Democracy in Indonesia: Transition and Prospects

Introduction

Indonesia has been classified into the "second", "third" and even "fourth waves" (Chadwick, 2006) of democracy. Its transition is not clean-cut since there were periods of semi-democracy before the authoritarian rule of Suharto, lasting 32 years. Nevertheless, to simplify matters, I chose to focus on the most recent period of democracy: 1999 onwards.

The first part of this essay explains Indonesia's transition to democracy in the framework of Huntington's article "How Countries Democratise" (1991b) in so far as there are similar actors and structures. Huntington (1991b) describes three kinds of transitions; Indonesia's transition to democracy can be classified as a transplacement (Haryadi, 2002 & Tanuredjo, 2007), although it is not an archetypal case. As for the definition of democracy, there is some debate as to whether Indonesia is fully democratized or still democratizing. I stick to Dahl's (1978) definition of democracy: civil freedoms, public participation, public contestation, and free and fair elections. The second part of this essay discusses the prospects for democracy from the three perspectives of Linz and Stepan (1996): behavioral, attitudinal and constitutional.

Transition to Democracy: *R*eformasi

In explaining the transition to democracy I will first provide a brief timeline of Indonesia's various leaders, from the authoritarian Sukarno and Suharto, liberal authoritarians B J Habibie and Abdurrahman Wahid, then to the more democratic Megawati Sukarnoputri and Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono. I will explain the Indonesia's transition as compromise between democratic powers and standpatters in the government-controlled hegemonic party Golkar, military and parliament, as well as the effects of non-actor events, such as the 1997 Asian economic crisis. Finally, the extent of democracy will be assessed according to Dahl's definition given above.

Timeline

In 1945, nationalist leader Sukarno declared independence, fully recognized only in 1949 after five years of fighting against its former colonial rulers, the Netherlands. Several unsuccessful parliamentary governments collapsed due to the absence of a majority party, during what is now called the "liberal democratic" period in 1950-57 (Neher & Marlay, 1995). This period ended with

"Guided Democracy", Sukarno's new form of government based on antiquated Indonesian tradition. After an unsuccessful alleged communist coup, Suharto overthrew Sukarno and installed himself as the second president in 1968, proclaiming a "New Order". Suharto's authoritarian rule lasted 32 years. Massive political pressure, demands for a total reform (Kusumah, 2001), increasing violence and antagonism between Golkar and opposition groups, and the effects of the 1997-8 economic crisis (Suryadinata, 2001) led to Suharto's presidential resignation on 21 May 1998, leaving his vice-president Habibie as the interim president. Habibie started some liberal reforms, but he was still associated with the corrupted and authoritarian aspects of the New Order. Indonesia began its transition to democracy with the 1999 parliamentary elections (Chadwick, 2006), when Indonesians elected their legislative representatives to the Assembly of People's Congress (MPR), who replaced Habibie with their chosen presidential candidate Wahid in an unexpected vote count. Wahid was impeached in 2001 due to suspicions of corruption, and was replaced by his vice-president Megawati. Megawati's three-year presidency was stable, but she did not address many problems Indonesia was facing, such as poverty and unemployment which were aggrieved by the 1997-8 crisis. The first direct presidential elections took place in 2004, deemed to be free and fair, with retired general Yudhoyono winning a "landslide victory" (*New York Times*, October 5, 2004) over Megawati. Indonesia is now, as of today, free (Freedom House, 2007).

Transplacement: Actors and Narrative

For practical purposes, I will start by identifying the actors in the transition process, borrowing Huntington's (1991b) terms for them. Then, on the government side, I will examine how standpatters were weakened, and how the emergence of liberal reformers in government pushed the government towards a compromise on democracy. On the opposition side, I will examine the emergence of democratic moderates who were stronger than the radical extremists. Finally, I will explain Indonesia's transition by roughly following Huntington' (1991b) "transplacement dialectic":

1. Government liberalization and loss of power and authority
2. Opposition expands support, hoping to bring down the government
3. Forceful suppression and containment of opposition power by government
4. Government and opposition leaders explore negotiation and compromise

Standpatters in government

During the transition period (or *reformasi*), the following standpatters were found in government: the military, the hegemonic party Golkar, and Suharto himself. They supported the New Order, but sometimes made liberal concessions in hopes of holding on to power; they adopt the rhetoric and some of the outer trappings of democracy (North et al., 1998), such as elections. Elections were held every five years only to "lend an aura of democratic legitimacy" (Neher & Marlay, 1995) but support always went to Golkar. According to the 1945 Constitution, the president has a very strong executive position. Suharto was only accountable to the Assembly of People's Congress (MPR) dominated by Golkar, which supported Suharto fully; he was also Supreme Commander of the military (Santoso, 1997). Golkar was a *de facto* "state party" as it consisted of the bureaucracy, military and non-civil servants (Suryadinata, 2007) and held the majority of seats in the legislative body, the Dewan Perwakilan Rakyat (DPR). These three actors clearly benefited during the nondemocratic regime and therefore wanted to stay in power.

Weakening of standpatters

Even though Suharto's economic policies brought "growth averaging 6 percent or better a year" (Liddle, 1996), his downfall was apparent: General Wiranto advised him to step down amidst riots and growing dissatisfaction against his leadership. Liberalisation of financial and capital markets took place in the early 1990s, but KKN (corruption, nepotism and cronyism) prevented market economies from developing. Governmental decision to deregulate the economy was exploited by Suharto associates who captured privatized companies and monopolized markets (Törnquist, 2002). When these two factors were combined into "despotic liberalism" (Törnquist, 2002), it caused de-legitimisation of Suharto's regime, and his quick exit.

Democratic moderates in opposition

In the opposition, the democratic moderates are the opposition parties and extra-parliamentary groups such as students and workers. Radical extremists were also present in the form of some parties. Democratic power lies in "extra-parliamentary movements" such as workers' strikes and student protests (Kusumah, 2001).

Under Suharto, the nine main opposition parties were fused into two: the United Development Party (PPP) and the Indonesian Democratic Party (PDI). Suharto saw this as a way to keep the opposition in check as the forced coalitions remained splintered within and could not advocate

policies different from the government. In accordance with Huntington (1991b), in transplacements it is difficult to achieve unity among opposition leaders.

Megawati led a breakaway "*perjuangan*" faction in 1998 from PDI, adding the suffix 'struggle' to the party name (PDI-P), after internal conflict over the leadership of the PDI. Its *Pancasila* ideology is secular and nationalist. There are also radical extremist Islamic groups that promote Sharia law, such as the Islamic Defender Front (FPI), but they only gain about 10% of public support (*New York Times*, April 15, 2007). The democratic and moderate opposition such as the PDI-P and Democratic Party (PD) led by Yudhoyono do not engage in violence, making them credible political partners.

Rise of opposition

It was government policy that led to the growth of the opposition. There had been increasing rivalry between Golkar and opposition groups. In the mid-1980s, political participation was allowed to increase through a process of "*politik keterbukaan"* (political openness) due to the increase in public political awareness after economic growth and improvement in education levels. Criticism of the government was allowed to a certain extent, but there were still restrictions on opposition leaders (Santoso, 1997). In general, the growing Indonesian middle class and students found Suharto's rule increasingly unacceptable. In 1998 the government decided to reduce subsidies, causing "widespread popular anger" (Törnquist, 2002). Students took to the streets in massive demonstrations, which stood-in temporarily for an extensive and well-organized democracy movement. The government policy of political openness, coupled with economic growth and improvement in education resulted in the rise of the opposition.

Liberal reformers in government

The liberal reformers in government emerged with the change of leadership. When Suharto resigned in 1998, Habibie took over as interim president. He pursued a "remarkably steady course toward democracy" by liberalising the press, labour unions and political parties (*New York Times*, May 28, 2000). However, he was accused of corruption and violations of human rights (*New York Times*, October 20, 1999). After Habibie, Wahid too promised to lift the Indonesian economy out of its depression after the 1997-8 Asian financial crisis. However, he too was impeached for corruption.

Although Habibie and Wahid had democratic and liberal intentions, there were still "powerful hangover elements" (Chadwick, 2006) from the pre-transition regime. Golkar continued to have seats in parliament, and its support came from the same businesses before and after transition. Also, most of the leaders in Golkar remained in the party after transition, leading to divisions between the standpatters and liberal reformers.

Stand-off

A governmental crackdown occurred in mid-1996 on Megawati's pro-democracy movement. Megawati's supporters occupied the PDI Headquarters in Jakarta, to defend her as the PDI leader. A riot broke out and there was a crackdown by the government (B., 1996). After this event, PDI-P broke away and won greater support to win the 1999 elections.

Compromise

In Indonesia's transition, there was no explicit negotiation, but instead more of a compromise on each power. The democratic moderates accommodated the standpatter elite, who were already weakened or eliminated, leaving the liberal reformers and democratic moderates more space to make reforms and introduce democratic measures.

In 2001, Megawati was elected president by the DPR mostly because according to Robison (2002) she 'recognised that no democratic government could rule without accommodating the old interests' (as cited in Chadwick, 2006). Her rule is said to be a "clear sign of normalization and the temporary consolidation of a pact" between the moderates and reformers (Törnquist, 2002). As a democratic moderate at the head of government, she paved the way for more support for democratic parties willing to compromise, such as Yudhoyono's PD and its coalition with secular nationalist and Islamists (Liddle & Mujani, 2005) in the 2004 elections.

Democracy?

There is still debate as to whether Indonesia has completed its transition. Even so, we can look at Dahl's (1978) definition as given earlier on. Under Suharto's rule, there was no citizen participation, "meaningful elections, or civil liberties" (Neher & Marlay, 1995). Nevertheless, in 2004, Indonesia voted for their president, vice-president and parliament in "free and fair" direct elections for the first time, becoming a "presidential democracy" (Liddle & Mujani, 2006). In the name of greater public

participation, direct elections for regional leaders nationwide took place in 2005. Citizens have freedom of speech, although the freedom of the press is mixed (Freedom House, 2007). According to this definition, Indonesia is indeed a democracy.

Prospects of Democracy

Will democracy last in Indonesia? Now I will examine the extent of democratic consolidation in Indonesia attitudinally, behaviourally and constitutionally (Linz & Stepan, 1996). This assessment takes as its point of departure the fact that democracy already exists in Indonesia; although this may seem tautological (Przeworski et al, 1996).

Behaviourally: civil society and feudal culture

The first aspect of democratic consolidation, behavioural democratic consolidation, occurs when

> "…no significant national, social, economic, political, or institutional actors spend significant resources attempting to achieve their objectives by creating a nondemocratic regime or by seceding from the state".
>
> (Linz & Stepan, 1996)

An active civil society has always been in place and it presents itself in the form of demonstrations for various issues. There were hundreds of social protests in Jakarta in 2000, spearheading pressures to oust and put Habibie on trial, push Wahid to presidency in 1999 and impeach him in 2001 (Kusumah, 2001). For example, in 2006, women's groups protested against the passes of the anti-pornography bill (*New York Times*, April 15, 2007). A lively civil society helps to "consolidate and deepen democracy" by coming up with political alternatives and monitoring the government (Linz & Stepan, 1996).

However, democratic culture in Indonesia may need some cultivation. Santoso (1997) argues that many aspects of Indonesian (or specifically, Javanese) life is governed by a feudal patron-client relationship. There is a tendency for KKN to happen because of the importance of loyalty, obedience and respect to superiors. Suyanto (1991) explains that there is a tendency to avoid open criticism and public debate for fear of creating embarrassment.

Attitudinally: public contestation and public participation

The next aspect of democratic consolidation is attitudinal, and it occurs when

> "…the majority of public opinion, even in the midst of major economic problems and deep dissatisfaction with incumbents, holds the belief that democratic procedures and institutions are the most appropriate way to govern collective life, and when support for antisystem alternatives is quite small or more-or-less isolated from prodemocratic forces."
>
> (Linz & Stepan, 1996)

Democratic procedures include public contestation and public participation. Increasing public contestation helps strengthen democratic institutions. The greater the plurality of parties, the more difficult it will be for one party to be hegemonic (ie. pre-transition Golkar) and exert more control in parliament. This is important especially in Indonesia, because pre-transition authoritarian elites still exert some power over New Order parties. Even though Habibie reduced its support base by pulling the military out of Golkar and parliament, it is still is the largest political party. However, it stopped being the majority party after the 1999 elections and has not gained support beyond 21.6% (Liddle & Mujani, 2005). "What is worrying though, (are) the attempts by Indonesia's more dominant political parties…- Golkar and …PDI-P - to disqualify smaller parties from contesting the polls" (*The Straits Times*, October 22 2007). In a large country like Indonesia, local representation is important and it can only be done through a parliamentary democracy. If a hegemonic party system is not prevented in addition to the fact that pre-transition elites can reconstitute themselves so as to continue to participate in politics (Chadwick, 2006), Indonesia could suffer "democratic erosion", back into an electoral democracy (Schedler, 1998).

Public participation is increased through the decentralization programme of the Indonesian Regional Autonomy Policy (Mallarangeng, 2001). The election of local governments for the first time across the country in 2005 seems to be a promising start to give Indonesians a greater stake in their country. Since Indonesia actually saw a "reverse wave" of democracy (Huntington, 1991a) during the New Order when economic development accelerated and the middle class grew significantly (Harriss, Stokke & Törnquist, 2000), greater power must be given to the workers and peasants to counteract the tendency of the middle class to support authoritarianism (Harriss, Stokke & Törnquist, 2000). Decentralisation of democracy provides checks and balances at the local government level (Mallarangeng, 2001), but this does not guarantee the elimination of corruption.

Constitutionally: government and military

The final aspect of democratic consolidation is constitutional, and it occurs when

> "…governmental and nongovernmental forces (are) … subject… and habituated to the resolution of conflict within the bounds of the specific laws, procedures and institutions sanctioned by the new democratic process."
>
> (Linz & Stepan, 1996)

An effective state bureaucracy is essential for democratic consolidation (Linz and Stepan, 1996). Corruption is entrenched in the government, a legacy of the Suharto era. However, there have been legislative changes since 1999. According to Qodari (2005), "appointed legislators are now a thing of the past", presidents are now directly elected, there is transparent proportional representation, and the National Election Committee (PKU) now consist of "academics and NGO activists" instead of "the government and party representatives". Elections give Indonesians power in choosing their leaders, and they made it "unmistakably clear" in the 2004 elections that they do not want any pro-Suharto elites in power. If citizens have power, they can hold their government accountable.

On the other hand, the military may have had its seats removed from parliament, but there is still no absolute civilian rule over the military. There are still "hangover elements of the old regime" (Chadwick, 2006), which can be used to the advantages of the new democratic elite. For example, Robison (2002) argued that Megawati nurtured links with some "New Order military-political elite" to gain support for her presidency (as cited in Chadwick, 2006). The military is not fully funded by the government; it is still linked extensively to businesses and charity organizations in its name, started in the Suharto era. As such, the military is not completely subject to civilian rule. A law passed in 2004 ordering the military to sell off their business interests by 2009 (Human Rights Watch, 2007). However, the reform is not complete and contains exceptions. Due to human rights abuses, continued military involvement in the economy and hence, incomplete civilian rule over them may prove to be a problem in democratic consolidation.

Conclusion

Behavioral, attitudinal, and constitutional views were used to classify various aspects of democratic consolidation. The features indicating a "long life" for democracy in Indonesia are: active civil society, increased public participation through decentralization, and an effective state bureaucracy. On the other hand, the following features may "shorten the life" of democracy: feudal and Javanese culture, rules to limit public contestation, and the power still retained by the military. It is not easy to say whether Indonesia's democracy will survive as only time will tell. If feudal culture dissipates with

the advent of globalization and the adherence to different norms, and if the government manages a complete reform of the military, then it is reasonable to say that Indonesia's democracy will last for a long time to come.

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