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### Indonesia: Twenty years of democracy by Jamie S. Davidson [Book review]

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**Indonesia: Twenty years of democracy By JAMIE S. DAVIDSON Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018. Pp. 76. Bibliography, Footnotes. doi:10.1017/S0022463420000569**

In 1998, Soeharto resigned. After 32 years of authoritarian rule, Indonesia's transition to democracy had begun. During that tumultuous period, there were plenty of reasons to expect that the transition would fail. The country was emerging from a long history of authoritarianism; the economy was devastated by the Asian financial crisis; and religious, ethnic and communal conflicts raged across the archipelago. But democracy did prevail.

In *Indonesia: Twenty years of democracy*, Jamie S. Davidson looks back over the two decades since Soeharto's fall, focusing on the 'tensions, inconsistencies, and contradictory puzzles of Indonesia's democracy' (p. 4). Refreshingly, the book moves beyond the common approach of studying the similarities and differences between the contemporary democratic period and the Soeharto era. Davidson identifies, labels and skilfully guides the reader through three separate eras in Indonesia's recent democratic history: the innovation period (1998–2004), the stagnation period (2004–14) and the period of polarisation (2014–18). Each era is analysed in parallel fashion, with subsections on politics, political economy and identity-based mobilisation. As such, the book offers a clear structure and, drawing on a wealth of academic research on Indonesia, packs a vast breadth of knowledge into a concise volume.

Chapter 2 describes 1998–2004, the innovation period, as 'a time of uncertainty, ferment, hope, and despair' (p. 7). The first free and fair elections since 1955 were held, and reforms were introduced to decentralise governance. On the economic front, the International Monetary Fund pried open a partially protected economy with pro-market policies and the privatisation of state assets, while in the Outer Islands economic decentralisation resulted in rampant exploitation of natural resources. In terms of identity-based mobilisation, three minorities who sought to advance their interests in an uncertain environment are discussed: conservative Muslims, ethnic Chinese and Outer-Island indigenous people. Although democracy did prevail during this period, Davidson reminds us that it was highly and often violently contested, and did not automatically lead to economic development or equality.

Compared to these heady years, chapter 3 describes 2004–14 as a period of stagnation. During the two terms of President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono, reforms ground to a halt and opportunities for economic development and infrastructure investment were squandered. In addition, old problems, such as corruption, inequality, inadequate public security and attacks on minorities, persisted. Davidson observes that Yudhoyono was a victim of high expectations and the complacency that came with a commodity boom. Ultimately, though, Yudhoyono prioritised stability and preserving the status quo over further democratic reforms. In this respect, Davidson offers us a sober account of Indonesia's development, acknowledging the successes but also the lost opportunities.

Chapter 4 (2014–18) deals with increasing polarisation between a resurgent political Islam on one side and democratic pluralism on the other. It discusses the rise of an outsider and pluralist, Joko Widodo, to the presidency; his rival Prabowo Subianto, a strongman with authoritarian tendencies; the invigorated political Islam movement; and the large and violent rallies surrounding the gubernatorial election in Jakarta. Although Davidson praises Widodo's efforts to update Indonesia's dilapidated infrastructure through state-led development (a shift from Yudhoyono's public-private partnership approach), he laments that Widodo has responded with either inaction or repressive measures to the growing intolerance that threatens religious and other minorities.

The concluding chapter poses the big question in Indonesian politics today: how durable is Indonesia's democracy and which group might bring it down? Davidson singles out Islamic nationalism as the largest threat, largely because it is rooted in ideology. However, this movement would need to form some sort of authoritarian pact with other actors to undo democracy. Davidson considers such a possibility unlikely. Other strategic groups, such as the oligarchs, the military and particularly the political parties, have a lot to lose by yielding to antidemocratic forces.

I think that other factors beyond those mentioned by Davidson may also prevent a durable authoritarian pact from forming. First, the trend of incorporating support for Islam into the platform of nationalist parties may represent a compromise that would satisfy most moderate Muslims. In elections, these nationalist-religious parties have performed much better than the Islamic parties. Second, due to decentralisation, much governance and political competition occur at the local (district) level. Here, elections are largely based on candidates' personalities and patronage rather than on party or ideological cleavages. At this level, national divisions that foster polarisation are less relevant.

Taking a comparative perspective, the book compares Indonesia with its Southeast Asian neighbours, Turkey (the other model of Muslim democracy) and the Arab Spring countries. Compared to these benchmarks, Indonesia stands out as performing admirably in terms of free and fair elections, press freedom and restraints on state-led violence. However, Davidson also highlights the serious contemporary challenges Indonesia faces, and will likely continue to face, during its next 20 years. He describes how state institutions and elections are riddled with corruption and money politics; the slowness of poverty alleviation and job creation efforts; and how growing sectarianism threatens civil rights and minorities.

Overall, Davidson's highly accessible book provides an excellent introduction to the politics and political economy of Indonesia, as well as the key contemporary debates. It is a must read for anyone wanting to understand democratic development in one of the world's largest and most dynamic countries.

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