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Sojourn: Journal of Social Issues in Southeast Asia, Volume 30, Number 1,
March 2015, pp. 227-255 (Article)

Published by ISEAS–Yusof Ishak Institute



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Research on Contemporary Indonesia: Complexities and Intricacies to Explore

Kathleen Azali and Ulla Fionna

Indonesia, the world's most populous Muslim nation, has developed into the world's third-largest democracy. Despite the encouraging picture of political transformation accompanied by remarkable economic growth that it presents, serious challenges and the potential for backsliding remain. Studies on Indonesia undertaken at centres outside the country have grown in number, but their authors' engagement and dialogue with Indonesian scholars about the state of studies on Indonesia and the direction in which those studies are heading remain insufficient. To address this gap, and in collaboration with other Indonesian scholars, we outline contemporary developments in research on Indonesia. We address the ongoing and emerging studies, research gaps and future directions identified during a round table organized by the Institute of Southeast Asian Studies on 10 May 2013 in Singapore. Areas of focus are sociological and demographic trends, domestic politics, decentralization and political economy.

Keywords: Indonesia, research trends, democracy, decentralization, politics, political economy.

After three decades of autocracy under Soeharto, Indonesia has experienced astonishing changes during the last sixteen years. Political freedom is now something about which Indonesians can boast, while the country's media and civil society now thrive. The country has just held its third direct, highly contested presidential election in a climate marked by a relatively high level of openness, peace and public scrutiny. It has joined the ranks of the G20, displayed several years of annual economic growth of more than five per cent and

is projected to become one of the world's major economies within the next decade. This political transformation, accompanied by years of remarkable economic growth, has attracted unprecedented international attention to Indonesia.

Despite these trajectories of political and economic progress, however, serious challenges confront Indonesia. Earlier this year, Freedom House downgraded Indonesia's democracy rating to "partially free" after eight years during which Indonesia had retained the "free" rating (Arifianto 2014, p. 2), and some analysts believe that legislation, now pending, may retard Indonesia's progress towards effective democracy (Arifianto 2014).

Recent years have brought indications that progress towards democracy has stalled in Indonesia, and that the country may be backsliding. Despite the largely encouraging picture of the country's progress and performance as a democracy, these achievements remain vulnerable to a reversal. Particularly worrisome tendencies have been manifest at "the level of behavioural, attitudinal and constitutional commitment to democracy among key elites who retain the ability to diminish or reverse democracy in Indonesia" (Diamond 2010, p. 47).

These tendencies towards reduced democracy may be due to the absence of prominent leaders in the reform movement that culminated in 1998, or of any clear vision among supporters of that movement other than demanding that Soeharto step down. Another explanation for these tendencies is that the core structures of power have remained unchanged. The oligarchic elites who controlled the New Order survived unscathed, and even continued to use the state for rent-seeking purposes. Despite institutional reforms, changes promoting democracy seem to have been superficial. The core oligarchic structures of power and the presence of predatory elites have endured (Robison and Hadiz 2004). The unmistakable transformations since 1998 notwithstanding, "spoilers have been accommodated and absorbed into the system" (Aspinall 2010, p. 21).

Attention to these developments has meant that the study of Indonesia has seen a vibrant, albeit constrained, revival across dispersed geographical "centres" around the globe, in the United

States, Australia, Europe and Asia. In the United States, there is a visible growing trend towards comparative, cross-country studies considering Indonesia in a wider perspective (e.g., Diamond 2010; Horowitz 2013; Kunkler and Stepan 2013). In some cases, these comparative studies locate Indonesia in a specifically Southeast Asian context (e.g., Bouderau 2009; Pepinsky 2009; Slater 2010; Vu Tuong 2010). The “area studies” approach, with its regionalist and particularist focus, has declined in importance in the United States, but it has thrived in Australia during the last two to three decades (Aspinall 2013; Liddle 2014, pp. 257–59). This approach to the study of Indonesia is also gaining momentum in Asia, particularly in Japan and Singapore.

However, the work of Indonesian scholars has not been sufficiently recognized, cited, addressed or developed in English-language scholarship on Indonesia. Academic work in the social sciences produced by authors in Indonesia remains minimal. According to a recent study by Suryadarma et al. (2011, p. 1), only about twelve per cent of articles on Indonesia are the work of scholars in the country. As Aspinall (2014, p. 246) has noted, Indonesian scholars have undertaken original research, and even achieved public recognition as media commentators and writers. But the publication of their work in Indonesian outlets contributes to its neglect in international scholarship.

To address these developments, in May 2013, the Indonesia Studies Programme at the Institute of Southeast Asian Studies (ISEAS) invited ten Indonesian scholars to a round table whose goal was to identify emergent research, gaps in research, and directions for future research in their fields of study — anthropology, labour studies, gender studies, inter-group relations and conflict management, demography, political economy, government and political science. Focusing on the ways in which democratization and decentralization since the end of the New Order have influenced research on Indonesia, the round table’s discussions centred on three areas: sociological and demographic trends; domestic politics; and decentralization, governance, and political economy. This research

note draws on those discussions, citing papers prepared for the round table,¹ complemented with a subsequent literature review and a number of later seminars² to outline contemporary developments in research on Indonesia, ongoing and emergent studies, research gaps and directions for future research. While it is not by any means exhaustive, we hope that this report will prove a useful resource for scholars of contemporary Indonesia.

Sociological and Demographic Trends

Indonesia's cultural, linguistic and religious diversity has long made demographic research an important branch of scholarship on the country. In his paper prepared for the round table, Tirtosudarmo (2013, p. 1) observed that in Indonesia, demographic data are primarily used by economists, although scholars in other social science disciplines have also become more concerned with demography over time.³ Still, most studies generally only use demographic data as background, as for instance when economists use data on population, birth and death to support their arguments. Other than economists, geographers and — more recently — sociologists and anthropologists have taken the lead in recognizing the importance of research on Indonesian demography. Although demography is basically concerned with the dynamics of three vital events in human life — birth, death and the movement of people or migration — people's movements have been sorely under-researched (Tirtosudarmo 2013, p. 1). Only in the results of the censuses carried out every ten years (*sensus penduduk*) can demographers see the basic patterns of migrations. Arguably, this neglect of demography is also related to the fact that statistics produced in Indonesia are scattered among a variety of agencies and resources.

According to Tirtosudarmo (2013, p. 5), there are two major strands of demographic studies. One focuses on the contribution of migration to economic development, and the other on social and political aspects of migration. There is, however, little convergence or overlap between work on these two strands of scholarship. More

cross-disciplinary studies are also needed. There is a dire need to infuse geography into the study of Indonesian demography and to investigate the impact of population density on social problems and the management of infrastructure.

The impact of transmigration policy on population distribution and the use of that policy for political purposes have long been topics of investigation (Wijst 1985; Tirtosudarmo 1990). After Reformasi and decentralization, the New Order's transmigration policy seems to have discontinued. But there are new patterns and paradigms to explore, particularly since the rapid growth of palm oil plantations in the past decade has increased the demand for transmigrants to join an expanded labour force (Potter 2012, pp. 272–73). Tirtosudarmo (2013, p. 5) also believes that Indonesian researchers increasingly realize that demography is becoming a more important determinant of change in other sectors, such as politics and economic development. The study of Indonesia's demography also has an important international dimension, relating for instance to Acehnese refugees who fled to Malaysia and even to Norway and Canada and to Indonesian workers spread around Southeast Asia and the Middle East.

Inter-Group Relations and Conflict Management

The immediate, volatile period after Reformasi witnessed the strengthening of local, religious and ethnic identities. The issue of political violence and of communal and separatist conflict has become one of the main research foci in the field of Indonesian studies (e.g., Aspinall 2009; Klinken 2012; Bertrand 2004; Brown and Wilson 2007). However, Tomagola (2013, p. 3) stated in his paper for the May 2013 round table that there is a lack of sustained and continuous effort to map Indonesia's various ethnicities or to understand and anticipate the possibilities and sites of conflicts. There have been only a few initiatives continuously to study inter-group relations: the University of Indonesia previously housed CERIC, the Center for Research on Inter-Group Relations and Conflict Resolution, and Gadjah Mada University has a Centre for Security and Peace Studies.

Tomagola (*ibid.*) adds that the currently prevalent approach to conflict in Indonesia is very much one of firefighting: deal with problems once they arise. There is a need for institutional arrangements to manage conflict at the national level, but at the same time such arrangements might also add another bureaucratic layer and thus complicate efforts to resolve conflict. In the meantime, latent social tensions may erupt at any time, aggravated or triggered by various socio-economic gaps. Collection of basic but fundamental geographical and sociological data on the distribution of Indonesia's population by ethnicity and research on the strategic resources of social and ethnic groups will provide a better understanding of inter-group relations. Only by understanding this distribution and these resources and by mapping them against the census data on ethnicity can Indonesia move from firefighting to anticipating conflicts.

The Working Class, Unions, and the Labour Movement

Warouw (2013, pp. 2–4) observed in his paper for the round table that certain themes have dominated the scholarship on Indonesian labour. These themes include, for example, the impact of industrial policies with increasingly neoliberal tendencies, unbalanced power relations among workers, the state and capital; labour control and exploitation; labour organization and unions; and class consciousness or the lack thereof. Researchers' limited access to relevant authorities in Indonesian factories means that most work on labour takes the form of workplace ethnographies and studies of daily life. Some work has focused on workers' lives outside the workplace and on social forms — such as ethnicity, religion, gender, patriarchy and local values — as an extended domain of values, ideologies and the everyday existence present in the natural habitation of workers. They may focus on residential neighbourhoods, villages or society in general. This focus merits broadening. For instance, incorporating the initiatives and institutions that surround workers may help in understanding issues of greatest salience at the local level. Additionally, most studies on labour have concentrated on

manufacturing and failed to consider the non-manufacturing and service sectors, despite the increasingly important role of the service industry in Indonesia.

Research on politics may also yield a better understanding of the political potential of labour. Generally, labour seems to be growing politically stronger than it was during the New Order (Suryomenggolo 2014; Ford 2010, p. 524), but most political parties consider labour too fragmented (Hadiz 2000, p. 130; Hadiz 2003, p. 111). Labour is thus developing its own means of promoting its interests; its political demands are not necessarily channelled through political parties. However, the formation of alliances and initiatives grounded in labour does not in itself automatically indicate the existence of class — let alone revolutionary — consciousness. Additionally, local patterns of labour power and its place in local networks merit study for what they reveal about workers' approach to inter-class cooperation and even to decentralization.

Warouw (2013, pp. 2–4) argued that efforts to understand the proliferation of class expressions among workers must take into account the multiple dimensions of their lives. Labour seldom falls into neat categorizations of classes, and one must not view the formation of the working class only with reference to the class consciousness resulting from control and resistance at the point of production. In other words, further research on labour in Indonesia should consider its changing roles and the changing spaces in which it is active. Labour is increasingly involved outside the point of production and beyond the realm of labour activism. Contemporary studies on labour must incorporate an understanding of the opportunities opened up by post-Soeharto political and economic decentralization. They must not perceive labour merely as lifeless casualties of industrial capital.

Gender Issues

Budianta (2013, pp. 6–7) observed in his paper for the May round table that there are two main, contradictory trends relating to issues

in Indonesia. On one side, there has been “backsliding” in formal structures: conservative legislation, weakening of the women’s movement on the national scale. There is also a resurgence of local — often patriarchal — nativism, despite the gender quota,⁴ gender-responsive budget,⁵ and ratification of UN documents on gender equity. On the other hand, studies of courtship, social relations, sexuality and gender are becoming more common in Indonesia. Social media and the Internet have provided the space and the means to discuss gender issues. New spaces have also opened up in the informal area — new alliances, new modes of politicization and networking in informal arenas. Research on hijab and trendy Islamic fashion that seeks to redefine the cosmopolitan Muslim has proliferated in Indonesian universities. Scholarship must engage the interaction between these two trends. How does the informal fit into formal structures? How do the informal, contextual, cultural aspects of daily lives affect formal structures? And how might we challenge understandings of formal structures and informal arenas relating to gender?

In terms of political participation, while the gender quota has introduced some controversial problems, international experience has shown that gender quotas are a necessary means of ensuring that women are elected to parliament (Bessell 2010, p. 219). A growing number of female politicians are active in Indonesia, particularly because since 2003 the government has adopted rules stipulating that at least thirty per cent of candidates fielded by political parties in elections be female.⁶ Quantitatively, at least, these rules have increased the participation of women in politics. From only 11 per cent in 2004, women came to fill 17.8 per cent — 101 of 560 — of the seats in the national parliament (DPR, Dewan Perwakilan Rakyat) during 2009–14. This percentage fell barely short of the global average of 18.8 per cent (*ibid.*). Out of the 6,608 registered contenders for the 2014 legislative election, 38 per cent were women, but behind these numbers lie a set of less-encouraging statistics: 42 per cent of the women elected as members of parliament were related to powerful established families, while 25 per cent were celebrities — singers, actresses and models (Warat 2013). Indonesians have even coined

a (rather derogatory) term for these latter: *caleg cantik*, or pretty legislative candidates.⁷ Currently, even the gender quota faces some uncertainty, as the newly amended law on legislative bodies (Law No. 17/2014, Undang-undang MD3) — quietly passed the day before the 2014 presidential election — has actually removed the gender quota.

Domestic Politics

Shortly after Reformasi, the decentralization process started with Law No. 22/1999 on the political authority of regional governments and Law No. 25/1999 — effective since January 2001 — on new fiscal arrangements allowing a far larger share of revenue to be retained by sub-national governments (Aspinall and Fealy 2003, pp. 3–4). Subsequently, government at the district and municipality levels received regional autonomy, and direct local elections were implemented.⁸

This sudden “Big Bang” decentralization left regions and institutions scrambling to find the right formula to make it work. Many relevant laws and policies have confusing, even contradictory, articles and terms, as they were passed without sufficient time for discussion or scrutiny (Anwar 2010, p. 103). There are tensions between the centre and the regions, mainly concerning authority and funding. Amidst strong sentiment in favour of a federal state, expressed most vocally by Amien Rais, devolution to districts and municipalities rather than to provinces was undertaken in 1999 as a necessary emergency step to prevent the country from breaking up after the introduction of federalism (Anwar 2010, p. 110).

Analysts and scholars have struggled to understand the dynamics of Indonesia’s post-Reformasi domestic political system. Some important issues and themes have emerged. These include the spread of vote-buying and money politics at the local level; the (re)emergence of local oligarchies (Robison and Hadiz 2004); the use of signs, symbols and practices derived from “tradition” in the formal political arena (Davidson and Henley 2007); party “cartels” (Slater 2004; Ambardi 2008); the lack of state funding for political parties and their subsequent predatory attacks on state resources

(Mietzner 2013, p. 239); the collusive, increasingly fragmented and unpredictable parliament (Sherlock 2003, p. 29; Sherlock 2010, p. 176); the survival and regrouping of New Order elites; and the concentration and influence of the media (Lim 2012).

Ambardi (2013, pp. 2–4) suggested in his paper for the round table that most views on Indonesia fall into three broad streams. The first of these streams holds that democratic changes have been superficial, or merely limited to administrative and institutional reforms. Core economic and social structures have not changed. Indonesia remains dominated by oligarchic, predatory elites who continue to use the state for rent-seeking purposes (for example, Robison and Hadiz 2004, 2010).¹⁰ The second contends that Indonesia has done comparatively well in consolidating democracy (for example, Holtzappel and Ramstedt 2009; MacIntyre and Ramage 2008),¹¹ particularly considering the general trend that has democracy in retreat in much of the world, and in Southeast Asia in particular. Work in the third stream suggests that Indonesia has made significant changes in the direction of democracy but that it remains beset by deep-seated structural problems like corruption and weak law enforcement (for example, Buehler 2009; Sulistiyono 2009; Hidayat 2009).

Santoso (2013, pp. 2–3) argued in his paper for the round table that the mainstream understanding of liberal democracy is not entirely relevant to the case of Indonesia, with its particular history, archipelagic geography and ethnic diversity. The discourse on Indonesia's democracy needs to underline the archipelagic nature and the extremely diverse localities of Indonesia, each with its own specific context of sub-nationalism and ethno-nationalism.

Undoubtedly there is an urgent need to investigate and understand the politics behind institutional arrangements and processes in Indonesia (Lele 2013, pp. 2–6). A growing number of studies examining legislative processes in Indonesia (for example, Sherlock 2003, 2010; Ambardi 2008), as well as political corruption, voter behaviour and political parties (Tomsa 2008; Mietzner 2013). However, rather than clinging to established, idealized frameworks for stable liberal democracy, scholars need to be conversant with existing

cultural approaches and particular beliefs and institutions, especially “informal” sources of power and authority at the local level. They must not be limited in their fieldwork to Jakarta and urban centres. Suggestions for direction of further studies include (1) potential conflicts between existing local customs and the implementation of local elections, such as in Papua, where the customary tradition (*adat*) of *noken*¹² voting has affected local and national elections (e.g., Nolan 2014; Panggabean 2014); (2) the religious and ethnic networks operating within student and mass organizations; (3) relationships between the parliament and state bodies such as the National Commission for Human Rights, the Constitutional Court, the Judicial Commission and others.

Scholars have frequently called attention to the role of informal networks and institutions, but exhaustive research on this role is lacking. Informal networks and institutions are believed to play an important role in determining politicians’ behaviour, influencing decision-making processes and even determining the outcomes of local elections. However, there has thus far been no proper, comprehensive investigation of these matters; existing studies (for example, Buehler 2013; Sherlock 2010; Slater 2004) only discuss them briefly. Additionally, Aspinall (2014, p. 247) notes that most political studies on Indonesia have focused on the formal processes and structures, and that they have been oriented towards elites and formal organizations, even at the local level. He also suggests the value of learning from other disciplines, particularly anthropology (for example, Li 2007), for those studying the micro-politics of Indonesian society. The role of money politics, for example, can be considered from angles other than the idealized principles of democracy and analysed within its sociocultural context. In that context, the notion of money politics as a form of bribery is not as clear-cut.¹³

Decentralization and Political Economy

Hidayat (2013, pp. 2–3) also pointed out, in his contribution to the May 2013 round table, that most studies on decentralization have

focused on governance and political elites or on relations between the central and local governments, above all as questions of political authority and fiscal arrangements figure in these relations. However, relationships among state, market, and society have received very little attention. There is an urgent need to study the continuity and change in business ownership and economic power before and after Reformasi. Researchers need to focus on the relationship between the reorganization of businesses and business actors within the frameworks of democratization and regional autonomy.

Chaniago (2013, p. 1) argued in his paper for the round table that decentralization has only happened at the administrative level. And even administrative decentralization is an illusion because its preconditions have not been sufficiently considered or created. The equitable development of local economies — with high labour absorption, high levels of participation and increased human capacities — has not occurred in outer regions, as capital seems to remain concentrated in the hands of a small number of powerful stakeholders. Vital economic networks and gateways such as communication, transportation and banking have remained very unevenly distributed across Indonesia, further aggravating regional disparities in development (Basri 2013a, pp. 2–4). In the last decade, infrastructure investments in Indonesia have dropped to only 2 to 3 per cent of GDP, half of the 5 to 6 per cent rate of the early 1990s (Basu Das and Pham Thi Phuong Thao 2013, p. 2). Public investment in infrastructure remains low in Indonesia, particularly because of the limits on project selection and execution at local-government levels. This is not to mention inefficiencies in the preparation of budgets and in procurement and the low quality of implementation often characteristic of infrastructure projects (Seneviratne and Sun 2013, p. 6).

Increasingly, Indonesia has privatized utilities. For example, Chaniago (2013, p. 7) pointed out the development of the Sunda Straits Bridge, part of the Master Plan for the Acceleration and Expansion of Indonesian Economic Development (MP3EI, Masterplan Percepatan dan Perluasan Pembangunan Ekonomi Indonesia). Initiated by Graha Banten Lampung Sejahtera, a firm in the Artha Graha

Network business group owned by Tommy Winata, this thirty-kilometre-long bridge is due to be the longest in the world (Husna and Otto 2012). Despite its high cost, which may reach US\$23 billion, the bridge is projected to accelerate the development of industrial activities — and inevitably raise land prices — on both sides of the bridge. The surrounding areas are to contain terminals, industrial estates, warehousing sites, and even tourism resorts (Azhari 2014). As more megaprojects and estates have been developed in public-private partnerships, and as Indonesia has long shown one of the strongest tendencies towards a market-driven development agenda in Southeast Asia (Rimmer and Dick 2009, p. 244), more studies should investigate relations between private and public firms, not least in the context of market liberalization.

Under the regional autonomy and fiscal decentralization policy, urban and regional development in Indonesia has become the responsibility of local authorities; it is planned and implemented by local and regional governments. Lane (2014, pp. xv–xvi) points out that, despite the weakening of direct crony capitalism at the national level after Reformasi and decentralization, political initiatives has shifted capitalists at the *kabupaten* (regency) level. This shift further calls for closer investigation of the intricacies of local governments' roles and the influence of local capitalists on sensitive decisions relating to development.

Policies on decentralization and regional autonomy — such as transmigration, the accelerated development of underdeveloped areas, the development of border areas, and construction in the outer islands — have been characterized by conflicting procedures and by steps that reinforce the concentration of growth and development. As is the case in many other Southeast Asian countries (Rimmer and Dick 2009, pp. 196–98), in Indonesia modern-sector growth has remained concentrated in the urban centres, above all Jakarta.

Basri (2013*b*) also cautioned against exaggerating the importance of regional autonomy, regional elites (*raja kecil*) and regional corruption. While regions legally have wide powers of autonomy, their dependence on budget allocations from the central government means that their income is constricted. According to Basri (*ibid.*),

allocations of income to the regions have actually decreased in the regional government budget (APBD, Anggaran Pendapatan dan Belanja Daerah); most spending now goes for routine and mandatory expenses defined by the central government. The portion of funds from the state budget (APBN, Anggaran Pendapatan dan Belanja Negara) transferred to regions has increased from 29.5 per cent in 2005 to 32.4 per cent in 2012, but more than half of this funding goes to the general allocation fund (DAU, Dana Alokasi Umum). In other words, only the administration of spending is shifted from the central government to regional authorities. Decentralization, therefore, has not significantly improved the level of public services and social welfare in the regions.

Indonesia's main challenge in fostering domestic economic growth comes from the lack of connectivity among its regions (for discussion, see Lobov 2012; Younger 2013). The world's largest archipelago urgently needs better integration of its domestic economy. The lack of inter-regional integration is clearly reflected in disparities in the prices of goods in various regions.¹⁴ More comprehensive study of the political economy of decentralization and regional autonomy is necessary. As two of the most lucrative sectors in Indonesia are property and palm oil, in this research note we turn our attention to case studies of urbanization and forest land use.

Urbanization and its Implications for Indonesia's Political Economy

Rimmer and Dick (2009, pp. 193–228) point out the curiously scant academic literature investigating the underlying relationship between business and urban development in Indonesia.¹⁵ Many infrastructure megaprojects to create urban gateways and networks — seaports, airports, communications — are increasingly subject to privatization, with concessions allocated mostly through patronage and with clear signs of rent-seeking behaviour.

The Jakarta metropolis has expanded outward beyond the city's administrative borders. New towns, industrial estates, and housing projects are being rapidly established in surrounding, previously rural areas. Jakarta is the only mega-urban region (MUR) in Indonesia

whose population exceeds ten million, a total substantially higher than the population of the country's second-biggest city, Surabaya, whose population numbers some three million.¹⁶ The high concentration of urban population in its surrounding areas, known as Jabodetabek (for "Jakarta, Bogor, Depok, Tangerang, Bekasi") indicates a disparity between Jabodetabek and other cities, and between large and small cities (Firman 2004, p. 430). This mega-urbanization process, marked by increasing flows of capital — including those from direct foreign investment — and of commodities and information should be seen in the context of a nexus of local–global and rural–urban relationships.

Chaniago (2013, pp. 7–8) points out the urgent need to study the agenda behind and possible impact of megaprojects such as international airports, inter-island bridges, skyscrapers and satellite cities. In particular, the ways that authorities have justified these projects and their economic impact deserve attention in relation to political regimes and the role of business actors. Justifications for physical development projects in Indonesia need to be analysed with reference to more than local or national economic rationales. Frequently, megaprojects involving property can lead to lucrative monopolies: increases in land prices or demand for automobile and telecommunication products and services. In turn, these megaprojects have contributed to significant spatial restructuring — the polarization of a few large urban centres, rapid development around mega-urban centres and neglected development in inland regions, particularly those areas disconnected from the city centres.

Regional Political Economies: The Case of Forest Land Use

Semedi (2013, pp. 2–6) highlights the socio-economic and political impact of the massive growth of the palm oil industry in the past decade. Capital continues to flow into the sector from various business groups, indicating how attractive the business is. At the same time, this lucrative business also represents an attractive retirement option for local officials, further spurring its growth. The industry generates considerable revenue, but it poses problems of land use and environmental degradation. While the ecological

impact of herbicide and fertilizer use have been well studied (for example, Trigg and Adeney 2013; Bissonnette 2013, p. 499), there are also issues concerning animal life, particularly the potential extinction of Indonesia's orangutans and elephants. The depletion of flora — such as bamboo and rattan — has reduced the supply of raw materials on which indigenous communities have relied to produce traditional products and have thus changed consumption and production patterns in favour of plastic.

Rampant bribery and corruption, both at provincial and regency levels, characterize the process of securing business permits in the palm oil sector. There have also been allegations that many candidates for regent use money generated from palm oil plantations to run for office, and that gaining a seat would lead to a supply of cash and facilities from the palm oil companies (Varkkey 2012, p. 318). The changing structure of the booming industry has created tensions between smallholding farmers and large plantation companies. Classes of local rich have emerged and grown stronger. However, the sector also generated considerable wealth in areas without the proper economic infrastructure to receive investment. Those rich enough to invest this wealth often move to other, more urban places, on Java to invest in other projects, such as property. Decentralization has created a new group of regional bosses who are capital-rich and can thus continue to exploit natural resources. There are also possibilities of social tensions emerging among different social and ethnic groups as the palm oil sector grows. Finally, the mix of goods produced in palm-oil-producing areas has also changed because of new economic opportunities. Research to investigate the impact of these changes, the patterns that have emerged, and the possible problems that may arise is needed.

Scholarship on Contemporary Indonesia: Some Timely Considerations

Overall, since Indonesia embarked on its democratic transition, scholars have turned to its study with renewed and increasing interest.

While a number of topics relating to democratization have drawn their interest, the implementation of decentralization has arguably attracted the greatest attention. New trends and new phenomena in the areas of social and demographic change and political economy are also emerging. Local societies and governments are changing as new rules and regulations have resulted in the emergence of new dynamics for researchers to study.

Democratization — or the commitment to democracy — has remained the principal overarching analytical framework for the study of contemporary Indonesia and its politics. A more comprehensive framework to assess Indonesia's progress and explain the “deviations” from the democratic path remains elusive. Recent years have witnessed the articulation of increasingly optimistic views of democracy in Indonesia. Yet, as Aspinall (2014, p. 243) and Lane (2014, p. xiv) have noted, the potential transformative powers of civil society and social movements have long been overlooked. Additionally, not enough attention has been paid to the market and society and their underlying relations to politics — or, in other words, to political economy and the economic dimension of the structure of political power. The growth of the middle class has long been touted (for example, Robison 2013, p. 80; Kharas 2010, p. 22; Sharpe 2014). At the same time, there is also the risk of the country falling into a middle-income trap (World Bank 2014), with inequality on the rise. The use of social media and mobile devices has been rapidly growing, but at the same time their distribution has been highly uneven, largely because of the uneven development of infrastructure such as electricity and connectivity. All these trends have created a society with specific demands and needs. Too little is currently known about the forms of Indonesians' aspirations or the specific social realizations of these new trends in Indonesia.

The 2014 elections offered clear evidence of how vulnerable democracy can be, even after sixteen years of development. Indeed, Indonesia's freedom rating has gone down to partially free, although, to put it in a broader context, 2013 was the eighth consecutive year

in which Freedom House's rating of global freedom has declined (Freedom House 2014).

As a final note, studies of contemporary Indonesia need to be developed further to include more scholars from Indonesia. This will require developing a sustainable academic culture in Indonesian institutions. There is a need to generate funding, improve bureaucracy, reduce corruption in education, and develop a peer-review culture. The projected future of the Indonesian economy opens wide possibilities for research. At the same time, the government and decision-makers will significantly influence further development of Indonesian academia.

Acknowledgements

The authors wish to thank all the invited speakers who participated in the May 2013 ISEAS round table on Indonesian studies for their valuable presentations and insights (see endnote for full list of papers and speakers). The contents of this report are, nonetheless, strictly the responsibility of its authors.

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NOTES

1. The round table was organized in three sessions. Session One, on Sociological and Demographic Trends in Indonesia, included papers on "Forest Land Use in West Kalimantan" by Semedi (2013), Faculty of Arts and Humanities, Gadjah Mada University; "Working-class, Unions, and the Labour Movement in Indonesia: Notes on a Research Agenda" by Warouw (2013), School of Humanities and Social Sciences, University of New South Wales, Canberra; "Gender Issues in Post-Reformasi Indonesia: A Reflection" by Budianta (2013), Faculty of Humanities, University of Indonesia; "Bidang Kajian: Hubungan Antar-Kelompok dan Manajemen Konflik [Study area: Inter-group relations and conflict management]" by Tomagola (2013), Faculty of Social and Political Sciences, University of Indonesia; and "Research Concerning Social-Demography in Indonesia"

- by Tirtosudarmo (2013), Research Center for Society and Culture, Indonesian Institute of Sciences (LIPI). Session Two, on Decentralization and the Political Economy, considered “Inside the Puzzle of Contemporary Indonesian Decentralisation Reform” by Hidayat (2013), Centre for Economic Studies, Indonesian Institute of Sciences (LIPI); “Indonesian Studies after the New Order: Democratization, Decentralization and Developing an Academic Peer Group” by Subianto (2013), Harvard Kennedy School Indonesia Programme, Rajawali Foundation Institute for Asia, Harvard University; and “Indonesia Menyongsong 2030 [Indonesia welcoming 2030]” by Basri (2013*a*), Faculty of Economics, University of Indonesia. Session Three, on Decentralization and Governance, included papers on “Agenda Penelitian Desentralisasi Indonesia: Memperkuat Sinergi Pusat-Daerah [Research agenda for Indonesia’s decentralisation: Strengthening central-local synergy]” by Maksum (2013), Department of Administrative Science, Faculty of Social and Political Sciences, University of Indonesia; “Political Corruption in Post-Soeharto Indonesia” by Lele (2013), Department of Public Policy and Management, Gadjah Mada University; and “Demokratisasi Kontekstual [Contextual democracy]” by Santoso (2013), Department of Politics and Government, Faculty of Social and Political Sciences, Gadjah Mada University. Session Four, on Domestic Politics, saw presentations on “Indonesian Political Culture Today: Some Timely Considerations” by Rinakit (2013), Soegeng Sarjadi Syndicate; “Perdebatan Demokrasi Indonesia: Apa yang Terabaikan? [The debate on Indonesia’s democracy: What is missing?.]” by Ambardi (2013), Faculty of Social and Political Sciences, Gadjah Mada University; and “Ilusi Desentralisasi: Ide Desentralisasi Administratif, Kepentingan Pragmatis Dan Proses Politik Kebijakan [The illusion of decentralisation: The idea of administrative decentralisation, pragmatic interests, and the political process of policy]” by Chaniago (2013), Department of Political Science, Faculty of Social and Political Sciences, University of Indonesia.
2. The following seminars, organized at the Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, contributed to the further development of this research note: Maxwell Lane, “Who Will be President in 2014? Short and Long-term Trends in Indonesian Politics”, 5 July 2013; Ulla Fionna, “The Waning Prospects of Islamist Parties in Indonesia”, 30 August 2013; Agus Widjojo, “Reform of the Indonesian Military (TNI) in the Context of Indonesia’s Democratic Transition”, 21 October 2013; Aris Ananta, Evi Nurvidya and M. Sairi Hasbullah, “Ethnic Mapping of Indonesia Based on the 2010 Population Census”, 19 November 2013; Burhanuddin Muhtadi, “The Indonesian Legislative Election 2014: How Parties Standing against Each Other”, 28 March 2014; Siti Zuhro and Sukardi Rinakit, “Campaigning for

- Victory: The Unfolding Drama of the 2014 Indonesian Legislative Election”, 3 April 2014; Maxwell Lane, “Indonesia’s ‘Elektabilitas’ Election: The Politics of Emptiness”, 23 April 2014; Agung Wicaksono, “The Legacy of the Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono Administration: Leadership, Governance and International Relations”, 16 May 2014; Ahmad Najib Burhani and Sumanto Al Qurtuby, “Islam and the 2014 Indonesian Elections”, 5 June 2014.
3. Professor Dr Widjojo Nitisastro, one of the main architects of economic development and its study in Indonesia, above all in the early New Order period, played a significant role in emphasizing the role of demography within the field of economics.
 4. Through gender quota systems, a certain percentage or number of women must be included on candidate lists, in parliamentary assemblies or in government institutions.
 5. Gender-responsive budgeting (GRB) enforces the consideration of gender equity in policymaking and implementation. For example, it mandates the creation of a gender budget statement for budget proposals (Indraswari 2010).
 6. Presidential Instruction No. 9/2000 on Gender Mainstreaming in National Development was the basis for the Ministry of Home Affairs decree on gender mainstreaming in local government in 2004. Law No. 12/2003 on Indonesian political parties aimed to empower women in the political sphere, and stated in its article no. 65 the need for thirty per cent of members of all political parties to be women.
 7. This is not to dismiss the idea that there are strong candidates with respectable political records hailing from the world of popular entertainment, such as Rieke Diah Pitaloka (PDIP) and Nurul Arifin (Golkar). See also, Power (2014).
 8. Lane (2014, p. 13) observes that almost all studies on decentralization have taken its association with Reformasi and democratization for granted. He argues that, while there was escalating criticism against concentration of power under the New Order regime, in 1998 there was actually no explicit demand for decentralization from the opposition, pro-democracy movement. Rather, the demand for decentralization came later, from within technocratic circles after the fall of Soeharto and with the ascent of a new constituency.
 9. The term “Big Bang” is commonly used to refer to Indonesia’s far-reaching fiscal, administrative, and political decentralization, implemented within a very short time span, between 1999 and 2001 (for example, Hofman and Kaiser 2002, p. 1).

10. The work of Robison and Hadiz (2004, 2010) has been very influential in analysing the underlying constellations of economic and political power in Indonesia, although others (for example, Aspinall 2014; Lane 2014) have pointed out the lack of transformative potential of subordinated (e.g., labour, civil society) groups in their analysis.
11. This work is mostly in the framework of “good governance”, funded by government and interested international institutions.
12. While the term has been used differently by different people, *noken* voting is best understood as bloc voting. The term is rather misleading, since *noken* itself refers to a traditional multi-purpose bag made from bark, used widely in the Papuan highlands for various daily needs. In some areas, the bags — usually hung from the neck of villagers — are used to collect ballots from voters. However, in some areas where community leaders simply decide on how the votes will be allocated, voters do not necessarily cast their ballots themselves. See Nolan (2014).
13. For instance, some *kyai* (Islamic religious scholars, who usually also act as Islamic boarding school masters) do not treat money politics definitively as corruption, because when people come to *pesantren* (Islamic boarding schools) to meet them, money that changes hands is referred to as *titiipan*, something to be kept by someone else temporarily, and thus the transaction is less clear. It might also be worthwhile to draw from the broader anthropological concept of “gift economy” (Mauss 1966), also more recently developed by Graeber (2011) as debts.
14. Connectivity has grown crucial in Indonesia, especially as the ASEAN Economic Community deadline of 2015 edges closer; equality of connectivity across its regions is imperative before it can better integrate with other economies. For the essential role of infrastructure in ASEAN connectivity and integration, see Bhattacharyay (2010), Das (2012), Das and Pham Thi Phuong Thao (2013).
15. For some sociological and political-economy studies on urban development in Indonesia, see the analysis of the development of large-scale satellite cities and suburban land projects by a small number of private developers in Arai (2001, 2011); Dorleans’s studies (Dorlean 1994, 2000) on changes in land use, transactions and speculation; Chaniago’s comprehensive political-economy analysis of the New Order’s development failures (2001). Kusno has repeatedly addressed this issue, in both English (Kusno 2000, 2010, 2013a) and Indonesian (Kusno 2013b).
16. Other mega-urban regions (MURs) in Southeast Asia include Manila, Bangkok and Ho Chi Minh City. For discussion of MURs, see McGee and Robinson (1995); Jones (2002); Jones and Douglass (2008, p. 22).

However, Rimmer and Dick (2009, pp. 83–128) point out the difficulties and huge gaps faced by “second cities” throughout Southeast Asia in challenging the political and economic domination of first, “national cities”.

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