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Publisher: Routledge

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The Pacific Review

Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information:
<http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/rpre20>

Reorganizing political power in Indonesia: A reconsideration of so-called 'democratic transitions'

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Published online: 04 Mar 2011.

To cite this article: Vedi Hadiz (2003) Reorganizing political power in Indonesia: A reconsideration of so-called 'democratic transitions', *The Pacific Review*, 16:4, 591-611, DOI: [10.1080/0951274032000132272](https://doi.org/10.1080/0951274032000132272)

To link to this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/0951274032000132272>

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Reorganizing political power in Indonesia: a reconsideration of so-called ‘democratic transitions’

Vedi R. Hadiz

Abstract The fall of Soeharto’s long-entrenched authoritarian New Order regime in 1998 raised hopes among many about a transition in Indonesia to a liberal democratic system of politics. However, Indonesia’s new democratic institutions have been captured and appropriated by predatory interests, many of which were nurtured and incubated in the New Order. These have merely now reconstituted and reinvented themselves in Indonesia’s new democracy. The article assesses these developments in the light of many of the assumptions of the still influential and growing ‘democratic transitions’ literature and on the basis of case studies in two Indonesian provinces, Yogyakarta and North Sumatra. These show that gradual reform since the fall of Soeharto has allowed the rise in political fortunes of those formerly entrenched in the lower levels of the New Order’s formerly vast system of patronage, including its political entrepreneurs and henchmen. On the other hand, those social forces that were marginalized under the New Order, for example organized labour, remain politically excluded.

Keywords Indonesia; democratic transition; North Sumatra; Yogyakarta; political parties; parliaments.

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The Pacific Review

ISSN 0951–2748 print/ISSN 1470–1332 online © 2003 Taylor & Francis Ltd

<http://www.tandf.co.uk/journals>

DOI: 10.1080/0951274032000132272

Introduction

The recent Indonesian experience demonstrates the problems of envisioning processes of replacing authoritarian rule with liberal forms of democratic governance – whether through benevolent elite pacts, or simply the rise of civil society and the growth of ‘social capital’. As such, it is clearly relevant to the concerns of the still growing literature on democratization and transitions from authoritarian rule, both academic and those spawned by the prolific intellectual production lines of international development and consulting organizations (e.g. O’Donnell and Schmitter 1986; Di Palma 1990; Huntington 1991; Linz and Stepan 1996; McFaul 2002; USAID <http://www.usaid.gov/id/docs-csp2k03.html>; NDI <http://www.ndi.org/worldwide/asia/indonesia/indonesia.asp>).

In analysing the outcomes of the demise of authoritarian rule, it is vital not to rely alone on such factors as elite choices, conjunctural situations, or actors’ immediate reactions to events, which have tended to dominate much of the literature on ‘democratic transitions’ since O’Donnell and Schmitter’s seminal work.¹ This is the case, even as Munck observes, the literature has expanded to cover places as diverse as Southern Europe, Eastern Europe, Latin America and East and Southeast Asia (Munck 2001). For example, an influential work by Linz and Stepan highlights the choices in relation to liberalization made by Eastern European communist rulers in the context of perceptions about possible reactions from the Soviet Union (Linz and Stepan 1996: 235–45). By the same token, it is also not enough to dwell on the niceties of technical assistance/training programmes to ‘build’ a civil society led by rational, enlightened individuals, as is often emphasized by international development agencies. It is also inadequate to dwell on the crafting of democratic rules of the game (electoral systems, etc.) – as McFaul observes, ‘if powerful democrats draft the rules, it does not matter what electoral system is adopted or whether a parliamentary or presidential system is adopted’ (McFaul 2002: 225). Instead, it is far more crucial to highlight the constellations of social forces and interests that determine the parameters of possible outcomes in any given situation, for it is contended here that the direction of political change following the end of authoritarian rule is primarily the product of contests between these competing social forces (e.g. see Bellin 2000: 175–7).

Specifically, it is argued that the Indonesian experience shows that the forging of new political institutions and arrangements, nationally and locally, in the wake of a long period of authoritarian rule under the so-called New Order of Soeharto (1966–98), has been contingent on the nature of salient social forces and interests. Moreover, the experience demonstrates that the legacy of authoritarian rule remains important even as the institutional structures of authoritarian regimes unravel. It is not necessary to adopt the heavily path-dependent approach of Kitschelt *et al.* (1999) – who argue that the legacy of pre-communist rule in different East European

countries account for their post-communist democratization trajectories – to make this observation. It is sufficient to recognize that in spite of a new framework characterized by elections, parties and parliaments, reformist interests may continue to be marginalized, and the rise of a new, liberal democratic, social order stalled, even as the old, authoritarian one becomes no longer viable. To paraphrase an observation once made by Lenin – what is necessary is not only the refusal of new forces to live in the old way, but also the *inability* of dominant ones to continue doing so (Lenin, quoted in Skocpol 1979: 47).

This theoretical viewpoint essentially contradicts the proposition advanced most famously by O'Donnell and Schmitter (1986) that democratic reform is best served through a pact made possible by more or less equally positioned *ancien régime* and reformist forces. Following from O'Donnell and Schmitter, transition theorists have often assumed that liberal democratic governance is the benevolent result of a situation in which conservative hardliners and reformers have respectively failed to gain the upper hand, and therefore are inclined toward striking a bargain with each other, rather than engage in conflict. In other words, democracy is supposed to be the product of a 'stalemate' situation. In an internal critique of the literature, however, McFaul suggests that the experience of post-Communist Eastern Europe/Central Asia has shown quite the opposite: democracy has required the clear political defeat of the forces of the *ancien régime* by pro-democratic reformist interests; new dictatorships have resulted from the alternate situation (McFaul 2002).

Without suggesting that a return to dictatorship or centralized authoritarian rule is a likely prospect in Indonesia, an observation that is much related can essentially be made in relation to the persistence of predatory forms of power. The problem, however, is that the Indonesian case has tended to be examined, explicitly or implicitly, from the lens of 'transitions' arguments, which besides being extremely voluntarist, are also heavily weighed toward negotiation and compromise, in the O'Donnell and Schmitter mould (e.g. Van Klinken 1999; Kingsbury and Budiman 2001). Thus, such analyses have been, at least indirectly, predisposed toward concerns about the threat of social disturbance. Notably, such concerns are mirrored in the statements of major Indonesian political figures, some of whom have warned against the reform movement descending into the anarchy of social revolution.²

By contrast, it is argued here that the institutions of Indonesia's new democracy have been captured by predatory interests precisely because these were not swept away by the tide of reform. In fact, old forces have been able to reinvent themselves through new alliances and vehicles, much like they have, for example, in parts of post-Communist Eastern Europe/Central Asia. At the same time reformist interests – whether liberal, social democratic or more radical – have generally been marginalized from the process of political contestation in Indonesia. Why has this been the case?

Again, this is primarily a legacy of Soeharto's New Order, which was ruthlessly effective in the disorganization of civil society and in repressing independent societal organization. Those social forces that were not directly nurtured by the New Order and therefore would possibly have an interest in challenging the very system of predatory capitalism – e.g. sections of the liberal intelligentsia and professional groups in society, the politically marginalized working class – have not been able to overcome this legacy and organize coherently. The result is the ascendance of many of the elements of the *ancien régime* – who were always more organized, coherent and endowed with material resources in the first place – and a non-liberal form of democracy, run by the logic of money politics and political thuggery. It is a form of democracy akin in many ways to those that exist in Thailand and the Philippines in Southeast Asia, and post-Soviet Russia, where similar dynamics can be observed to varying degrees.

But the problem is not at all about the absence of a civil society cemented by enough social capital. Civil society does exist in Indonesia – the issue is that its most salient elements are those that were organized and nurtured under a rabidly predatory system of power. While the interests of civil society are often tacitly understood in the neoliberal tradition to favour free markets, rule of law and democracy – and thus basically associated with idealized notions of a vibrant and independent middle class or bourgeoisie – the reality is that there are often competing interests within civil society itself. Moreover, important sections of civil society, including parts of the bourgeoisie or middle class, may be profoundly anti-democratic or anti-market (Rodan 1996: 4–5). It is important to emphasize, however, that the situation is not simply that of powerful 'bad guys' versus weak 'good guys'. The essential issue is that of contending interests: as noted earlier, the New Order legacy has ensured that civil society is *not* characterized by the preponderance of political vehicles that would embody organized interests that fundamentally challenge the persistence of predatory power, for example, by promoting coherent rule of law or social justice agendas. Indeed, the contest over power in post-New Order Indonesia has been characterized by the latter's conspicuous absence – a fact that has great ramifications for the parameters of democratization outcomes.

After the crisis

The system of power that Soeharto had presided over for three decades quickly became untenable at the end of his long rule in May 1998. With a deepening economic crisis, and the looming threat of mass unrest, the reorganization of that system of power became urgent, both to pre-empt demands for 'total reform' – at that time advocated most vocally by militant sections of the student movement – and to provide the opportunity for interests nurtured under the New Order to survive and reconstitute.

A most unlikely reformer was to emerge from this situation: Soeharto's

immediate successor, and long-time aide, B. J. Habibie. His task was not an easy one, for on the one hand Habibie had to demonstrate an ability to protect the interests nurtured under the New Order, in order to guarantee his own political survival. On the other hand, this was not possible without opening up the political arena to new actors and forces – in other words without democratizing.

The way out, as it appeared, was to devise a process of gradual democratic reforms, the outcomes of which Habibie could attempt to control. However, lacking the authority over the institutions of state power that Soeharto enjoyed – including the military and the former state party, Golkar – he was ultimately unable to ensure his election to the presidency in October 1999. He was instead to be outmanoeuvred and succeeded by Abdurrahman Wahid, the leader of the largest Muslim organization in Indonesia, the Nahdlatul Ulama (NU), who was at times an apparent ally of Soeharto, and at other times, a vocal critic. Less than two years later, Wahid himself was to make way for Megawati Soekarnoputri, daughter of Indonesia's first president, Soekarno, and whose vehicle – the Indonesian Democratic Party for Struggle (PDI-P) – hosts a range of former New Order stalwarts.

But more important than the individuals who came to occupy the presidential office, after Soeharto was forced to vacate it, was the fundamental outcome of gradualist reform. This was the repositioning of a variety of interests, incubated and entrenched during Soeharto's long rule, within a new democratic political framework. Specifically, it was crucial for Indonesia's later trajectory that those forces advocating 'total reform' – small sections of the student and labour movements as well as parts of the liberal intelligentsia – were too incoherently organized to sweep aside these old interests in the decisive and tumultuous first months of the post-Soeharto era.

Therefore, the cast of characters in the contest over power now represent this fascinating range of interests: politico-bureaucratic elements who were well entrenched nationally and locally during the Soeharto era, ambitious political entrepreneurs and fixers, shadowy gangsters and thugs on the rise, and established as well as aspiring capitalists. Some of these were at the heart of the system of patronage that was the New Order – at the apex of which stood Soeharto himself – while others may have been only ensconced in its lower layers, but have now come to develop new ambitions. Significantly, this process involved the forging of new alliances that found ideological expression in appeals to both nationalist and Islamic populist sentiment and imagery. It also involved the emergence of an array of uncivil society groups like paramilitaries, some of which are directly or indirectly linked to political parties inhabited by old elites and their new allies.

Another consequence of this process of reconstitution is that the contest over state power – and for control over its institutions and resources – is not confined to those engaged in the national political arena. This process has instead extended to the local level because of the erosion of central

state authority. In spite of such changes, the major theme of Indonesian political economy remains the appropriation of state institutions and resources by coalitions of politico-bureaucratic and business interests. The unravelling of the New Order only means that these coalitions are now more diverse, diffuse and decentralized, as are the new networks of patronage being built.

It is also important to note that the salient forces involved in the process, nationally as well as locally, while largely confined to those cultivated in the New Order, exclude others, like labour, which had been systematically marginalized within its authoritarian framework (Hadiz 2000). As mentioned, social forces and interests that may be expected to advocate more thorough reform continue to lack organization. Aware of their own weakness within the wider constellation of forces, market-oriented liberals, for example, have sometimes explicitly welcomed the active role of international organizations like the IMF as virtual domestic actors in the context of Indonesia's struggle to emerge from the 1997–98 economic crisis. As one suggested, the disciplinary pressure exerted by such organizations (in such areas as the budget and finance) can only be applauded 'since domestic forces may not be adequate to clean up the mess'.³ The labour movement, on the other hand, while benefiting from new freedoms, has most clearly been unable to overcome the legacy of systematic and often brutal disorganization under the New Order.

One of the most important developments in post-Soeharto Indonesia is that the contest over state power is no longer confined to coalitions of interests operating in the capital city of Jakarta. This is reflective of the diffusion of politics that would not have been possible under Soeharto's highly centralized system of rule. Thus, developing their own systems of patronage, and forging their own alliances, powerful local interests have competed openly over control of local government machineries and institutions. Nothing illustrates this better than the fact that the offices of mayors and *bupati* (regent) have become far more highly contested political prizes than ever before, as have positions in local legislatures. Significantly, the election processes of local officials in many provinces have frequently been tainted by accusations of money politics (*Tempo Interaktif*, 29 February 2000; *Kompas*, 22 March 2000; *Kompas*, 17 April 2000) and political thuggery, as local elites with often strong links to the New Order scramble to reposition favourably in the new, more fluid, environment. Interestingly, one preliminary survey concluded that local political elites now largely consist of entrepreneurs who 'matured' under the New Order (IPCOS 2000).

The diffusion of politics to the local level has gone hand in hand with the formal process of decentralizing administrative and fiscal governance to the country's 300-plus *kabupaten* (regency) and municipal entities. Though the two sets of legislation on regional autonomy introduced in 1999, and implemented in January 2001, remain controversial and are subject to revision

(Bell 2001), it is clear that they provide opportunities for local elites to exert direct control over many local resources.

The developments described above would suggest that useful insights might be gained by comparing the Indonesian experience with that of Thailand and the Philippines. In both countries, for example, local bossism – linking dominant political and economic interests – has long been a feature of contests over power and economic resources (see Ockey 1998; Sidel 1999; McVey 2000). Also in both countries, these contests have involved the widespread practice of money politics and the frequent utilization of brute force, coercion and criminal elements by the rich and powerful – the use of ‘goons and gold’. Thus, in the Philippines, where entrenched oligarchic families have long captured the national and local machineries of state power, paramilitaries have been a salient feature of political life and of struggle. Both cases, like that of Indonesia, demonstrate how the institutions of democratic politics may be appropriated in the interests of those whose economic and political agenda may be quite decidedly anti-liberal as well as anti-democratic (see Anderson 1998a; Hewison 1993).

The new constellation

The fall of Soeharto marked the end of a long chapter in Indonesia’s political history, and the beginning of a new one. As the system of authoritarian rule which he presided over faltered, electoral politics has become far more important, as have institutions like political parties and national and regional parliaments (respectively the DPR and DPRD)⁴ as arenas of genuine political competition.

But after thirty years of systematic disorganization of civil society under the New Order – which imposed a highly state-centred authoritarian corporatist framework to prohibit independent sources of political power – not all kinds of interests have been well placed to take advantage of democratization. It is suggested here that democratization has mostly benefited those who occupied the middle and lower rungs of the New Order’s vast system of patronage – including its local apparatchik and operators, and its henchmen and enforcers. Thus, small- and medium-scale businessmen who had always relied on political connections and state contracts are now developing more lofty ambitions: some for example, seek business opportunities by winning political office. The hope, apparently, is to have direct influence over the allocation of resources, contracts and other forms of largesse. Likewise, some middle-level civil servants are no longer content with mere administrative power, and seek to wield direct political power by contesting local elections. Moreover, gangsters that assisted the New Order’s feared security apparatus in the task of intimidating opponents and maintaining order, have sought new, more powerful positions in the local political arena, as well as new social status and prestige. A range of these

now inhabit political parties or their paramilitary wings, and local assemblies or executive bodies. Other players in the local political arena include professional politicians with links to the old New Order parties, or activists who had latched on to the mass and youth organizations from which the New Order regularly recruited new apparatchik and political operators. While there are also relative newcomers, these have grown in prominence only due to alliances with more established figures or groups endowed with political or economic resources – or an apparatus of violence. While some may aspire to use the local political arena as a springboard to national politics, others may increasingly find that much could be harvested from the possession of power and authority at the local level – especially with the erosion of central state authority.

A window into the dynamics of reorganizing power is provided by the alliances that have been cemented in the form of political parties, locally and nationally. It is not surprising that virtually all the parties have been obscure about their respective reform agendas, although all, including Golkar (the former New Order state party), present themselves as reformist. Few have clear policies, for example, with regard to market and legal reforms, labour relations, environmental degradation or the eradication of endemic corruption. Indeed, in the cases in which reformers have emerged, they have subsequently been swept aside in the process of internal party struggles.

Thus, it is clearly simplistic to draw the reformist/anti-reformist divide in terms of competition between Golkar and other major parties. In fact, the latter have also been populated by a variety of elements that were all part of the vast network of political patronage that was the New Order. For such interests, parties and parliaments are now the main avenue towards political power and control over state institutions, a situation that contrasts starkly to that which existed in the Soeharto era, during which political parties other than Golkar were mainly ornamental. Now different concentrations of old politico-bureaucratic and business interests have been dispersed within all the major parties, along with typically small bands of reformist liberals whose influence arguably depend on continuing external pressure – i.e. from the IMF – for economic reform. After thirty years of labour disorganization, social democratic or labour-oriented parties have also not emerged to any degree of significance.

The internal dynamics of the major new parties have been very instructive in terms of understanding some of the dynamics of Indonesian politics, and here we shall briefly examine the cases of two of the major post-Soeharto-era parties.

The first is the National Mandate Party (PAN) led by Amien Rais – now the chair of Indonesia's national supra-parliament (the People's Consultative Assembly, or MPR). What is significant about this party is that it has been characterized by a serious rift between its Islamic activist followers and more secular liberal intellectuals who had embraced the party because

of its nominal secularism. This rift was best illustrated in the acrimony between chairman Rais and now estranged former secretary-general Faisal Basri, the liberal economist. The problem for the liberals was that PAN's real constituency is the traditionally conservative urban petty bourgeoisie. It is thus centred on the 'modernist' Muslim mass organization, the Muhammadiyah, and guided by the vision of a kind of capitalist populism that advocates an active state role in redressing wealth imbalances in favour of *pribumi* (indigenous) Muslim Indonesians. Significantly, there are new rent-seeking opportunities clearly implied in this position. It is significant also that Rais is in fact closely linked to former Soeharto crony and finance minister Fuad Bawazier – who is widely believed to be a major PAN financier as well as being one of its representatives to the MPR. PAN also relies on the support of some elements of ICMI (the Indonesian Association of Muslim Intellectuals), the organization set up by Soeharto and run by Habibie to mobilize support from the Muslim middle class in the 1990s (Hefner 2000), and which became a conduit for politically ambitious new apparatchik. Thus PAN is arguably dominated by elements that were part of the New Order's system of rule, albeit on its fringes.

The same can be said about the PDI-P (Indonesian Democratic Party for Struggle), led by President Megawati Soekarnoputri, and the victor in Indonesia's 1999 parliamentary elections – the first free poll since 1955. In contrast to PAN, it is arguably, along with Golkar, the major exponent of a more secular nationalist brand of populism, which generally emphasizes centralized bureaucratic rule, and national consensus on policy. In spite of its own reformist credentials – it was the party that Soeharto so uncharacteristically failed to suppress – the PDI-P leadership today is centred on docile New Order-era politicians, while retired military officers and Golkar refugees, including businessman and New Order crony Arifin Panigoro, have joined since 1998. A number of top party members had already been members of the old Soeharto-era parliament while a few were middle-level entrepreneurs – Megawati's own husband, Taufik Kiemas, being a good example. Meanwhile, liberal intellectuals like economist Kwik Kian Gie and former banker Laksamana Sukardi have coexisted somewhat uneasily within the party. At the same time, while the party's populist rhetoric seemed to appeal to workers, there has never been organized labour representation in the PDI-P leadership, except for a minister of manpower who actually also heads the old, compliant, New Order-backed labour federation, the FSPSI. In fact, the PDI-P's position on labour issues has been ambivalent at best, with pronouncements about the intent to protect 'workers as a special and humane [*sic*] factor of production' while developing a 'social security system without the excessiveness occurring in Western Europe' (PDI-P 1999: 15), being fairly typical.

More importantly, PDI-P appears increasingly attractive to some business interests seeking new allies and protectors. Some press reports suggest that Indonesian Chinese businesses were counted among the PDI-P's strongest

supporters during the election campaign of 1999 (*Far Eastern Economic Review*, 6 May 1999, p. 26). Notably, the PDI-P's paramilitary wing, the *satgas* PDI-P, has also taken part in the quelling of labour unrest on behalf of industrialists.⁵

Such an observation is given some credence at the local level. As one Yogyakarta parliamentarian from Golkar wryly remarked, 'Businesspeople do not dare help Golkar like they did before. Moreover, our businesspeople . . . follow [whoever] wins. I can say that today is the era of the PDI-P'.⁶ Many liberal reformers have also been swept aside from the PDI-P, as Faisal Basri and his allies were from PAN. The party congress in March 2000, for example, saw the ouster of many of its liberal intellectuals from key positions and the growing stranglehold over the party of the ambitious Taufik Kiemas. Filmmaker and journalist Eros Djarot, a long-time confidante of Megawati, was one victim of the Congress (*Tempo Interaktif*, 8 March 2000), along with academics Mochtar Buchori and Dimiyati Hartono.

The point in all of this is that ostensibly 'reformist' parties like PAN and the PDI-P constitute tactical alliances that predominantly draw on the same pool of predatory interests. They have essentially become a new harbour for old and new predators that have not been swept aside by the tide of the reform movement in 1998. Their function has been to act as a vehicle to assure access to the spoils of state power rather than to produce a concrete agenda of fundamental reform.

Local politics: insights into Indonesia's new democracy

Not surprisingly, local political dynamics after the fall of Soeharto have mirrored those at the national level, both in terms of the essential predatory logic, and in the appropriation of the institutions of democracy primarily by old interests nurtured by the New Order. Nevertheless, it may be important that local elites appear to be developing the capacity to carve out relatively autonomous positions *vis-à-vis* those ensconced in Jakarta. Indeed, the current controversy about how much autonomy should be granted to local governments under still contentious new legislation, and how the principle of local autonomy should be implemented (Bell 2001), is indicative of a tug of war between local and central elite interests that may prove quite inconclusive for some time. The analysis offered here directly contradicts assumptions that decentralization policy will likely result in democratic good governance (USAID <http://www.usaid.gov/id/docs-csp2k03.html>). Instead, it is shown here that the local institutions of democratic governance may fall to alliances that constitute the foundations for an extensive predatory local bossism.

It is in this context that the remainder of this essay deals with the reorganization of power in post-Soeharto Indonesia as reflected at the local level, with Yogyakarta and North Sumatra as case studies. The assumption is that the diffusion of politics since the fall of Soeharto means that it is no

longer possible to understand the basic logic of Indonesian politics and society via Jakarta dynamics alone, if it ever was. Though it is recognized that there are distinct problems of extrapolating generally from these cases, given the diversity of conditions across Indonesia, it is suggested that the patterns of power relations identified in Yogyakarta and North Sumatra might be found in other areas, even as the exact constellation of social forces will differ from case to case. For example, contrasting the dynamics in provinces that are particularly richly endowed with natural resources and those that are particularly not could also prove an additional useful exercise. North Sumatra, and particularly Yogyakarta, may be counted as regions that are not expected to fare particularly well, financially, under the decentralization programme. Yogyakarta lacks natural resources, while the revenue from North Sumatra's plantations sector would fall largely under the control of the central government without further amendments to existing legislation. Nevertheless, local elites in both areas, like elsewhere, have been enthusiastic supporters of a decentralization process that would theoretically allow them greater direct access to a variety of material resources, through greater taxation powers, etc. Radically different dynamics, however, will probably be found in two areas in the vast Indonesian archipelago: Papua (formerly West Irian) and Aceh. There, local elites are seriously involved in secessionist movements, and are not merely repositioning favourably in the context of decentralization policy.

Yogyakarta, a designated Special Region in the heart of Central Java – with a rich history and cultural tradition – has been relatively free of much of the wanton political violence and turbulence that has characterized many other regions. Nevertheless, it has been less free of the thuggery and money politics that have frequently accompanied contests for control over local political offices. North Sumatra, a major site of the historically important plantations sector, and more recently a major centre of manufacturing industry, has even more clearly displayed the characteristics of a new political environment dominated by the utilization of money and violence.

As in neighbouring Central Java, the PDI-P emerged victorious in Yogyakarta in the 1999 parliamentary elections. Of the six national parliamentary seats that represent the Special Region of Yogyakarta, two were PDI-P, while the rest were equally divided amongst PAN, PKB (The National Awakening Party of former president Abdurrahman Wahid), Golkar and the PPP (United Development Party), the old 'Muslim' party of the New Order. The PDI-P is also the dominant force in Yogyakarta's provincial parliament, controlling 18 of the 54 seats. Much of the same pattern is replicated in the various sub-provincial parliaments in the *kabupaten* (regencies) of Bantul, Kulonprogo, Gunung Kidul, Sleman and in the city of Yogyakarta itself.

In North Sumatra, the PDI-P has also been the dominant force. It won 10 of the 24 national parliamentary seats allocated to the province, as well as 30 of the 85 seats in the provincial parliament, thereby emerging as the

strongest faction. It also controls no fewer than 228 of the 690 seats in the various sub-provincial and city parliaments, leaving Golkar a distant second with just 145 seats.⁷

It is useful to understand political parties in Yogyakarta and North Sumatra, as in Jakarta, as primarily the vehicles of emerging coalitions of interests, older and newer, forged in battles to secure control over state power and its resources. Again, the demarcation lines locally are rarely between clearly reformist and pro-‘status quo’ forces, for these will intermingle and realign within party vehicles. As in other regions, the authority and power of the local legislatures, and therefore of political parties, have been significantly enhanced with the erosion of central state authority.

Significantly, formal decentralization of powers to the regions has in general given rise to questions about the rise of local practices of ‘KKN’ (the Indonesian acronym for corruption, collusion and nepotism) and the emergence of petty official fiefdoms. Though such concerns have been much stronger in relation to regions with abundant natural resources, Yogyakarta has not been completely immune from them. In North Sumatra, sub-provincial politicians are particularly concerned to ensure local control over revenue from the plantations sector as well as independence in introducing new levies.⁸ One provincial-level Golkar parliamentarian in Yogyakarta, for example, suggests that, ‘Because the culture of the bureaucracy remains the same, the decentralization of power or authority, I am afraid, will be followed by the decentralization of KKN [corrupt] practices’.⁹

Others are aware that local parliamentarians are in a particularly good position. As one PPP provincial parliamentarian in Yogya observes, ‘With the growing strength of the DPR . . . deviations that used to occur in the bureaucracy may now happen in the DPRD’.¹⁰ Given the decentralization of powers to the *kabupaten* level envisaged in the new legislation, another PPP parliamentarian in Yogyakarta suggests that ‘opportunists’, in the future, will be especially interested in sub-provincial DPRD II.¹¹ In North Sumatra, some local legislators admit that the practice of ‘KKN’ is already a growing problem in local state institutions.¹²

These local legislatures are particularly crucial sites of political battles during elections for *bupati* and for mayor. In Yogyakarta, this was already witnessed in the election process of the *bupati* of Sleman. The case was particularly controversial, with contending forces reportedly deploying both money politics and intimidation. Indeed, allegations of beatings, kidnappings, the use of paramilitary organizations and even bomb threats were pervasive.¹³ In North Sumatra, the election of the *bupati* of Karo was a particularly ugly affair, which involved the mysterious burning of the local parliament house.¹⁴

It may be significant as well that the selection process of regional representative to the national MPR in 1999 was also reportedly tainted – legislators in the Yogyakarta DPRD recall being offered large sums of money to elect particular individuals.¹⁵ Another notable case of local money

politics involved a débâcle for the PDI-P in the city of Medan, North Sumatra. Controversy shook the party badly when its official candidate – long-time bureaucrat Ridwan Batubara – failed to win the mayoralty, in spite of the party's strong position in the city's legislative body. As it transpired, PDI-P members in the legislature had been bribed to vote for another candidate (*Kompas*, 22 March 2000), local businessman Abdillah, while goons and thugs had been deployed to intimidate them as well.¹⁶ It is interesting that Abdillah achieved victory even though his main rival was the brother of Yopie Batubara, a major local businessman and head of the North Sumatra Chamber of Commerce and Industry. Yopie Batubara himself admits to a failed attempt to sway the votes of Medan legislators through monetary incentives, for which he had kept the receipts!¹⁷

Thus, what seems to be developing is a situation in which legislative bodies, in particular, are emerging as a site for the auctioning of powerful positions and the distribution of political largesse. Given the enhanced stature of legislative bodies, nationally and locally, these developments are important in making sense of much of what is happening in the post-Soeharto period. Recalling Anderson's famous assertion about the significance of political murders in Thailand in the 1980s (Anderson 1998b) in relation to the rise of parliaments, that such effort is now invested to gain control over local offices in Indonesia is clearly indicative of their growing value and significance.

But it has been as much about naked force as it has been about money as political parties form their own paramilitary wings or civilian militia. In Yogyakarta 'Islamic' paramilitary groups have been at least as ubiquitous as that of the *satgas*, or paramilitary wing, of the politically ascendant PDI-P. Groups like *Gerakan Pemuda Ka'bah* (GPK), loosely linked to the PPP have been active, as have the *Front Pembela Islam* (FPI), which allegedly involves cooperation between several Islamic-oriented parties, including the nominally secular PAN.¹⁸ Members of party-linked paramilitary organizations or civilian militia frequently function as goons when these parties need to flex their muscles – especially during local elections. It is significant as well that members of paramilitary organizations are sometimes alleged to have underworld links. It has been suggested that they have been involved in new protection rackets, for example, probably in collusion with the corrupt police force.¹⁹

In North Sumatra, however, protection rackets – as well as others like illegal gambling and prostitution – still appear to be the domain of old New Order-backed youth/gangster organizations like the *Pemuda Pancasila*, and the powerful *Ikatan Pemuda Karya*. It is significant that a number of such organizations' members currently occupy local parliamentary seats. It is also significant that activists of these organizations, with historic links to both the military and Golkar, have frequently migrated with ease to other parties, including PAN and the PDI-P.

It is in this context that questions arise about the origins of the individuals

who staff these burgeoning paramilitaries. Some local party officials admit, for example, that it is likely that some have simply crossed over from the *Pemuda Pancasila*, the nationally organized 'youth' organization that under the New Order effectively acted as a state-sponsored organized crime operation (see, for example, Ryter 1998).²⁰ This they do in search of new sources of patronage. Continuing high levels of unemployment, especially in the wake of economic crisis, conceivably provide a steady stream of new potential entrants into the ranks of such organizations.²¹

More crucial, however, for the purposes of broad analysis is to gauge the kinds of interests represented by those who are now in, or seeking control of, the local machineries of power.

In this context, North Sumatran dynamics are particularly enlightening. Of the twenty-two *bupati* and mayors winning elections since the fall of Soeharto, all but one have been Golkar nominees, in spite of the emergence of the PDI-P as the dominant party in the region. Given the role of local legislative bodies in electing these officials, this may indicate the greater adeptness of Golkar – the party of the New Order – at playing the game of money politics and political thuggery. Indeed, elections without accusations of these practices have been rare in North Sumatra. Also interestingly, at least six of these new *bupati*/mayors have backgrounds as local entrepreneurs, demonstrating the growing attractiveness of direct bureaucratic power to people engaged in business.²² Most of the remainder have been bureaucrats, indicating a strong degree of continuity with the New Order.

It is in North Sumatra as well that *preman* or gangsters (usually linked to 'youth' organizations) have most clearly emerged as direct players in local politics. Three parliamentarians in the city of Medan, Bangkit Sitepu, Moses Tambunan (both Golkar) and Martius Latuperisa (Justice and Unity Party) are leading figures of the local branches of such organizations. While critical of the avarice of his fellow politicians, the latter admits to a life of crime, which has included 'everything but rape'.²³ Significantly, New Order-era 'youth' organization figures winning the top executive body positions in the town of Binjai and the *kabupaten* of Langkat.²⁴

Clearly the contest over power in Yogyakarta and North Sumatra has been about control over resources. The stakes may be relatively small in natural resource-poor Yogyakarta, at least for the time being (although it would not be for aspiring political entrepreneurs in resource-rich places like Kutai in Kalimantan). The *bupati* of Bantul, Yogyakarta, speaks of setting up new local state enterprises although he presides over little with great economic value, except for the popular tourist site, Parangtritis beach. But for individuals such as this *bupati*, it is clearly better to have direct control over scarce resources rather than no control over resources under the jurisdiction of Jakarta.²⁵ It is not surprising that some reports suggest that mayors across Indonesia, armed with new-found powers, are now toying with the idea of instituting new levies to business and the public. This is the

case as well in North Sumatra, where local politicians are introducing such new levies, creating distress in the business community.²⁶

Reflecting more general, national dynamics, in both Yogyakarta and North Sumatra, the fall of the New Order has *not* been accompanied by the greater salience of movements and organizations representing the interests of lower classes, which have remained excluded from the process of political contestation. Thus, labour organizations, though existing in greater numbers and operating much more openly than during the Soeharto era, remain weak, largely ineffective and still vulnerable to acts of outright repression. Such acts, however, have been increasingly committed against workers by hoodlums or hired militia, rather than state security forces, as was the case in the immediate past.²⁷

It is true that labour activists have benefited much from the loosening of rules and regulations regarding the establishment of unions. At the national level, several dozen new unions have registered with the Department of Manpower. It is now theoretically unnecessary for labour activists to operate in semi-clandestine fashion, unlike in the Soeharto era, during which labour controls were extremely repressive (Hadiz 1997).

Nevertheless, the historical legacy of disorganization and demobilization during Soeharto's rule, and of the crushing of militant sections of organized labour at the very genesis of the New Order (owing to links to the Indonesian Communist Party), ensures the continuing relative weakness of the labour movement as a whole. Thus, in Yogyakarta and North Sumatra, as is true nationally, labour has been largely ignored by contending elites.

Significantly, the continuing salience of the interests that had been embedded in the vast network of patronage that was the New Order is reflected in the ideologies and world-views that remain prominent among major political actors. In Yogyakarta, for example, the views of many political party elites on the nature of labour struggles sometimes reproduce nearly exactly the kind propagated by officials of the decidedly anti-labour New Order. Thus, some local parliamentarians in Yogyakarta tend to waver between a condescending paternalism towards 'uneducated' workers to moral outrage when the problem of apparently heightened labour unrest is brought up. However, rather than recognising deep-rooted problems in the area of industrial relations, many such parliamentarians advance the 'third party' explanation so favoured by New Order officials like the notorious former security chief and Minister of Manpower Sudomo. Similar to Sudomo, they tend to argue that labour unrest has largely been due to the self-interested, behind-the-scenes manipulations and opportunism of NGOs. Now a favoured target of this kind of moral indignation is the People's Democratic Party, a small leftist party whose affiliates in Yogyakarta are routinely accused of staging strike actions as well as 'misleading' young 'impressionable' workers.²⁸ Claims about the omnipresence of the PRD in labour disputes in Yogyakarta clearly reflect a

tendency to equate the rise of labour unrest with the resurgence of communism, which as Etty once observed, was a characteristic of New Order officials (Etty 1998). This is hardly surprising, as many of these local parliamentarians have backgrounds in organizations that historically were part of the alliance that brought the New Order to power while simultaneously smashing the old Communist Party.

Indeed, while anti-PRD rhetoric is much less pronounced in North Sumatra, generally anti-communist rhetoric is commonly heard as well. Indeed, members of 'youth' organizations like the military-linked *Pemuda Pancasila*, with direct experience in confrontations with communists in the 1960s, still play a major role in local politics.²⁹ One Medan municipal parliamentarian from PAN – and member of the women's section of the *Pemuda Pancasila* – suggests that one should always be 'vigilant ... because [communists] are shrewd, well-trained'. She adds that 'they do not only acquire this shrewdness from internal organizing', but also through 'foreign contacts'.³⁰

But the fixation with communists may disguise other dynamics beginning to emerge, as another aspect of the contest over power in Indonesia has been the selective mass mobilization of the urban poor on behalf of contending elites. Reports abound in the Indonesian press regarding 'rent-a-crowd' demonstrations and rallies. Thus, it is interesting that such powerful figures like the Sultan of Yogyakarta, who is governor of the province, and the *bupati* of Bantul, have regarded outbreaks of labour unrest as part of sinister manipulations by political rivals to discredit their administrations.³¹ It is clear that they were not referring to the small PRD, but real or imagined machinations by more significant political actors.

Whether this view of the roots of recent cases of labour unrest in Yogyakarta is valid is still difficult to ascertain. Nevertheless, at least one PPP Yogyakarta parliamentarian, with known links to the *Gerakan Pemuda Ka'bah*, confirmed that certain major political parties might indeed be responsible for some of the labour unrest.³² One Medan municipal parliamentarian, the local boss of the military-linked 'youth' organization, the innocuously named Communications Forum for the Sons and Daughters of Military Retirees (FKPPI), openly admits to having fomented labour unrest on occasions.³³

This suggests the tantalizing possibility that party elites may devote more attention in the future to developing bases of labour support in the context of heightened power struggles and strategies of selective mass mobilizations. At the national level, some labour organizations have indeed been established – perhaps with still insignificant bases at the grassroots level – but with clear links to party elites. The most highly publicized has been the Muslim Workers' Union (PPMI), headed by Eggi Sudjana, a long-time field operator for Islamic populist forces, with links to the Crescent and Star Party (PBB). This, in turn, further opens a lucrative area of enterprise for politically connected hoodlums and thugs. But without greater capacities for

labour self-organization, elite involvement may only open the door for manipulation, rather than negotiation, and greater access to power for organized labour.

Conclusion

The reorganization of power in contemporary Indonesia recalls some of the experiences of countries like Thailand and the Philippines, and that of post-Soviet Russia. All of these cases demonstrate serious problems with envisaging the replacement of authoritarian regimes with liberal forms of democratic governance. Instead, they show that old interests and such uncivil forces as local bosses and political gangsters may reinvent themselves and appropriate the democratization process, and thereby exercise predatory power through money politics and political thuggery. Their collective experience, along with Indonesia's, makes the triumphalist tone adopted by those who see the inexorable, world-wide march of democracy in the liberal vein, driven by elite enlightenment or rational choice, sound somewhat hollow.

This all suggests a way of reading the recent Indonesian dynamics that contradicts notions of transitions to liberal forms of democracy, which some Indonesia observers seem to have considered 'inevitable' (Budiman 1999: 41) once Soeharto was toppled. Such a reading suggests that the ultimate establishment of a democratic regime in the liberal vein will not necessarily be the outcome of the unravelling of the New Order. From this point of view, the currently highly volatile, angst-ridden state of Indonesian politics and society is not simply a transitional stage. In fact, Indonesia is no longer in transition in the sense that the new patterns and essential dynamics of the exercise of social, economic and political power have now been more or less established. In other words, all the political violence, vote buying, kidnappings and so on today are not symptomatic of 'growing pains' towards an ultimately liberal democratic system, but fundamental instead to the logic of a 'something else' – a non-liberal type of democracy driven by money politics and thuggery – that is already entrenched, and the variations of which can readily be found elsewhere.

Acknowledgements

I would like to acknowledge a debt to Professor Richard Robison, the Institute of Social Science, The Hague, with whom I have been collaborating on themes closely related to those which appear in this article. Thanks are due to Ridaya Laode, and Safaruddin Siregar, Elfenda Ananda and other friends at FITRA, who helped with the research in Yogyakarta and North Sumatra. Funding for the fieldwork was obtained from the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, National University of Singapore, to which I am grateful. I would also like to thank the two anonymous referees who read

this article for their constructive criticism, as well as Professor Chua Beng Huat. An earlier version of this paper was presented to a Conference on Consolidating Indonesian Democracy, Ohio State University, Columbus, 11–13 May 2001.

Notes

- 1 Indeed, consideration of such factors alone could lead to a descent into the most banal forms of rational choice (and game-theoretic mathematical models). McFaul (2002: 215) has noticed that the ‘postulates’ of transition theorists are strikingly ‘very similar to institutional arguments being generated by rational choice theorists working in the positivist tradition’.
- 2 For example, the statement by opposition leader and future president Abdurrahman Wahid, as reported in *Kompas*, 11 February 1999; also speech by General Wiranto, then Indonesian defence chief, as reported in *Jakarta Post*, 5 November 1998.
- 3 From Mohammad Sadli, ‘The way out of Jakarta’s prolonged messy state’, *The Straits Times*, 27 March 2001.
- 4 DPRD are divided into two categories: DPRD-I, which are provincial-level local parliaments, and DPRD-II, which are sub-provincial (city and regency)-level parliaments.
- 5 Interview with activists of Serikat Buruh Independen Indonesia, Yogyakarta, 15 December 2000.
- 6 Interview with Khairuddin, head of the Golkar faction in the Yogya regional parliament (DPRD), 5 January 2001.
- 7 Data on Yogyakarta were provided by Ridaya Laode while FITRA tabulated the data on North Sumatra.
- 8 For example, interview with T. Rizal Nurdin, Governor of North Sumatra, 7 July 2001.
- 9 Interview with Khairuddin, head of the Golkar faction in the Yogya regional parliament (DPRD), 5 January 2001.
- 10 Interview with Syukri Fadholi, Head of the PPP faction in the Yogya DPRD, now Deputy Mayor of Yogyakarta city, 15 December 2000.
- 11 Interview with Herman Abdul Rahman, member of DPRD-I Yogyakarta for the PPP, 14 December 2000.
- 12 Interview with Victor Simamora, member of the North Sumatra provincial parliament for the small Partai Bhineka Tunggal Ika, 3 July 2001. He made headlines in local newspapers when he suggested that some of his colleagues had offered themselves for bribes in the tendering of projects. Also interview with O. K. Azhari, PDI-P member of the Medan municipal parliament, 5 July 2001.
- 13 Interview with Hafidh Asrom, businessman, defeated candidate for the *bupati*-ship of Sleman, 9 December 2000.
- 14 Interview with John Andreas Purba, PDI-P member of Karo sub-provincial parliament, 6 July 2001.
- 15 Interviews with Syukri Fadholi, Head of the PPP faction in the Yogya DPRD, and now Deputy Mayor of Yogyakarta city, 15 December 2000, and with Herman Abdul Rahman, member of DPRD-I Yogyakarta for the PPP, 14 December 2000.
- 16 Under the existing system, mayors and *bupati*, or regents, are elected by members of the local legislature.
- 17 Interview with Yopie Batubara, 8 September 2001.

- 18 Interviews with Syukri Fadholi, then head of the PPP faction in the Yogya DPRD, and now Deputy Mayor of Yogyakarta, 15 December 2000, and with Herman Abdul Rahman, member of DPRD-I Yogyakarta for the PPP, 14 December 2000.
- 19 Interview with Herman Abdul Rahman, member of DPRD-I Yogyakarta for the PPP, 14 December 2000.
- 20 Interview with the late Ryadi Gunawan, PDI-P member of Yogyakarta legislature, 11 December 2000; and with O. K. Azhari, PDI-P parliamentarian in the city of Medan, North Sumatra, 5 July 2001. The latter comments that the PDI-P was such an open party that it welcomed 'thieves and murderers'.
- 21 The mobilization of lower-class support for petty propertied or politically conservative interests is, of course, not historically unprecedented. Similar support was provided by sections of the European working classes in the twentieth century to a number of populist and fascist regimes. Indeed the ubiquitous paramilitaries of such regimes – their uniformed goons and thugs – were largely working-class-derived (Mann 1995: 39–40).
- 22 Interview with Amir Purba, Dean, Faculty of Social and Political Sciences, Islamic University of North Sumatra (UISU), 5 July 2001; and data kindly compiled and supplied to me by Elfenda Ananda.
- 23 Interview, 6 July 2001.
- 24 Interview with Amir Purba, Dean, Faculty of Social and Political Sciences, Islamic University of North Sumatra (UISU), 5 July 2001; data kindly compiled by Elfenda Ananda.
- 25 Interview with Muhammad Idham Samawi, *bupati* of Bantul, 12 December 2000.
- 26 Interview with Yopie Batubara, head of the North Sumatra Chamber of Commerce and Industry, 8 September 2001.
- 27 Interview with Amin Muftiana, YASANTI (labour NGO), 15 December 2000, and with Herwin Nasution, *Kelompok Pelita Sejahtera* (labour NGO), 4 July 2001.
- 28 Interview with Budi Dewantoro, Justice Party member of Yogyakarta provincial legislature, 13 December 2000.
- 29 For example, interview with Amran Y. S., North Sumatra provincial parliamentarian from PAN, 4 July 2001.
- 30 Interview with Elvi Rahmita Ginting, Medan city parliamentarian from PAN, 6 July 2001.
- 31 Interview with Sri Sultan Hamengkubuwono X, 15 December 2000, and with Mohammad Idham Samawi, 12 December 2000.
- 32 Interview with Syukri Fadholi, Head of the PPP faction in the Yogya DPRD, now Deputy Mayor of Yogyakarta, 15 December 2000.
- 33 Interview with Martius Latuperisa, Medan parliamentarian, 6 July 2001. A former member for Golkar, he is now with the Justice and Unity Party led by such former New Order stalwart General Edi Sudrajat.

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