

Contribution to “Through the northern Eyes: Indonesia in the perspectives of Norwegian”
University of Oslo May 31, 2022

Historical legacies: What Indonesia has overcome in its transition from authoritarian to more democratic rule, and what should now be done.

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In early April, when the Covid restrictions were relaxed in Indonesia, I could finally revisit parts of the country, and share the conclusions in my endbook *In Search of New Social Democracy: Insights from the South - Implications for the North* (Zed-Bloomsbury) in a series of discussions on the ground. The book is primarily based on studies during half a decade of Indonesia – in comparison in the South with India and the Philippines, and to some degree South Africa and Brazil, and in the North with Scandinavia.

It was touching to be present when several friends, colleagues, union leaders, civil society activists and students whom I have worked with over the years could meet again.

Indonesia is of course one of the countries hard hit by both Covid-19 and by political contingency measures that have prevented popular protests. Including against a general so called omnibus law to attract investment at the expense of labour and the environment. It is true that there is now cautious optimism that it will be possible to stop the campaign by the establishment and President Jokowi’s fan club to postpone the 2024 elections and let him remain in office, even though he has then completed his maximum two terms. But there are growing worries among scholars, activists, and commentators that the basic elements of democracy are regressing, especially the freedoms and rights.

I would argue, however, that the restrictions of freedoms and rights and the increasing police brutality are so far less serious than the weakening of social and trade union movements, and that there is still no organised political alternative. All parties in parliament are governed by political and religious elites and oligarchs. In addition, Jokowi has included most of them in his government, served by several generals, academics, and former NGO leaders. Jokowi's compromising and accommodating of almost everyone who matters

continue to be so successful that neither the ruling elite nor the more religiously oriented leaders have until the time of writing come up with strong presidential candidates for the next election. Not to mention the lack of a real alternative for the progressive groups.

How could things go so wrong in the new democracy that in 1998 replaced dictator Suharto and was long considered unusually liberal and successful? In view of my retrospective analyses, the problems began in the late fifties when both the left and the liberals gave up the successful democratisation after independence in favour of left-wing populist "guided democracy" and US and military supported "politics of order".

After the massacres of 1965/66 and thirty years of Suharto's ban on independent organisation, there was no longer any dormant popular movement that could be revitalised and build democracy from below.

In addition, as in most parts of the Global South, industrialisation was so weak that it was not possible to build a broad labour movement only through trade union organisation in companies. Wider fronts were needed with social movements and civil society organisations among students, farmers, fishermen, informally hired workers and the poor without employment at all, plus among the growing number of educated people who were forced into freelance work. But uniting the different organisations based on their specific interests in various local contexts proved impossible.

In addition, the powerful elites were persuaded to accept formal democracy in exchange for retaining their wealth, being able to privatise the public assets they controlled, and deciding on their own on the new rules of the game. In this way, it became almost impossible for fledgling popular movements and civil society groups to influence politics and build their own parties that could participate in elections.

The positive opening that eventually came about was instead associated with decentralisation, direct local elections and the then mayor Jokowi's populist discussions with the poor people's organisations about tolerable conditions for them in the city of Solo in Central Java. This was in exchange for businessmen and the middle class being able to "clean up" and modernise the city. The same idea was applied (albeit with growing problems) during his time as governor of Jakarta and in the 2014 presidential election. At the same time, several local politicians gained extra votes by informally promising union leaders to increase the regional minimum wages.

Most importantly, however, it proved possible in 2010-11 to form a successful broad alliance with progressive politicians, trade unions, organisations among the urban poor and domestic workers but also the middle classes, in favour of a national and universal public health reform. This was obviously the way forward, and similar signs could be registered in other contexts that I compare in my book.

The only problem was that the progress was temporary. Following the victory in Indonesia with the public health reform, trade unions and civil society groups returned to their fragmented priorities and horse-trading with individual politicians. In two presidential elections, even the leader of the strongest metalworkers' union, Said Iqbal, signed a pact with Suharto's former son-in-law, the general and oligarch Prabowo Subianto.

Fortunately Prabowo lost, but the nascent social-democratic popular movement disintegrated. Hence it could not influence and defend President Jokowi and his main partner Basuki 'Ahok' Tjahaja Purnama. So, Jokowi choose to compromise with the political elite, religious leaders, oligarchs, and generals. Including Prabowo, now the Minister of Defence.

When this was discussed in several book-seminars and informal conversations, most participants agreed that progressive experts must help the popular movements to work out a *series* of reform proposals. Citizen-rights based reform proposals that the various movements and leaders can come together to further develop and campaign in favour of. Iqbal, recently having formed a new workers' party, nodded too.

In addition, the reforms must prescribe popular participation and negotiations between the government and stakeholders, much as we have experience of in Scandinavia. This is partly to counteract unrealistic direct contacts between "strong leaders" and the "people" that lead to division and horse trading in Indonesia. It is also to enable broad agreements (with production-oriented employers too) on economic development based on education and welfare reforms that has so far been unfeasible in Indonesia.

If the activists could mobilise popular support for such a platform of reforms and democratic partnership, it would be possible to encourage both parties and presidential candidates to support the reforms instead of agreeing on transactions in their own interests behind closed doors.

To initiate the work on such platform it is necessary to review previous research and experiences. One suggestion was that the Norwegian and

Swedish governments along with their Indonesian counterpart and, most importantly, academia should follow up their previous joint engagements in Indonesian studies of democratisation¹ by facilitating international dialogues to review research and experiences of productive labour- and welfare reforms that are governed by way democratic partnership. This would be much like the previous dialogues on human rights, though this time primarily between scholars and civil society- and interest-organisation-experts. In short: Democratic Welfare Reform Dialogues.

¹ For a brief summary of that research, see Törnquist, O. 'The Downside of Indonesia's Successful Liberal Democratisation and the Way Ahead. Notes from the Participatory Surveys and Case Studies 2000-2016', *Journal of Current Southeast Asian Affairs*, 1/2017. See also the report from the joint programme's concluding conference, <https://olle-tornquist.com/16/3-Full-report-from-concluding-PWD-conference-2018.pdf>