

What's Wrong with Indonesia's Democratisation?

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Abstract

The post cold war 'crafting of instant democracy thesis' has reached Southeast Asia. Indonesia is a good test case for a contextually based critique. Within that framework, the paper argues, weak modernisation and bad leadership are insufficient explanations, and there is a need to go beyond both deterministic and idealistic recipes. A critical brief 'audit' from the point of view of the conventional means to promote popular control and political equality indicates that most of the constitutional rights and institutional channels do not make sense even to the major potential pillar of democracy, the people at large. Most citizens have to make their way through other and sometimes anti-democratic methods. There is an urgent need, the papers thus concludes, for a third path that aim at substantial and thus sustainable democratisation by promoting citizens actual capacity to make use of and further improve civil and democratic rights and institutions.

Democracy at stake

It is no longer what it used to be, the discourse and practices of democratisation. For long, democratisation in the third world was regarded as difficult and resting with a whole series of conditions that had to be achieved through rather long term structural change and hard political work. The major thesis was that of liberal as well as Marxist modernisation-theory which stressed the lack of social, economic and political

prerequisites. In East and Southeast Asia, modernisation, institution building, and the rise of sufficiently strong middle classes was the celebrated perspective among adherents as well as liberal critics of the developmental states.¹ Others added the conservative and elitist character of the processes that had anyway started, or pointed to the predominance of so-called illiberal democracy.² The major rival dependency thesis, moreover, was even more pessimistic, stressing economic globalisation as a major threat against democracy.³ Since the 1989 fall of the wall in Berlin, however, the idealist idea of democratisation as something natural and almost inevitable have got worldwide proportions. Actually, it began with the defeat of fascism on southern Europe in the 70s and authoritarian regimes in Latin America in the 80s. But post-89, the thesis was quickly exported to Eastern Europe as well, and, most remarkable to Africa too, as the soft backpack of structural adjustment schemes. East and Southeast Asia, however, seemed rather immune, aside from some NGO activists. Just as elsewhere, it took economic and political crises, and they remained local until 1997. But by now, then, the post cold war truth on democratisation has settled here as well – and thus it is time for a contextually based critique.

The scholarly back up for this trend was celebrated studies of democratisation in southern Europe and Latin America, which then spread to Africa and Eastern Europe.⁴ This was the proposition (quite against previous thinking) that it was possible, after all, to craft instant democracies almost no matter what the conditions by compensating unfavourable internal structures with external support for the introduction of elementary human rights, ‘free and fair’ elections, and ‘good’ institutions. For some time now, supplementary studies have emerged on the difficulties of ‘consolidating’ the instant democracies as well as more radical critique of ‘democratic imperialism’

for mainly having produced limited, unstable and ‘choiceless’ democracies, especially in Africa but also elsewhere.⁵ The specific question we need to ask, therefore, is if there are additional and perhaps different lessons to learn from Southeast Asia.

The Philippine and Thai debacles

What would be the best case to examine the experiences? The natural first candidate is the Philippines, with its authoritarian tendencies but also long experiences of liberal democracy. Here the problems of ‘consolidation’ as well as tendency towards shallow and uneven democratisation are obvious. By 1986, the Philippine middle class was deprived of their electoral victory and thus gained mass support against Marcos’ authoritarianism. An entire world was thrilled, but the outcome under Corazon Aquino was the resurrection of the traditional elitist-cum-boss democracy, and under Fidel Ramos additional and more efficient structural adjustment. In the next presidential elections, therefore, populist and semi-nationalist Joseph Estrada could benefit from people’s frustrations and win a landslide victory. But the outcome was misgovernance and abuse of public resources. So in early 2001, the undermining of the second pillar of the institutional channels of democracy (in addition to elections) – open and accountable government – paved the way for a partly middle class cum business led revolt. The only other major difference from 1986 was that Estrada had not (yet) lost as much mass support as had Marcos (who also undermined the constitutional rights) – and that this was compensated for by the massive mobilisation of the major parts of the radical Left that had not stubbornly invested in Estrada’s populism⁶ but finally (some consistently and some, like the Maoists, for tactical reasons) had learnt the lesson to defend rather than neglect democracy.

An obvious second candidate for study is Thailand, with its own waves of pro-democratic movements but also serious setbacks. Just a few weeks before the recent debacle in Manila, for instance, Thailand's major business tycoon, Thaksin Shinawatra, won a landslide victory on the basis of an Estrada-like nationalist-populism, against a liberal middle class cum business and IMF sponsored 'post-1997-crisis regime'. The idealist NGO attempts at crafting new ambitious constitutional regulations against boss politics and vote buying did not help much. With fresh and massive backing, Thaksin himself have so far avoided legal disqualification for having tampered with the new rules of the game. It is more likely that he will later on face similar problems as did Estrada.

From elitist modernisation to idealistic democratisation in Indonesia

Indonesia, however, is probably the even more illustrative and critical case. Here, in the late-50's, liberal modernisation theory was first used to legitimate Western support of the regional-cum-ethnic and religious separatists, on the one hand, and the containment of democratically successful communists, on the other. This contributed to destruction of Indonesia's parliamentary democracy. In 1965/66 the same theses was applied to legitimate (and cover up) the massacre of at least half a million leftists. This destroyed whatever remained of Indonesia's democracy. For more than thirty years, then, the modern package was used to support Suharto's authoritarian modernisation. This prevented rather than promoted democratisation (and caused the death of another 300.000 persons, not just in East Timor). And finally, with the 1997 crisis, the actions of the markets and its supporters even proved politically disastrous, contributed to a socio-economic catastrophe, obstructed democratisation, and only accidentally helped oust Suharto. Yet, until the bitter end, mainstream 'liberal'

analysts continued to claim that Indonesia's basic problem was financial and economic, with too little market and too much state.

Actually, it was only with the collapse in 21 May 1998 that all analysts suddenly agreed instead that the problem was political and that nothing would improve without legitimate government – which called for some democracy. Swiftly, in other words, at least limited democracy had become a precondition for further modern development rather than the other way around. But was it genuine? Much of the western discourse on democracy after World War II was of the need to defend liberal and democratic societies against authoritarian mass-opportunism. But never did I experience such a liberal and democratic mass-opportunism as in Indonesia. This was not confined to the opportunist domestic elite. While parachuted western economists had failed in getting the prices right, their somewhat softer colleagues were now flown in to get the institutions rights – to thus craft democracy. They were the big American and other Western party-institutes, the United Nation and national development aid agencies, the NGOs and turn-key election managers, the democracy-consultants and the political science celebrities with ready made universalistic recipes.

Within a year, it was argued, they would put Indonesia on the right track by supplementing economic and financial 'reconstruction' with the engineering of appropriate rule of law, rights and liberties, governance and decentralisation, plus civic societies – as a basis for 'free and fair' elections, plus pacts among moderate incumbents and realistic reformers.

Less than four years later, however, this essay suggests, much of the historical chance to promote the development of the World's third largest democracy may already be history. I am not saying that all opportunities to continue democratisation are gone, only that the unique chances to promote qualitative changes and fundamental prerequisites under transition from a weak old regime to new forms of rule seem to be over. The coming to power of the new Megawati government is a clear sign of normalisation and the temporary consolidation of a pact between so-called moderate incumbents and conservative reformers, setting the pro-democrats aside. So in addition to the fact that this would then also be a historical failure (for which its external sponsors must share the responsibility), Indonesia should be the best of candidates if we look for a critical case to examine the problems of democratisation in general and the fashionable post cold war 'crafting of instant democracy thesis' in particular.

The logic of the essay

The major steps of the following analysis, then, is to first consider different ways of explaining the problems. Beyond the dominating and elitist determinist and idealist explanations respectively, we shall add an alternative perspective from the level of the citizens who after all are supposed to gain from and propel democracy. From this point of view, why did democracy suddenly became a viable proposition and what has happened since? The mainstream recipes are reconsidered, then, followed by the argument that there is a need for a third way – to promote *substantial* democratisation. Having identified its major elements, the essay continues with a brief audit and, thus, an answer to what is missing. This in turn forms the basis for a summary of 'what is wrong with Indonesia democratisation' and a concluding section on what should be

done. A final note of precaution and apology: what follows are only brief summaries of some of the main and still tentative conclusions from a comparative project during a decade on popular movements and democratisation in Indonesia, Kerala (India), and the Philippines. An unfortunate consequence is that full references have been impossible to include.⁷

Missing factors and mistakes?

How shall we read the problems of instant democratisation in Indonesia? Aside from the international and primarily economic constraints, there are two major interpretations: one refers to insufficient modernisation, another puts the blame on bad leadership.

On the 'realist' side, the 'modernists' argue that the middle class is not sufficiently strong and that primordial ethnic and religious loyalties still dominate. Hence, politics remain neo-patrimonial and clientelist. This, they say, will continue to characterise and undermine whatever 'modern' democratic institution that the middle class tries to implant. But neither, they add, can the masses be trusted. If people are let loose, they will generate riots and ethnic and religious violence. Hence, the least bad elite will have to hold on. Even the military may have to come back, at least partially. For instance, the first civilian defence minister Juwono Sudarsono was among the early and clear-cut proponents of this view; and rather soon Washington, then, began to reconsider new links with the military.⁸

On the voluntaristic side, the advocates of leadership and instant crafting of democracy are still split into three factions with different scapegoats. The

conservative first group is rooted among non-pluralist Muslims and old Golkar bosses, led by the speakers in the supra-parliament (People's Consultative Assembly, MPR), Amien Rais, and the House of Representative (DPR), Akbar Tanjung. Their main argument was and is that the problems of Indonesian democratisation were all the fault of the former executive, led by erratic then president Abdurrahman Wahid, Gus Dur. While partly true, the accusations about favouritism and corruption, however, were mainly symbolic, as all major parties have skeletons in their closets. In the end, Gus Dur's parliamentary critics even gave up most of the corruption-thesis and focused on more general accusations of mismanagement. The basic problem, however, most serious analysts agree, was that Rais, Tanjung & Co. felt that Gus Dur was not holding on to the instant elitist pact that brought him to power in late 1999. Soon enough he rather prevented them from getting their 'rightful' share of the cake. As the struggle continued, large sections of Megawati's PDI-P also felt marginalised. Finally, in July 2001, Megawati thus accepted the invitation to come aboard the Rais-Tanjung-TNI (the armed forces) train, whose major short term problem was the lack of a constitutionally legitimate alternative president. The present conservative pact is more pragmatic, or as a close Megawati-adviser cum political scientist Pratikno put it already in May when advocating for it: "One of the mistakes of Gus Dur's administration is its stance against the past, which has made the old players become too reactive and defensive because they feel insecure. Megawati should learn to be more realistic. There are too many players in the country's economic and political arena who could be involved in past wrongdoings, therefore we can't treat them as enemies. The coalition agreement should contain a spirit of reconciliation with the past."⁹

The second and increasingly weak Gus Dur group that have now lost out argued the opposite: that all the troubles were because of the manipulations and the undermining of the capacity of the reformist executive by the opponents in the parliament, and their allies in the military and ‘uncivil society’ (such as Laskar Jihad and Suharto supported militias).

The third group, finally, consists mainly of the remnants of the pro-democracy movement that have not yet been trapped by the two previous major contenders. Increasingly frustrated, this group say that the basic problem is that Suharto lost out too early – before the democracy movement had become ideologically and organisationally stronger and more experienced. So now, the group concludes, it must try to catch up and consolidate democracy at the same time.

An alternative perspective

Of course there is much to all this. But on the one hand the lack of modernisation arguments almost repeat Huntington’s plea in the mid-60s for ‘politics of order’. That was used to legitimate Suharto’s regime; which in turn sustained patrimonialism as well as elitist manipulation of ethnic and religious loyalties (*not* the other way around!). Worst: almost nothing is said of what might alter this state of affairs. Even the role of ‘civil Islam’ in the struggle for democracy is neglected.¹⁰ Clientelism continues to be analysed as a virtual *perpetum mobile*. Moreover, those who rather explain the insufficient crafting of democracy in terms of bad leadership hold on to idealism and even set aside basic structural and institutional preconditions for democracy.

In my experience, therefore, we need to go beyond both the deterministic and the ideal-leadership perspective. Both fail to consider democratisation from the level of the citizens, who after all are the ones that are supposed to be equals and control public affairs. Many say that such an approach is unrealistic and a waste of time. But already during the authoritarian regime this argument caused most scholars and experts to neglect basic conflicts and hidden broad opposition, not to talk of potential democratisation. So why should we trust the same thesis now? Rather, the view from below remains of vital importance. Not because some of us may normatively be in favour of it, or because anyone has the illusion that civil movements would be able to alter the entire scenario on their own. On the contrary, ‘only’ because popular efforts have been of great importance in the struggle for national liberation as well as many processes democratisation elsewhere.¹¹ And ‘only’ because such a perspective involves asking questions about both fundamental conflicts and the core democratic principles of popular control and political equality that might otherwise be set aside.¹² So what are the citizens’ constitutional rights and what are the institutional channels of democracy? Do people have the capacity, and do they find it meaningful, to improve and make use of them?

Despotic liberalism, political crisis, and democracy as a last resort

From this point of view, then, why was it that democracy suddenly became a viable proposition in Indonesia in the first place? Of course the economic crisis was important, but how did that relate to the need for democracy? Why did the Suharto regime crumble?

There are two major explanatory theses: either the crisis was because liberalisation and globalisation of the finance and capital markets in the early-90's undermined the attempts at developmental regimes in the area – or it was because corruption, nepotism, and cronyism, KKN, undermined attempts at developmental market economies. Both arguments are getting increasingly politicised; especially the latter, as part of the West's campaign to promote its political and economic interests in the area. But worst: none of them is sufficient. Why did the deregulation and internationalisation become especially untenable in Indonesia, and only after some eight nine years? And why was it possible for decades to combine KKN with rapid economic growth? Indonesia was on top of the world championship in corruption for years and years. The obvious answer, I suggest, is that only when these two factors were combined into despotic liberalism did the system began to crumble.¹³

This was when deregulation promoted rather than combated corruption. This was when the Suharto associates were strong enough to capture privatised companies and monopolise the markets. And this was when the mid-1996 crackdown on the democracy movement demonstrated, that the regime could neither reform itself nor handle pro-democratic opposition but had to return to outright repression and outdated anti-Communist rhetoric.¹⁴

The still missing triggering factor, however, turned out to be the mid-1997 financial crisis. Actually, it was not the economic crisis as such that made a difference but that the market finally understood that the government might not be able to guarantee political stability anymore. So when the IMF confirmed this by closing down major

banks and calling for harsh structural adjustment, the market lost all trust in the only collateral for all their loans and investments, the Suharto regime.

Meanwhile the deep symbiosis between politics and the economy also prevented solutions based on the idea that ‘business will take care of itself’, in spite of political crisis; something which may come about in more privatised economies such as in much of southern Europe, Latin America and partly the Philippines. So when the market had lost faith in Suharto’s political capitalism, private capitalists could do little on their own, and ‘the old man’ could neither repress the market nor the capitalists – as he used to do with ordinary people – even his own associates began to doubt his capacity to protect them.

Yet, little happened until, first, the government’s (not the IMF’s) blunder in early May to drastically reduce subsidies caused widespread popular anger, and then the students’ massive demonstrations briefly substituted for the lack of a broad and well organised democracy movement.

In short, therefore, democracy did not come about because modern development called for good government, but because it was in deep crisis. That crisis in turn was not primarily financial or economic but political and systemic and rooted in the symbiosis between politics and economics in the form of despotic liberalism. The space was limited even for the kind of private capitalist improvements that may evolve irrespective of political turmoil in less politically monopolised economies. Meanwhile the regime was unable to reform itself, the potentially important

democracy movement was socially isolated and poorly organised, and the students was the only group capable of at least pulling the trigger.

Few improvements

Worst of all: little has changed. There is no alternative democratic co-ordination of the state and the country to substitute for Suharto's centralised dictatorship.

Corruption may thus be even more devastating than before, despite liberalisation.

When Suharto & Co. were in command they knew that they could not undermine the system by extracting too much but also had to nurture it. At present, the many competing bosses with their local and sectoral fiefdoms do not have the same capacity to co-ordinate and plan but have to take out as much as possible directly. This is no news for students of late developing countries,¹⁵ but even international economic and political experts might now become aware of it as Mancur Olson last grand theory also addresses the phenomena.(Olson 2000)

Moreover, while some export-oriented business is doing well, this is also where liberalisation enables domestic and international investors to avoid public and national responsibilities. The major and crisis ridden sectors, however, have become even more dependent on political and administrative patronage than before. The international banks will not pay and the domestic tycoons have escaped, so the huge losses have to be socialised. Sections of the economic and political elite fight about what companies and banks shall be saved, plundered and sold; and what parts of the administration and public sector that they shall gain control of. The most obvious central level cases relate to the Indonesian Bank Restructuring Agency, IBRA. Politicians and businessmen and officers and religious and ethnic leaders horse trade

and fight for services and financial back up. Independent experts of corruption say that corruption has become increasingly political.¹⁶ The unusually clean and skilled new minister in charge, Laksmana Sukardi, may do his best but as local bosses and business people cannot gain enough power anymore by relating to a supreme godfather, they rather have to act by themselves through combinations of various central and local sources, by competing for control of local government and administration, and by organising their own security and popular backup. So the increasingly localised struggles tend to take ugly proportions and to relate to ethnic and religious loyalties.¹⁷ In fact, the quite understandable attempts by pro-democrats to undermine previous authoritarian state structures, and the current international aid agency euphoria over decentralisation and civil society, may even make things worse – given the poor democratic institutions and the weak popular checks and balances.

So while the major part of business is as dependent on state and politics as ever, and really do need clear-cut and clean politics – politics remains corrupt. Not because it is inherently bad, but because business interests occupies and abuses it, both from within and from outside.

In fact, this symbiosis is also why the standard international recipe to negotiate pacts among the political elite¹⁸ – under the assumption that civil society and business can take care of themselves – is insufficient and out of context. Rather, there is an urgent need to go beyond the generalisation of prescriptions based on empirical generalisations from southern Europe and Latin America to be able to fully consider the more decisive role in Southeast Asia, among other late developing regions, of primitive accumulation of capital with extensive use of extra-economic force.¹⁹ The

new conservative pact under Megawati testifies to this. To be accepted, gain the presidency, and achieve some stability there was a need to re-unite much of the political-cum-military-cum-business interests and to abandon Gus Durs futile attempt to build an elitist liberal democratic pact while leaving the rest to civil society and private business. This, moreover, was backed up by a widespread populist-cum-semi-nationalist reaction (similar but not as strong as behind yesterdays Estrada or today's Thaksin); a backlash against the inability of the liberal recipes to build democracy against violence, to 'save' the domestic economy, to promote new growth and development, and to prevent the disintegration of the nation and the public administration.

Meanwhile, moreover, there was much more freedom and human rights under the Gus Dur presidency but no efficient way of reforming state and government, and of accommodating different interests, ideas and opposition. The political regime itself avoided the use of outright force, but sections of the military were not following suit, and violence was getting privatised, including in various militias and criminal gangs.²⁰ With the Megawati-pact, the situation has become tighter.

Finally, and perhaps most serious: the democracy movement is as weak as ever. While several activists have turned to party politics, many of them have been subordinated to vested interests and the need to bet on populist, religious and ethnic shortcuts to gain mass support. Meanwhile, numerous of their friends within the NGO sector compete over funding (domestic and international), continue to focus on single issues, and remain big-city-centred. The attempts to build popularly based organisations such as trade unions and parties with roots in different ideas and interests and firm local

presence are scattered and weak and not very popular among middle class activists and foreign donors. The student movement was united against Suharto, but unable to adjust to the electoral and parliamentary agenda. Hence it lost momentum and was divided between those who were for or against Gus Dur.

The major strategic propositions

So what could be done, beyond the immediate political quarrels? There are three major answers. The first is the ‘rule of law’ strategy by the ‘enlightened’ establishment. In accordance with major historians, their argument is that rule of law based institutions and governance are the prerequisites for sustainable economic and political development, including democracy.²¹ The only problem is, that when this constitutionalism does not precede popular sovereignty (as it did in the West, through rather authoritarian measures), we have either to say (like the supporters of the East Asian development state) that time is not yet ripe for democracy – or discuss what social, economic and political forces would simultaneously be able to enforce constitutionalism *and* democracy. And this is rarely done. Most of the proponents of rule of law and good governance²² talk at length of what should be done (and state that have nothing against democracy) but avoid the problem of who would be able to enforce and implement it all.

The second is, or at least was, the liberal argument. If there was a logic behind Gus Dur’s regime, I suggest it was to weaken the authoritarian state, the military, the old parties, and the politicised big business, since they were all seen as the root cause of the problems. But is the dynamics of authoritarianism the same as the institutions? Are states and parties always bad? Should they be ruled as informally and arbitrarily

as paternalistic but occasionally pluralistic NU- patriarchs handle their boarding schools? And what is the alternative? Some, like Gus Dur and his supporters, say civil society. But to the best of my knowledge, and with due respect to the many groups that have tried to strengthen civil society, there are less ready made ideal versions of civic associational life and self-government in Indonesia than of local fiefdoms and bosses, and ethnic and religious networks, and criminals and militias.

The third answer to what should be done is the human rights and pro-democracy position of the principled NGOs and some emerging popular organisations.

Democracy must be ‘consolidated’, they begin. There is a need for more consistent human rights, justice for the victims, and free and credible information. This is important as such, and necessary in order for people to participate. Furthermore, they add, people must be able to elect their own representatives, and the elite must be accountable to the public. This, it is argued, calls for the crafting of direct elections.

But what of realism? Truth, justice, and real human rights in Indonesia are up against the fundamental symbiosis of political and economic power and call for the organisation of massive counter movements – of which little is mentioned. And while the optimistic ‘direct elections’ proposition may undermine some of the current centralist and not very representative parties, it even neglects the fact that resourceful elite and boss politicians tend to take advantage of simple majority systems in one man constituencies, thus preventing the emergence of the much needed alternative and popularly rooted parties; as in the Philippines.

Towards a third way

For whatever they might be worth, my results indicate, instead, that there is a need to proceed along a third way, between determinism and idealism. This implies the specifying of the minimum material social, economic and political preconditions that must be promoted in addition to the current crafting of basic constitutional rights and institutional channels. Preconditions that are necessary in order for ordinary people to be able to use and improve the rights and institutions, and thus develop a substantial democracy. A substantial democracy which is no utopia but ‘only’ implies that the conventional rules of the game are both fair *and* applied to significant areas and issues and that all the players are both granted political equality *and* have an actual capacity to take part and win. A democracy, therefore, which is likely to make sense for most people concerned. Not because its outcome is always to their advantage. (The result is an open question and another matter, as long as the democratic fundamentals are not undermined.) A substantial democracy is likely to be meaningful (and solid) simply because the people at large (and not just the elite) has then both the possibility *and* the capacity to make use of and improve conventional democratic rights and channels in order to handle their problems – by influencing, controlling, and participating in equal, peaceful and significant government and administration of their societies.²³

How would it be possible to start identifying such minimum preconditions that should be added to the current crafting of minimum rights and institutions in order to promote a democracy that makes sense? What are the constitutional rights and institutional channels that must be both fair and applied? And what kind of rights, institutions and popular capacities are needed for people to be both equal and capable to take part and win? In other words, what are the kind of questions that we should ask to get a better understanding of what’s wrong with Indonesia’s democratisation?

While the democratic principles of popular control and political equality with regard to collective binding decisions constitute the aims of democracy and are universal, their substance and the means to implement them are not. Hence our questions should be thoroughly contextualised. But there is no mysterious cultural relativism involved. So for the lack of space (and to avoid unnecessary conflicts with fellow political scientists) let us only indicate what should be covered by drawing on the four basic criteria that have gained rather wide acceptance in the European discussion about ‘auditing democracy’. (Beetham 1999) Those criteria include the ‘conventional’ means to promote the democratic principles of popular control and political equality, some of the additional conditions that are necessary to enable people to make use of those instruments, and the specification of the quality and extent of it all.

There are three clusters of democratic means and four major factors to look out for. The first cluster is the institutional channels. On the one hand this includes ‘free and fair elections’ – to which we add their substance and scope. On the other hand it also consists of open and accountable government (politically, legally, and financially) – which require independent public knowledge, movement, organisation, and government responsiveness to public opinion. The second cluster of democratic means is made up of the conventional judicial, civil and political rights, including to what extent that they are real and useful for ordinary people. The third cluster is the set of additional societal conditions that help making the other factors real – including democratic governance of not just state and local governments but also the society at large (at least civic associations) to shape a democratic culture as well as basic needs, social and cultural rights, and education to make citizens reasonably self-confident.

Of course, Indonesia's new-born democracy does not play in the same league as the more mature ones. But while the quality may differ, the mechanisms and the rules of the game are the same. Moreover, the picture so far has been gloomy, and in the following pages I am afraid that will continue, but what we primarily are out for now is the dynamics – including of what could generate improvements. So if we ask the four simple and general questions above to the bulk of standard knowledge of the current situation in Indonesia,²⁴ what problems *and* options of democracy would then stand out as the most important?

Free, fair, and substantial elections?

The rather free and comparatively fair rules of the game in the June 1999 elections as such forced much of the elite to compete temporarily by mobilising votes rather than manipulating in closed circles and provoking religious and ethnic groups only. But the context was not so just and the substance was shallow. There was a lack of reasonably equal opportunities to make use of the political liberties and many fundamental problems continued to be swept under the carpet.

Several of the major conflicts and issues in Indonesia were not subject to debate. The parties and leaders did not have to declare their positions on them. The major economic crisis, for instance, and how it should be solved, was almost a non-issue. The same was true with regard to the many subordinated struggles over land, the regional grievances, the struggle in East Timor, the problems of human rights, and the need to sustain and further develop democracy. There is a long list.

Moreover, the elections did not produce a reasonable representation of various segments, interests and ideas among the population. There were no reformed elections on the very local level, in the villages and their urban equivalents, where most people have to handle their problems. (And the quality and character of the later on attempts at electing so-called village councils seem to depend on the local balance of power, which usually is in favour of the conventional elite.)²⁵ On the other levels, 7,6 % of the seats were reserved for the armed forces. One third of the delegates to thereafter elect a new president were not elected but appointed by the military and the political elite. Remarkably many seats were allotted to provinces where Golkar remained intact. Ex-communist parties were barred from taking part. Most important of all: local parties were also not allowed. Only already strong organisations – previously accepted parties or groups based on religious or ethnic or cultural loyalties – stood a real chance to win. Other preconditions were also unjust. Golkar and its associates could make good use of the state apparatuses and foreign funded credits for co-operatives and social safety net programmes. The foreign experts on the crafting of democracy focused on instant elections to appoint ‘legitimate leaders’. Support was limited to electoral arrangements, technical information, some limited voters education, and electoral watch efforts via a few NGOs. Critical voter education about the actual political forces involved was scarce. Promotion of democratic organisations among labourers, farmers, civil servants, and employees was almost absent. There was hardly any attempt to support new parties based on vital social and economic cleavages and interests and societal ideas beyond religious and ethnic loyalties.

In short, when people castled their vote, the probably most important problems facing Indonesia were non-issues. Reformed elections were not held on the very local level.

The military, the established elite, and the already strong parties or socio-religious organisations could monopolise the discourse and the competition for votes while the pro-democratic movement and the students in particular were marginalised. Local parties as well as new popular organisations and parties based on interests and societal ideas did not stand a chance. And this was all backed up by major foreign democracy-makers.

Open and accountable government?

Vital parts of the government and administration are non-operative. The government is only partially able to control the military and the police. The most clear-cut cases include the crises in East Timor, the Moluccas, and Aceh, and the recent clashes in Kalimantan. Numerous reports indicate that similar problems are widespread within the civil administration – including in relation to the current efforts at decentralisation.

Meanwhile the government and administration remain comparatively closed. It is true that the coherent centralisation of power during the Suharto regime is no more and that much more power is now localised. But on the different levels, access is still through limited circles among increasingly rival fractions of the political elite.²⁶ This is enhanced by the fact that the elite itself has few organised links with the masses beyond socio-religious, ethnic, and generally cultural-cum-nationalist populist movements. Such links with the masses, therefore, have become increasingly important when the elite cannot anymore rely on close connections with influential top-rulers only but must also anchor and legitimate their positions in much wider circles. Worse: the middle class and intellectual reformers who lack even such association with the masses must either relate to leaders with a following or turn to

closer contacts and manipulation within limited circles, including with foreign support.

The established parties are very much dominated by the elite on various levels. Ordinary people may relate to them but can hardly change them. In this respect, even the most ambitious attempt to form a secular, inclusive and democratic new party, PAN, has collapsed and resorted to its partly non-plural socio-religious pillar. Worse: there are only weak alternative pressure groups and interest based organisations. It is true that several NGOs have emerged over the years, but generally speaking they remain urban student and middle class phenomena. There are still very few examples of forceful attempts at making use of the new liberties to go from elitist foundations to mass-based organisations. The attempts at building outright popular movements and organisations from below, such as trade unions or peasant leagues, remain limited, scattered and often dependent upon links with patrons within the elite, foreign donors, and the dominant socio-religious and cultural streams. The huge mass organisations that emerged during many and hard years of struggle for independence and freedom are way past and gone – and were followed by more than thirty years of authoritarian ‘floating mass politics’.

These problems are aggravated by the lack of formally institutionalised alternative channels of influence within the political system. Beyond the elections, with all its limitations, and the possibility, at best, to ask for a dialogue with elected leaders or civil servants, there are few other ways of making a difference than to turn to informal contacts and networks or outright pressure politics by using one's social or religious or economic or military resources, or take to the streets.

One of the great improvements after Suharto, and one of the most important factors that contributed to his fall, has been the development of a public space via various open and underground communication and media. During the anti-authoritarian struggle, this was fairly self-regulated by committed democrats. Their main drawback was their limited contacts beyond the urban students and middle class. Now, however, it is free for all, including for all kinds of speculation and provocation. Hundreds of flowers blossom, but the weeds are rapidly taking over, headed by the resourceful media houses, several of which are economically dependent on the old guard, including the Suharto family. These business houses, moreover, seem to be the only ones that are capable of filling up the new local spaces created by the fall of the centralised regime and the rather unorganised decentralisation. Some committed journalists try to put up a fight by forming their own organisations and media, but it is an uphill battle.

More remarkable: most foreign promotion of open and accountable government is neither organised and carried out in accordance with this principle nor based on the universal experience that broad popular organisation is needed to demand and uphold such principles. Various watch and lobby groups are supported, but organising with a mass base is usually avoided. The international NGO- as well as multi- and bilateral government support may partly be open and accountable to the donors but rarely to those who matter most, and are supposed to both receive funds and get a share of good experiences, the Indonesian population. Some handling agencies may include Indonesians, but how are they selected? On the basis of what criteria do these persons in turn select projects? And to whom are they accountable? There is risk that a virtual

‘democracy-industry’ emerges among donors and well as recipients. And as the selection of persons and projects is often related to previous individual contacts, such as education in the donor country and socialisation in international NGOs and organisations, the (usually very nice and sharp) actors tend to belong to various factions of the intellectual, administrative and cosmopolitan city elite that survived Suharto’s repression and have their roots in the old PSI-cum-Masjumi networks.

Real judicial, civil and political rights?

On the one hand, the judicial system is in shambles and deeply affected by corruption. Not even the most obvious and top-level cases against members of the Suharto family have been possible to carry out. On the very grass-roots level, many people feel that they have to take the law into their own hands, regularly as well in individual cases of threats and theft. Resourceful people and companies opt for private solutions in terms of sponsoring sections of the official security apparatuses and various militias, employing their own security guards, or simply paying for Mafia-like ‘protection’.

On the other hand, and as previously indicated, the primary and impressive achievement since mid-1998 is the liberalisation of civil and political life. Several civil society organisations among journalists and human rights activists as well as students continue to play an important role. Aside from Gus Dur’s attempts at undermining the parliament by way of emergency legislations (resembling Sukarno's guided democracy thinking in the late-50’s), his regime also fought hard to defend and improve the new freedoms and rights, as well as the possibility to substitute political negotiations for repression, against the major parts of the armed forces, different extreme groups, as well as more compromising actors in parliament and his

own administration. However, human rights are far from real. Suharto has stepped aside and the military has lost some powers but political violence survives – increasingly privatised and horizontal rather than statist and top down mainly. At the time of writing, most analysts seem to agree that the social and political disintegration of Indonesia paves the way for more harsh populist-nationalist measures by the Megawati regime, with the support of the military and at times less plural (and often statist) Muslim groups than those who were behind Gus Dur.

In terms of the roots of these problems, Indonesia calls to mind Germany after the Holocaust, and still more so South Africa before it settled account with apartheid. There is a tendency to overlook the quests for trust and justice and give priority to unspecified reconciliation. But the major problem is not so much to find ways in which neighbours or members of different ethnic or religions groups can live with each other as equal citizens. The problem is rather that they must first be reasonably equal citizens. Hence, of course, basic minority rights, and probably reservations and perhaps even quotas, for instance, (like in India) must be regulated and institutionalised. But even before that, one has to come to terms with the political and economic instigation and exploitation of communalism, and the massive acts of violence and repression that have boosted conflicts in the first place. The victims and subordinated citizens have no reason to reconcile with these mechanisms and vested interests. Truth and justice cannot be repressed but must come first, if reconciliation between equal citizens and a reasonably functioning democratic society shall be possible.

Moreover, there is a tendency to focus on the violence against the supporters of the post-Suharto leaders, such as various Muslim groups and different factions in the Moluccas or Kalimantan. But actually, the violence and repression and sponsoring of militias and communal conflicts have long historical roots and became established state policy during the massacres of 1965-66. Thus it continued, not just in East Timor or Aceh. And thus it then turned more localised, as in the Moluccas or Kalimantan, when a central godfather was no longer able to master much of it all.²⁷ So the importance of returning to the earlier catastrophes is not limited to finding out what happened, and to rehabilitate and compensate millions of individuals, but that people in general (in addition to students and other educated and reasonably independent parts of the middle class) may get rid of their fear, resurrect history,²⁸ and get a real chance to organise themselves independently. And that, of course, calls for much more massive popular organising, pressure, and education than the current individual and NGO-based networks, advocacy, information, and lobbying.

Towards a democratic society?

Finally, this relates to more general but necessary prerequisites in terms of a reasonably democratic culture based on the combination of, on the one hand, social and cultural rights (including of minorities) and, on the other, equal citizenship and open and free and plural education and discourse which is not limited to a few students, intellectuals, and reasonably independent professionals. There are improvements (including with regard to the Chinese). And the role of citizen-oriented Muslim reform movement in fighting both Suharto's authoritarian rule and non-plural religious streams has been of vital importance, effectively reputing Huntington's thesis that Islamic culture is incompatible with democratisation. (Hefner 2000)

Generally speaking, however, the problems are severe after decades of massive subordination, falsification of history (including of the struggle for freedom of democracy as part of the modern nation state project) and Suharto's promotion of feudal-like and authoritarian elements of Javanese values and customs. Moreover, much of the vulnerable majority of the population may not have been able to benefit from the new freedoms but may rather have been forced to set aside whatever potentially independent views of their own to be able to relate to patrons, bosses, ethnic and religious networks to find ways of surviving the economic and social crisis. The authoritarian milieu, finally, has even influenced the pro-democracy movement. Most organisations remain liberal oases but continue to suffer from the lack of solid democratic practices and the primary need to find strong and influential leaders with access to funding rather than to serve and uphold unity among members and followers – a phenomenon which in turn sustain elitist quarrels and divisions.

Conclusion

So what is wrong, then, with Indonesia's democratisation? Let us make a brief summary and draw the general conclusions. It was not the development of modernisation but a political crisis of despotic liberalism that gave birth to Indonesia's new democracy. Hence, the institutions crumbled and there were few independent and forceful actors that could take command and propel change; economically, administratively, politically. While the determinists were right in stressing the insufficient preconditions for democracy, the idealists had a point in saying that one should not miss the chance to promote it. But to craft democracy by only betting on elementary civil and political rights plus elections within a vacuum of supportive mechanisms, forces and organisations was doomed to fail. The country's

most severe problems turned non-issues in elections that avoided the very local level. Only the military, political and religious elite with old organisations and loyalties stood a chance. Aside from informal contacts and networks, much of state and politics remains closed for those who thus lost out, and has turned non-operative and disintegrated in the process of fragmentation and localisation of power. Instead, boss politicians are on the rise – brokering religious and ethnic leaders with mass following, businessmen and administrators with resources, and military and militias with weapons. While city-based pro-democratic NGOs are (rather) well funded but marginalised, the new attempts at popular organisations and parties are poor and fragmented. Beyond the limited elections, there are few chances for people to influence the system other than to return to informal contacts or resort to pressure politics. The decisive public sphere that had evolved among pro-democrats rarely expanded locally and to ordinary people. With liberalisation, speculative media has instead filled the empty spaces. Foreign support for open and accountable government is usually non-transparent and unaccountable to the Indonesian population, and limited to urban elite circles with good international connections. The judicial system is in shambles and deeply affected by corruption. Poor people try at times to take the law into their own hands while the more resourceful citizens may buy their way out or pay for protection. The vital liberalisation of civil and political life remains of limited significance for major parts of the population. Political violence is localised, semi-privatised, and nourished by instigation and manipulation of ethnic and religious loyalties. The lack of social and cultural rights is part of the problem. This became established state policy already during the massacres in the mid-60s but is no longer mastered by a supreme godfather. Truth and justice is a precondition for reconciliation but primarily remain a topic for NGO seminars. The

elements of a democratic culture, and the interest and ideology-based popular organising that grew out of the struggle for freedom and national liberation have been thoroughly undermined by decades of ‘floating mass politics’ and boosting of feudal-like customs. In fact it has even affected the pro-democracy movement which continue to suffer from divisive elitism while many people have to weather the crisis before they can make use of the new democratic options.

So the picture is quite clear. There are important freedoms, but the judicial, civil and democratic rights as well as the institutional channels are poor, often malfunctioning, and usually difficult for ordinary people to make use of. The politically marginalised but resourceful elite would probably have turned to non-democratic methods anyway. But what is really wrong with Indonesia’s democratisation is that it does not make much sense even to its major potential pro-democratic force – the people at large – as a way of promoting ideas and interests and agree with others on how to handle issues of mutual concern. Rather they usually have to find non-democratic and anti-democratic methods and avenues. For instance, they have to pay or bargain for protection and influential positions and contacts within administration, government and elite circles as well as ethnic and religious networks. And if nothing helps, they may have to take to the streets or end up burning down a police station.

The obvious solution, then, is the need to start from the point of view of these people and support processes and attempts among them at making democratic government of vital sectors of society accessible and meaningful. The fashionable counter-argument is that such efforts are naive and almost ridiculous. Since patrimonial cultures and systems are so old and strong that they will capture whatever element of democracy

that is introduced.²⁹ But the role and importance of these elements of patrimonialism and clientelism rarely have that deep and strong roots.³⁰ In Indonesia, they primarily gained importance as a result of the authoritarian rule and exploitation from the late 50s and onwards. So if one focuses on that enemy – not some seemingly irrevocable cultural traits – the favouring of democracy cease to be impossible. Of course, however, that calls for more than idealistic promotion of shallow rights and election packages. Rather one must focus exactly on how it would be possible for common people to make use of democracy under specific conditions and opportunities in various settings. What are their capacities and opportunities? How can people improve them? How can they make use of rights and institutional channels? How could these in turn be altered in favour of people's chances to use them?

Among the key areas of concern that stand out from this brief essay are the rise of interest and ideology based popular movements, organisations and parties, as well as mass based campaigns for truth, justice, and the rewriting of history; which would also promote popular education. For one example only, pro-democrats might wish to consider giving more emphasis to local level actions and public discourse, including demanding legal changes that would enable new pro-democratic parties to emerge locally, from the grass roots. Otherwise even the best of local reformation committees or action groups would be captured by the few 'national' big parties and politicians, or turned into pressure and lobby groups that at worst would not even bother about democracy. Further the activists might also wish to modify their campaign for simple majority elections in one-man constituencies. Without proportional representation of some kind, it might not just be difficult to govern democratically a diverse society but more importantly: the chances for new alternative parties to emerge are very slim

while resourceful local bosses tend to benefit.³¹ The uphill struggle for new popular rooted politics in the Philippines is a decisive lesson to learn.

In short, the quick crafting of instant democracy in Indonesia has failed. To prevent collapse and move ahead there is an urgent need for a third path between determinism and idealism; a third path that aim at substantial democratisation by promoting citizen's actual capacity to make use of and further improve judicial, civil and democratic rights as well as institutional channels. One of the main puzzles to me is why in a case like Indonesia northern Europeans, for instance, come down so floppily, and suppress their own experiences of the need for social and economic preconditions and popular organising in processes of democratisation, in face of the predominant ambivalence between elitist modernisation and equally elitist but idealistic betting on shallow rights and election packages.

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¹ For instance, this was even upheld as late a few months before the economic crisis in the attempt at a compromise in World Bank (1997).

² At first hand Friedman (1994) and Bell et.al. (1995).

³ C.f. Bello & Rosenfeld (1992)

⁴ The standard works include O'Donnell & Schmitter (1996), Linz & Stefan (1996) and Bratton & Van de Walle (1997).

⁵ For a recent mainstream standardwork on the problems of consolidation, see Diamond (1999); for a recent general critique of the shallow processes of democratisation, see e.g. Gill (2000), for two different critical perspectives on the transitions in Africa, see Chabal & Daloz (1999) and Abrahamsen (2000.)

⁶ Like previous first National Democratic Front and then Popular Democracy leaders Horacio 'Boy' Morales (Estrada's Agrarian Reform Secretary) and Edicio de la Torre (in charge of Estrada's popular education and major ideologue of his mass mobilisation), with their various NGO-backups (PRRM and ELF respectively).

⁷ These studies are based on previous research (cf. Törnquist (1984, 1989, 1991a, 1991b), news clippings, and continuous interviews with key informants and leaders – initially about 50 in each context, then several others – (plus informal documents) during recurring field visits. The first rounds of case-studies are published [see at first hand Törnquist (1993, 1996, 1997, 1998a)]. The follow-up studies – of the People's Campaign in Kerala and the collapse of the New Order regime in Indonesia – are partly published, see e.g. Törnquist (2000a) and, for Indonesia, (2000b). For the general perspective, see Törnquist (1999) or (1998b) and (2001b). A concluding comparative book is forthcoming. A tentative summary of the main arguments are in a longer essay commissioned by UNRISD and forthcoming in early 2002 from the Centre for Development and Environment, University of Oslo, available then at <http://www.sum.uio.no/publications/index.html>. I am also drawing on the ongoing project on and with the democracy movement, in co-operation with Arief Budiman and ISAI, (The Institute for Studies of Free Flow of Information). Cf. Budiman&Törnquist (2001). Readers with specific queries are welcome to contact >olle.tornquist@stv.uio.no<. The research is financed by Oslo University and SAREC, the department for research-cooperation within SIDA, The Swedish International Development Authority.

⁸ *Jakarta Post*, 23 November 1999 and *Washington Post*, 2 March, 2001 respectively. For similar arguments with regard to the previous developmental states, see eg. Wade (1990).

⁹ *Jakarta Post*, May 15, 2001.

¹⁰ Even though Hefner's (2000) fine study also calls for more critical perspectives of 'smiling Islam'.

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- ¹¹ For the recent period, cf., for instance, Gill
- ¹² Cf. Rudebeck (1992), Mohanty & Mukherji with Törnquist (1998) and Rudebeck & Törnquist with Rojas (1996).
- ¹³ For an extended argument and references, see Törnquist (2001a). Let me emphasise in particular Robison et.al (2000) and let me add here Haggard (2000), Pempel (1999) and Khan and Sundaram (2000)
- ¹⁴ On the mid-1996 crackdown as a moment of transparency that pointed to the forthcoming crisis, see Törnquist (1996a).
- ¹⁵ Cf. McIntyre (2000).
- ¹⁶ See e.g. Teten Masduki of Indonesia Corruption Watch (ICW) in *Jakarta Post* December 30, 2000, June 6, 2001, and *Laksmana Net* January 23, 2001, plus George Aditjondro (2000)
- ¹⁷ The best studies of the character of the political violence include those in Wessel & Wimhöfer (2001) and Colombijn et.al (2002) plus Nordholt (2000), van Klinken (2001), and Robinson (2001) Cf. also Törnquist (2000c).
- ¹⁸ Based on the grand research programmes such as those led by O'Donnell & Schmitter (see e.g. 1986) and Linz & Stephan (see e.g. 1996) and Huntington (1991).
- ¹⁹ For a recent stimulating attempt in this direction, see Sidel (1999). Cf. Törnquist (1989, 1991a and 2002).
- ²⁰ See fn. 17.
- ²¹ Good historians such as North (1989, 1990, 1993) and especially the World Bank (1997).
- ²² Including the World Bank (1997).
- ²³ For further elaborations of the concepts above and below related to substantial democracy, see Törnquist (2002).
- ²⁴ Hence, for lack of time and space, references are only included when the text is not covered by fn. 7 and where there is a need for specific directions.
- ²⁵ Cf. e.g. Antlöv (2001)
- ²⁶ Cf. e.g. Sidel (1998).
- ²⁷ See fn. 17.
- ²⁸ For a fine discussion of this problem see van Klinken (2001b)
- ²⁹ For one of the currently most forceful argument in this jangre, see Chabal & Daloz (1999).
- ³⁰ For one of the most exciting argument in this respect, see Hansen's (1999) fine analysis of the saffron wave in India.
- ³¹ For a breif review of the pros and cons of different electoral systems, see Beetham (1999) ch.9.