

# 1.8. Yanwar Pribadi Book Review SEAR Volume 29 Issue 2 2021.pdf

*by Yanwar Pribadi*

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The 2018 and 2019 Indonesian elections: identity politics and regional perspectives

edited by Leonard C. Sebastian and Alexander R. Arifianto, London and New York, Routledge, 2021, xvi + 204 pp., £120.00 (cloth), ISBN: 978-0-367-46780-7

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competing legal discourses that were invoked. Ahok's lawyers based their 634-page Notice of Defence on a liberal democratic construction of human rights law and maintained that Ahok had not exhibited intent to blaspheme as required by article 156a of the Criminal Code. What is interesting, albeit depressing, to read, is Peterson's analysis of how the court addressed the question of intent and reasoned that Ahok, as a public official, should have known better than to provide public comment on religion, much less connect a Qur'anic verse to words with negative connotations. Strikingly, the court did not acknowledge any of the human rights-based legal arguments submitted by the defence, which leads Peterson to conclude that the court was sympathetic to an 'Islamist majoritarian' construction of human rights law. The many procedural irregularities also lead him to suggest that this was a show trial.

A key issue running through the book is how the Indonesian legal system reconciles state criminal law with Islamic opinions. This issue is revisited in Chapter 7, where Peterson argues that improved levels of 'legal literacy' among law enforcement officials and the judiciary are needed for Indonesia to realize 'its constitutional aspiration of being a *negara hukum* (law state)' (203). Among other things, this would require law enforcement officials and judges to stop treating MUI-issued edicts as if they were a source of positive law. It is easy to agree that MUI's current position as an arbiter of Islamic orthodoxy is highly problematic. However, I missed a more substantial discussion of how the practice of what Melissa Crouch has termed 'religious deference' relates to the issue of legal pluralism, an issue that is barely mentioned in this book. Although the Blasphemy Law has survived three Constitutional Court challenges, I was surprised that Peterson ends his book by identifying ways to salvage aspects of this problematic law, effectively suggesting that it can be applied if the prosecution finds that someone has purposefully intended to antagonize or insult a religion followed in Indonesia. In light of recent trends, it seems more important to call for wider scope for criticism of religious ideas and authorities. Despite this criticism, this book easily qualifies as the most comprehensive analysis of the Ahok trial to date, and one hopes that it will be translated into Indonesian since its findings are highly relevant for Indonesian legal reform and will be of interest to anyone who is interested in the tangled relationship between law and religion.

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**The 2018 and 2019 Indonesian elections: identity politics and regional perspectives**, edited by Leonard C. Sebastian and Alexander R. Arifanto, London and New York, Routledge, 2021, xvi + 204 pp., £120.00 (cloth), ISBN: 978-0-367-46780-7

By focusing on identity politics, this volume emphasizes the processes of power, alliances, competitions, accommodations, negotiations and claims that politicians used in the 2018 simultaneous regional head elections and the 2019 Indonesian national election to attain or reaffirm power. As vibrant Islamic ways of life have become increasingly conspicuous, the widespread use of identity politics has been seen to entangle communal piety, religious commodification, Islamic populism and Islamism in Indonesia. Indeed, as a Muslim-majority

country, it is not striking that religion acts as a <sup>7</sup> **determinant of political identity, a focus of loyalty and a source of authority** there (Vatikiotis 1991). In this regard, Leonard C. Sebastian and Alexander R. Arifianto's edited volume, a book based on a research project at the Indonesia programme of the S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies (RSIS), Nanyang Technological University, is a welcome addition to literature on electoral politics, political Islam, and democratization and decentralization in Indonesia.

The central theme of this collection of nine scholarly essays, with an introduction and conclusion, is to investigate the saliency of identity politics during the 2018/2019 elections in eight key regions throughout Indonesia. In addition, the volume explores the relations between identity politics and local historical legacies, socio-political and demographic variables within these regions in the elections. The regions the authors probe are the three most populous provinces in Indonesia (West Java, East Java and Central Java, respectively), two provinces in Sumatra (North Sumatra and West Sumatra), South Sulawesi, West Kalimantan and East Nusa Tenggara. The volume's authors show that in the presidential and many gubernatorial elections, the role of identity politics was significant. However, the role was less significant in elections for regents and mayors, as well as in national and regional legislative elections. The editors argue that instead of identity politics, these latter elections tended to be mired in historical grievances between different ethno-religious groups. Candidates were tied to local networks, often based on patron–client relations with key local politicians and power brokers (3).

The volume is loaded with fascinating case studies. Together, they reveal that the use of identity politics during the elections has made the Indonesian electoral system increasingly fragile. The editors define identity politics as 'any political act that utilizes rhetoric, images, metaphors, and symbols meant to portray members of ethnic and/or religious groups in a negative manner' (3). The individual chapters detail the investigation within various fields – politics, Islamic studies, sociology, and anthropology – conducted by each author. They study and analyse the historical background of electoral politics in each of the provinces; the relationship between regional head candidates and political parties; identity politics at the regional level; and implications of the election results on the future of Indonesian politics.

Chapter 2 by James Guild examines President Joko Widodo's (known as Jokowi) developmentalist economic policy and how it impacted the 2018/2019 elections. Guild shows that strong economic performance does not necessarily translate into electoral success when demographics and political coalitions are not conducive (31). In Chapter 3, Keoni Marzuki and Chaula R. Anindya discuss the national and regional elections in West Java. They reveal that Islam stands out as the most important consideration in voter choice, due to the larger number of religiously conservative voters (34). Alexander R. Arifianto explores national and regional elections in East Java in Chapter 4. He asserts that the East Java gubernatorial and presidential election campaigns are two different species, particularly in terms of the level of identity politics used in the two campaigns: the gubernatorial campaign was relatively free from identity-based 'dark' campaigning, while the presidential election campaign saw the heavy use of identity politics against Jokowi Widodo, who was portrayed as lacking Islamic credentials (71–72).

Syafiq Hasyim highlights election results in Central Java in Chapter 5. Applying the categorization of streams (*aliran*) by Clifford Geertz, Hasyim argues that PDI-P remains very strong in the *abangan* zone in Central Java, while Islamic parties, for instance PPP, PKB and PKS, remain strong in their *santri* zones (85–86). In Chapter 6, Tiola and Adhi Primarizki investigate national and regional elections in North Sumatra. They indicate that identity politics were used by all candidates to determine certain electoral outcomes in the 2018 simultaneous regional elections and the 2019 presidential elections. Moreover, specific forms of



identity politics that were utilized during the regional elections were replicated in the presidential elections (91).

Chapter 7 by Adri Wanto and Leonard C. Sebastian delineates national and regional elections in West Sumatra. The authors identify key factors why that province had the lowest number of votes for Jokowi in the 2014 and 2019 presidential elections. They argue that the role of historical narratives, ethnicity and religion in the identity formation of the West Sumatran people influenced people's perception of the presidential candidates during both elections (110).

In Chapter 8, Dedi Dinarto and Andar Nubowo analyse national and regional elections in South Sulawesi. They maintain that South Sulawesi provides important insights, including the decline of Jusuf Kalla's (Indonesia's vice president for the periods of 2004–2009 and 2014–2019) influence in the province, the problem of coordination from both Jokowi's and Prabowo's campaign team, and the role of Islamic groups in mobilizing voters (129). Jonathan Chen covers national and regional elections in West Kalimantan. He points out that West Kalimantan's vastness and its ethnic heterogeneity and fault lines have come to define identity politics and how it is conducted in the province, particularly with respect to ethnic and political polarization (145). Lastly, Chapter 10 covers national and regional election dynamics in East Nusa Tenggara, particularly in Sumba. The author, Chris Lundry, brings to the fore the conditions whereby 95% of the Sumbanese electorate voted for Jokowi in 2019. He suggests that Sumbanese people have little hope for much significant representation on the national or provincial scale, yet the history and the role of party politics influence their voting behaviour. Meanwhile, for the district-level elections, a mixture of tradition, caste, religion and party creates a unique dynamic (167).

In addition to religious identity, we can actually see – yet the authors seem to neglect it – that the use of regional identity is also massive. Indeed, a number of factors have affected the resurgence of interest in regional identity in post-New Order Indonesia. Firstly, there is the absence of an absolute centre after 1998. Secondly, there is a popular expectation that regional autonomy will transfer power to *putra daerah* (literally 'sons of the region'). Thirdly, there is the ongoing Islamization in Indonesia, which particularly influences the country's urban middle class (Sakai 2009). Certainly, the devolution of state power has been accompanied by a series of unintended consequences, such as an increase in ethnic and communal conflicts and greater administrative and political fragmentation (Bünte 2009).

Throughout the chapters, the state and politics are concerns, yet less emphasis is put on the people (the voters) and how socio-religious groups or individual actors have shaped the state and the character of identity politics in Indonesia, despite the claim that the volume will offer a wealth of insights for readers who study political populism, identity politics and comparative politics (10). In point of fact, it seems that there are only two chapters that deal pro rata with the people and the elites: Chapter 9 by Jonathan Chen and Chapter 5 by Syafiq Hasyim, even though we also have to note that Chapter 5 lacks statistical data on the elections. Moreover, as acknowledged by the editors, the authors do not advance any theoretical framework, and hence their conclusions are solely based on empirical assessments of the elections (8). This may be regarded as a shortcoming. It can be clearly seen in Chapter 4, in which the author does not consult the existing literatures on regional and identity politics in East Java. A theoretical discussion chapter could have enhanced internal coherence and, more importantly, contributed to scholarly debates about the concepts and implementations of identity politics, regional politics and Indonesian politics in general, complementing the existing schools in studies of Indonesian politics, such as the oligarchy school and the pluralist school.

These issues, however, are the only distractions from an otherwise important volume. Students and scholars of political science, history, political anthropology and Islamic studies will find rich materials on identities, political consolidation and candidate strategies in the elections. As a whole, this volume is an impressive example of compelling analysis germane to recent political developments in Indonesia. The contributors' discussions of identity politics certainly have utility as a model to deal with contemporary problems of political polarization, religious conservatism and Islamism, particularly since the 2014 and 2019 presidential elections.

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- <sup>6</sup> Sakai, Mina. <sup>3</sup> 2009. "Creating a New Centre in the Periphery of Indonesia: Sumatran Malay Identity Politics." In *The politics of the Periphery in Indonesia: Social and Geographical Perspectives*, edited by Minako Sakai, Glenn Banks, and J. H. Walker, 62–83. Singapore: NUS Press.
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**Cina Timor: Baba, Hakka, and Cantonese in the making of Timor-Leste**, by Douglas Kammen and Jonathan Chen, New Haven, CT, Yale University Southeast Asia Studies, 2020, xviii + 244 pp., \$26.00 (pbk), ISBN 978-0-98504298-1

The Chinese in East Timor (or Timor-Leste) have been largely overlooked, unlike those living in other parts of South East Asia. Douglas Kammen and Jonathan Chen's well-written *Cina Timor* is the first book-length study on the subject, despite the deluge of research on East Timor since liberation from Indonesia in 1999. This oversight is understandable, for other topics have stolen the limelight: revisiting Portuguese colonialism from postcolonial perspectives; bridging the 'ethnographic gap' (due to the near-absence of research during the twenty-four years of Indonesian occupation); and, from 1999, reconstruction, state- and nation-building and the international development frenzy, cultural revivalism and so on. In addition, as Kammen and Chen elucidate throughout their book, the temptation has been for the Portuguese, the Indonesians, contemporary state-makers and others to stereotype Chinese-Timorese as a separate group of economic actors and not much else. I suspect that scholars of East Timor have succumbed to similar reductionism.

Questioning stereotypes and examining a wide range of circumstances concerning Chinese migration to, and settlement in, East Timor, Kammen and Chen advance a big claim: "the Chinese"—as a people with variegated origins and as the subjects of colonial rule—played a critical role in the formation of Portuguese Timor and, by extension, of independent

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