as many are powerful people within parliaments and political parties on all levels. Only 12 percent are based on private business and NGOs sponsored by the establishment. The nexus between state-cum-political sources of power and business is quite obvious. Nineteen percent of the dominant actors primarily draw on public resources (of the government and civil administration) and 28 percent point to non-economic coercive forces (including the military, police, thugs and militia groups as well as the capacity to mobilise the masses). Almost as many, 25 percent of the dominant actors opt for networks-cum-good connections, and only 13 percent draw on 'pure business' that is viable without political and other backing.²⁹ These are thus the fundamental roots of the defunct political representation that was discussed in the previous section, including the predominance of money politics and powerful vested interests.

(6) Ever 'floating' democrats?

Given that the monopolisation by the political and economic elite of the institutions that are supposed to promote democracy is the major explanation for the drawbacks of the largest of the new democracies (the poor social and economic rights and the weak operational tools of

governance and representation), and that the civil society oriented pro-democrats have obviously not been able to alter this, the remaining question is if this is due to fallacies of the civic thesis that have been observed by its critics. The survey results are very clear. The grounded informants – most of whom belong themselves to the largely civil society oriented democracy groups – confirm almost unanimously the position of the critics, i.e. that the civic associations are fragmented, isolated from the people at large, and avoid or at worst oppose vital aspects of democratic politics.

The expert have been asked a large number of questions on how the pro-democracy activist that they know of (a) relate to the institutions that are supposed to promote democracy and (b) how the activists try to enhance their capacity to affect them. Most serious, according to the informants the activists continue to be socially ‘floating’ and remain politically marginalised, aside from some co-opted individuals and semi-sectarian Muslims who have built Indonesia’s well disciplined, anti-corruption and social welfare oriented brother-hood party.³⁰ Let us turn to the details.

First, according to the informants, the presence of the pro-democracy activists that they know of in relation to state, business and workplaces remains marginal. Second, their inclusion of women and women’s perspectives (which might swiftly broaden the base and capacity of the democracy movement) is also still poor.

Moreover, according to 55 percent of the informants the pro-democracy activists prioritise direct democracy in civil society. Only 7 percent of the informants say that the activists try to combine civil society-based activity with constitutional, representative democracy. It is also quite popular to find ways of bypassing any kind of political mediation and democratic decision-making by connecting various communities or interest groups to the executive, primarily to governors, regents and bureaucrats but also to the military and the police. In other words, the core of the democratic political system is still left wide open to be dominated by the elite. This is not to belittle various forms of so-called direct democracy and self-management, especially not when they are practiced in relation to sectors that have been more or less privatised or captured by communitarian organisations and are thus difficult to affect through institutionalised politics. But politics and formally public administration remains crucial in Indonesia and much of the powers and decision-making are through elected and supposedly representative institutions. These have now been captured by the political and economic elite and thus have to be de-monopolised and

made better use of, including in order to regulate the sectors that have been privatised and hijacked by communal groups – a task that have been ignored by the civic thesis.

Fourth, according to 42 percent of the informants' statements, the pro-democrats prefer single issues and specific interests, on the one hand, and quite general ideas, on the other (the latter being stated by some 40 percent of the informants). In fact, only 18 percent of the informants' statements indicate that the pro-democrats focus on comprehensive issues, interests and governance agendas. Partial figures for what the pro-democrats give priority to are even more clear-cut: some 50 percent of the informants point to single issues and specific interests, 44 percent indicate general ideas and only 6 percent comprehensive agendas.³¹ In short, there is almost no alternative aggregation of interests and ideas in favour of a program or even a minimum agenda. Again, the civic activists leave it to the elite to suggest principles and directions for how to govern society.

Fifth, the pro-democracy activists continue to be miserable mobilisers and organisers – i.e. activists who almost never win an election and are quite unable themselves to gather substantial numbers of people behind a progressive programme and leader. Hence they rather employ quite undemocratic methods. According to almost 50 percent of the informants' statements, the activists rely on traditional forms of incorporating people into politics through, for instance, populist 'popular figures' and the providing of alternative NGO-based patronage to vulnerable clients of abusive patrons instead of helping people to organise themselves to fight clientelism.

Finally there is the ultimate symbol of floating democrats: According to 42 percent of the informants in the second phase of the survey the democracy activists try at first hand to transform their sources of power into legitimacy, authority and political influence by way of providing correct information and analysis, generate public awareness and so forth. Only 1 percent of the informants say that they give priority to the seeking of the mandate of the people, getting elected or appointed to official positions; and none of the informants say that the pro-democrats favour work by way of political and administrative representatives.³² Most Indonesian pro-democrats seem to live in a post-industrial society – and those who do not agree, but rather try to organise farmers, workers or urban poor, are rarely well connected to the 'leading' pro-democracy groups.

Conclusions

Empirical evidence shows that the citizen based action has contributed successfully to the introduction of democratic rights and freedoms as well as elections, but not to the generation of the more operational dimension of democracy, including social and economic rights, the rule of law, representation and responsive and democratic government. The latter problems are quite clearly because the extended and localised political and economic elite (that replaced Suharto and marginalised the pro-democrats that had done away with him) has managed to capture and monopolise most of the institutions that are supposed to promote democracy.

Why is this? Empirical evidence provided by grounded informants – most of whom have themselves been working in accordance with the civic thesis – suggest that the problems can hardly be due to insufficient emphasis on civil society and social capital, since this is what has been prioritised, but rather because the critics of the civic thesis are right:

- The civil society based democracy movement remains fragmented around some fifteen separate issues and there are few links to more broadly based popular movements.
- The presence of the activists in relation to state, business and workplaces remains marginal.
- Their inclusion of women's perspectives is still poor.
- They prioritise direct democracy in civil society, bypass representation by facilitating direct contact between sections of the people and the executive, and do rarely engage in civil society-based constitutional, representative democracy.
- They engage in single issues and specific interests in addition to general ideas but rarely in comprehensive issues, interests and governance agendas.
- They rely on traditional forms of including people into politics through, for instance, popular leaders and by providing 'alternative patronage'.
- They try at first hand to transform their sources of power into legitimacy, authority and political influence by way of providing correct information and analysis, generating public awareness and so forth – and they give no priority to the seeking of the mandate of the people, getting elected or appointed to official positions.

The civic pro-democrats continue thus to be isolated from broader popular dynamics. The basic problem is the lack of efficient autonomous politics of democratisation to link state and politics on the one hand and people that are not already able to claim their civic rights and form civic organisations on the other. The increasingly important new elements of representative democracy remain the property of the dominant elite. They rally votes by control of public resources, 'good contacts' and clientelism and identity politics. Most contacts between state and politics on the one hand and people on the other are mediated via communitarian organisations (including religious and ethnic) and private business and the market. While real alternatives in the form of

autonomous popular links based on democratic representation are rare and weak, the civic groups rather try localised self-management, 'direct and participatory democracy' and to influence the 'public discourse' -- but without much success.

In short, the emphasis on civil society activism has not generated more unified collective action and meaningful democratisation beyond freedoms and elections. Rather, the problem seems to be the lack of efficient *politics* of democratisation for improved popular representation. To add data and analysis of this *political* problem is, however, the next step.

¹ The idea of this game theory is that each isolated prisoner gains when both cooperate, but if only one of them cooperates, the other one, who defects, will gain more. If both defect, both lose (or gain very little) but not as much as the "cheated" cooperator whose cooperation is not returned. The dilemma resides in the fact that each prisoner has a choice between only two options, but cannot make a good decision without knowing what the other one will do.

² The most widely cited basic text remains Putnam 1993.

³ For some early examples of critical texts that relate to the points above, see Tarrow 1996; Levi 1996; Törnquist 1996; also in Rudebeck et.al 1998; Törnquist 1998. For vital further developed early critique, see for instance, Skocpol 2003; Rothstein 2005.

⁴ To use the term of Partha Chatterjee 2004.

⁵ See e.g. Harriss, Stokke and Törnquist 2004; Chandhoke 2005; Harriss 2005.

⁶ A concluding report from my own longitudinal case studies in the nineties are in Törnquist 2002. For more specific Indonesian case studies, see Budiman and Törnquist 2001; Prasetyo, Priyono and Törnquist 2003.

⁷ See at examples of publications in endnote 5 and Lavallo, Houtzager and Castello 2005.

⁸ For a brief summary, see Törnquist 2006. The first edition of the concluding report from the survey is available in Indonesian, the revised edition in Indonesian and English is forthcoming in 2007, Priyono, Samadhi, and Törnquist 2007. A resurvey will be carried out in 2007 and 2008.

⁹ For instance in Aspinall's thesis 2005.

¹⁰ See for instance Gramsci 1971; Seidman 1988; Bourdieu 1998; Tarrow 1994 and Therborn 1977.

¹¹ See at first hand Törnquist 1984, 2002; Budiman and Törnquist, 2001, Prasetyo, Priyono, and Törnquist 2003 and Priyono, Samadhi and Törnquist 2007

¹² Cf. Törnquist 1984. (The book has now, more than 20 years later, been translated into Indonesian and is currently being edited for publication.)

¹³ See Törnquist 2003.

¹⁴ For a summary of the comparative results, see Törnquist 2002

¹⁵ Törnquist 2002 *op.cit.* and Budiman and Törnquist 2001

¹⁶ Prasetyo, Priyono, Törnquist 2003

¹⁷ For two recent review studies, see Carothers 2004 and 2006 (e.g. p. 137).

¹⁸ For a dynamic brief comparison, see Sidel in Harriss, Stokke and Törnquist 2004.

¹⁹ We shall return to a discussion and attempt to specify the intrinsic aspects of democracy when we will also refer to the results from a national survey of the challenges of democracy in Indonesia.

²⁰ Once 14 issue areas or frontlines of democracy activism had been defined based on the previously mentioned case-studies, the independent research team (within a research organization called Demos, The Indonesian Centre for Democracy and Human Rights Studies, embedded in the democracy movement but academically guided by this author from the University of Oslo) identified widely respected leading pro-democrats with good general knowledge as key informants, one in each of the then 32 provinces. These key-informants in turn assisted the team in identifying reflective and experienced informants in their provinces and within each of the issue areas. The ideal was to have at least two independent informants within each issue area in each province – i.e. some 896 informants. In reality, activism within all issue

areas was not evenly spread, and for various reasons some informants could not complete the questionnaire (with 330 questions) – but quite remarkably 798 did. Trained local assistants helped explaining the questions. Each interview took between 6 hours and one and a half day to complete. The identity of the key-informants was made public, since they as well as the researchers had to be accountable for the selection of the informants – the identity of which, however, was of course kept anonymous. The informants could choose between referring to their local context or to their issue-area – a clear majority opted for the first.

²¹ The informants were first asked a number of questions about the performance and substantive and geographical scope of the various intrinsic instruments of democracy, based on an attempt to further develop David Beetham's et.al. framework for assessing democracy. (C.f. Beetham, Bracking, Kearton & Weir 2002). In addition, the informants were also asked questions of how the pro-democracy activists as well as the most dominant actors within their context (or issue-area) related to these just mentioned institutions and what capacity the actors had to promote and/or use them. The latter questions were largely based on the framework that had been used in comparative studies of this author (c.f. Törnquist 2002, op.cit). This in turn was further developed on the basis of supplementary social and political movement theories as well as aspects of Bourdieu's theories of domination. For an easily accessible presentation of the framework, see Törnquist 2006 op.cit. The full results are in Priyono, Samadhi and Törnquist op.cit.

²² Cf. Törnquist (2007)

²³ These figures are based on the 435 informants in the second phase of the survey. We do not have exact figures for this variable based on the 363 informants in the first phase, but it is clear that the tendency was similar.

²⁴ For the various intrinsic dimensions of democracy, see footnote 21.

²⁵ For details, see e.g. www.worldbank.org/id, www.undp.or.id, and the Partnership for Governance Reform, www.kemitraan.or.id/

²⁶ See at first hand the collection of papers to the major conference in 1998 on how Indonesian democracy should be 'crafted', Liddle 2001.

²⁷ C.f. e.g. Robison and Hadiz 2004.

²⁸ See fn 23.

²⁹ See fn 23.

³⁰ The Prosperous Justice Party (PKS)

³¹ The partial figures refer to the statements by 435 informants during the second phase of the survey,

³² See fn 28!

References

- Aspinall, Edward 2005: *Opposing Suharto: Compromise, Resistance, and Regime Change in Indonesia*. Stanford, California: Stanford University Press.
- Beetham, David, Bracking, Sarah, Kearton, Ian & Weir, Stuart 2002: *International IDEA Handbook on Democracy Assessment*. The Hague: Kluwer Law International.
- Bourdieu, Pierre 1998: *Practical Reason: On the Theory of Action*. Cambridge, UK: Polity Press.
- Budiman, Arief and Törnquist, Olle 2001: *Aktor Demokrasi: Catatan Tentang Gerakan Perlawanan di Indonesia*. Jakarta: ISAI.
- Carothers, Thomas 2004: *Critical Mission: Essays on Democracy promotion*. Washington DC: Carnegie Endowment.
- Carothers, Thomas 2004: *Confronting the Weakest Link: Aiding Political Parties in New Democracies*. Washington DC: Carnegie Endowment.
- Chandhoke, Neera 2005: 'Seeing' the State in India'. *Economic and Political Weekly*, 40 (11): 1033-1039, March 12.
- Chatterjee, Parth 2004: *The Politics of the Governed: Reflections on Popular Politics in Most of the World*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Diamond, Larry 1994: 'Rethinking Civil Society': Toward Democratic Consolidation. *Journal of Democracy*, 5 (3), July.
- Gramsci, Antonio 1971: *Selections from the Prison Notebooks of Antonio Gramsci*. New York: International Publishers.

-
- Harriss, John, Stokke, Kristian & Törnquist, Olle (eds). 2004: *Politicising Democracy. The New Local Politics of Democratisation*. Houndmills and New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Harriss, John 2005: Political Participation, Representation and the Urban Poor. Findings from a Research in Delhi. *Economic and Political Weekly*, XL (11): 1041-54, March 12.
- Lavalle, Adrián Gurza, Houtzager, Peter P. and Castello, Graziela 2005: *IDS Working Paper 249: In Whose Name? Political Representation and Civil Organisations in Brazil*. Brighton: Institute of Development Studies.
- Levi, Margaret 1996: 'Social and Unsocial Capital': A review Essay of Robert Putnam's "Making Democracy Work". *Politics and Society*, 24 (1), March.
- Liddle, R. William (ed) 2001: *Crafting Indonesian Democracy*. Jakarta: PPW-LIPI, Ford Foundation and Mizan Pustaka.
- Putnam, Robert 1993: *Making Democracy Work; Civic Traditions in Modern Italy*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Prasetyo, Stanley, Adi, Priyono, A.E, Törnquist, Olle and contributors 2003: *Indonesia's Post-Soeharto Democracy Movement*, Jakarta and Copenhagen: Demos and NIAS-Press.
- Priyono, A.E, Samadhi W.P and Törnquist, Olle, 2007: *Making Democracy Meaningful. Problems and Options in Indonesia*. Jakarta: Demos
- Robison, Richard & Hadiz, Vedi R. 2004: *Reorganising Power in Indonesia: The Politics of Oligarchy in the Age of Markets*, New York: Routledge/Curzon.
- Rothstein, Bo 2005: *Social Traps and the Problem of Trust, Theories of Institutional Design*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Rudebeck, Lars et.al. 1998: *Democratisation in the Third World*. Houndmills and London: Macmillan
- Seidman, Steven (ed.) 1988: *Jürgen Habermas on Society and Politics. A Reader*. Boston: Beacon Press.
- Sidel, John 2004: Bossism and Democracy in the Philippines, Thailand and Indonesia: Towards an Alternative Framework for the Study of 'Local Strongmen', in Harriss, John, Stokke, Kristian & Törnquist, Olle (eds): *Politicising Democracy: The New Local Politics of Democratisation*. Houndmills and New York: Palgrave.
- Skocpol, Theda 2003: *Diminished Democracy: From Membership to Management in American Civic Life*. Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press.
- Tarrow, Sidney 1994: *Power in Movement. Social Movements, Collective Action, and Politics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Tarrow, Sidney 1996: Making Social Science Work Across Time and Space: A Critical Reflection of Robert Putnam's "Making Democracy Work". *American Political Science Review*, 90 (2), June.
- Therborn, Göran 1977: The Role of Capital and the Rise of Democracy. *New Left Review*, 103.
- Törnquist, Olle 1984: *Dilemmas of Third World Communism: The destruction of the PKI in Indonesia*, London: Zed Books.
- Törnquist, Olle 1996: *Making Democratisation Work. From Civil Society and Social Capital to Political Inclusion and Politicisation. Theoretical Reflections on Concrete Cases in Indonesia, Kerala and the Philippines*. Uppsala University:
- Törnquist, Olle 1999: *Politics and Development. A Critical Introduction*. London, Thousand Oakes and New Delhi:
- Törnquist, Olle 2002: *Popular Development and Democracy. Case Studies from the Philippines, Indonesia and Kerala*. Geneva and Oslo: UNRISD and SUM.
- Törnquist, Olle 2003: *Quick, Cheap, and Efficient: The Mass Killings of Indonesian Communists 1965-1966 Revisited*. Manuscript. Oslo University.
- Törnquist, Olle 2006: Assessing Democracy from Below: A Framework and Indonesian Pilot Study. *Democratization*, 13 (2): 227-255, April.
- Törnquist, Olle (2007): 'Muslim Politics and Democracy. The Case of Indonesia'. *Journal of Indonesian Islam*, Vol 1, No 1.

Note on the author:

Olle Törnquist is Professor of Political Science and Development Research, University of Oslo, and co-director of *Demos*, The Indonesian Centre for Democracy and Human Rights Studies, Jakarta. He is also engaged in a project on the role of democracy in the post-tsunami conflict areas in Aceh and Sri Lanka. His recent books include *Politics and Development: A Critical Introduction*. Sage, 1999; *Popular Development*

and Democracy: Case Studies in the Philippines, Indonesia and Kerala, UNRISD and SUM, 2002; *Indonesia's Post-Soeharto Democracy Movement (with S.A. Prasetyo and A.E. Priyono)* Demos and NIAS Press, 2002; *Politicising Democracy: The new Local politics of Democratisation* (edited with J. Harriss and K. Stokke), Palgrave, 2004; and *Towards and Meaningful democracy: Problems and Options in Indonesia* (with A.E. Priyono, W.P. Samadhi and the Demos team). Demos 2007.