



Demokrasi: Indonesia in the 21st Century

Hamish McDonald

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Indonesia, a nation of thousands of islands and almost 250 million people, straddles the junction of the Pacific and Indian oceans. Current President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono has presided over 6 per cent average yearly growth of its economy, to surpass \$1 trillion. If this rate continues, Indonesia will join the world's ten biggest economies in a decade or so, just behind the so-called BRIC countries. The much-discussed recent documentary *The Act of Killing* revived some of its darker past, and Barack Obama's reminiscences about the childhood years he spent there briefly shone the spotlight on a country many Americans know little about. Yet as Indonesia approaches its 2014 parliamentary and presidential elections, its future is wide open. Though the largest Muslim nation by population, it remains a receiver of wisdom from the Arab world, rather than a messenger of multi-religious tolerance. Its pursuit of trade agreements with Japan and South Korea have burnished its economic ambitions, but its diplomacy is long on so-called "soft power," and short on sanctions or force.

So what does the future hold for this pivotal place? Award-winning Asia-Pacific journalist Hamish McDonald's *Demokrasi* is an accessible and authoritative introduction to the modern history and politics of this fascinating country.

Demokrasi: Indonesia in the 21st Century Details

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Calzean says

When I worked in Jakarta, a senior civil servant told me many people were not happy with having to vote - he said that from colonisation then two strong-willed pseudo-dictators, the people were not good at choosing leaders or determining priorities. Rather the people would prefer to be told what to do. So I was very keen to see what Hamish McDonald had observed.

This books provides a very detailed coverage of Indonesia challenges - leading figures, politics, the difficulties of passing laws, corruption, environmental damage, palm oil, religion tolerance, Islamic influence, Papua, economy and overpopulation. It is a journalistic view so there are few conclusions but it is gives a lot of information for the reader to mull over.

Greta says

It certainly did get a lot better once it reached more recent events. I feel like I learned something.

Nicholas says

Goodreads win. Will read and review once received.

I thought this book was wonderful. I will admit I really don't know too much if anything about Indonesia. But this book was a good stepping stone. I was happy to find myself having a hard time putting the book down. I can see myself after reading this book to go on and look for others about Indonesia. I found myself to really enjoy reading about a place I knew not very much about.

Frumenty says

We arrived in Indonesia amid much turmoil as President Abdurrahman Wahid (aka Gus Dur) struggled to avoid impeachment, and we departed a few months before the close of his successor Megawati Sukarnoputri's short and lacklustre presidency. Interesting times! I took a lively interest in Indonesia's history and politics, keeping myself as well informed as I could from English-language sources (though I spoke passable Indonesian, the language of the Indonesian media was always beyond my competence). I took up this book because I was conscious of the deficiency of my knowledge of Indonesian politics and public affairs for the whole term of the presidency of Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono (SBY), and unsure what to make of the new president Joko Widodo.

The opening chapters were straightforward revision of history that I already knew: the old civilisations of Sriwijaya and Majapahit, the arrival of Islam, the Mataram sultanate, Portuguese traders and missionaries, Dutch (VOC) colonisation, Sir Stamford Raffles, Dutch (post-VOC) colonialism, the Japanese invasion, post-war independence, Sukarno, the Crocodile Hole and the purging of the PKI, Suharto and the New

Order, the Global Financial Crisis, Reformasi. The whole history of the archipelago which we now know as Indonesia is told concisely and economically in just four chapters, but with emphasis on events that succeeded the expulsion of the Dutch from their last stronghold, New Guinea, in 1963.

For me the real meat of the book was in the succeeding chapters. There are chapters on the role of the army in politics and commerce, which will appear very peculiar to most Westerners; coal in the economy (I was surprised to learn that RI has pipped Australia as the world's largest exporter), and other commodities too; big business, Indonesian style, and how it has fared under Suharto and since; Islam, which enjoys only middling support at elections; corruption; Papua; the environment; the SBY presidency; and RI in foreign affairs .

In Australia we tend to think of SBY as a "good" Indonesian president because he was outward-looking and friendly to Australia. I now have a more nuanced view of him, and a better idea of the failings of his presidency. McDonald accuses SBY of fostering a "creeping orthodoxy", of kowtowing to conservative religious parties to the detriment of groups such as the Ahmadiyah, a form of Islam which the majority Sunnis regard as heretical, and of Christians. SBY is a former military man, and when he took office military reform halted. Following a 3 year enquiry by the government's Human Rights Commission, SBY toyed with the idea of an apology to the victims of the 1965 massacres, but his army colleagues and the Moslem parties opposed it and it was quietly dropped. Passivity was a mark of his presidency.

The present incumbent, Joko Widodo, is a former mayor of Solo who has a reputation as a reformer and a fighter of corruption, and has made a virtue of being an outsider in the world of Jakarta politics. He has few friends in high places and may find himself hamstrung by that fact. At the time McDonald was writing the result of the presidential election was still unknown. He expresses the fear that Megawati, as president of his party, may end up pulling his strings. I have heard nothing of this in the media since the election, so perhaps there is nothing in it, but it is a suspicion to keep in mind as we watch his performance into the future.

Hunter Marston says

A worthwhile overview, but a tough slog admittedly. I found this very insightful and thorough book to read more like a collection of oddly assembled long-form journalism essays, not as a history or a cohesive work on its own. Worth reading, but this could have used more editing. And with McDonald's stellar reputation as a writer, I was a bit surprised that the book wasn't more readable and enjoyable. Still, I learned a lot, so I suppose there's that.

Patrick McCoy says

Hamish McDonald's *Demokrasi* (2014) is a good overview of Indonesia today. It is a well researched look at the island nation of more than 250 million. The book starts with "Nusantrara" in which the Suharto regime is discussed. Then "The Crocodile Hole" discusses the events surrounding the 1965 takeover by Suharto. "The New Order" looks at Suharto's rule. "Reformasi" is an analysis of the 1998 fall of Suharto and the rise of his second in command Habibie. "Tsunami" discusses the problems associated with the massive tsunami that hit SE Asia in 2004. "Beyond Dwifungsi" discusses the reforms of the military after reforms of the post Suarto period. "Supreme Commodity" looks at the natural resources of Indonesia and their importance to other countries. "Capital" is a look at the banking system of Indonesia. "Between Mecca and the South Sea" looks

at religion in the country. "Korupsi" looks at the government under Yudoyono. "The Eastern Margin" looks at the role of Papua New Guinea as a region in Indonesia. "The Burning Question" looks at the management of Indonesia's natural resources. "From Sby to Jokowi" is a look at contemporary politics of Indonesia. "Indonesia in the World" is a look at Indonesia's place in the world today. This book is a well-researched overview of Indonesia.

Sofie Tyger says

Excellent. More importantly, made me care about military territoriality, Papua, palm oil plantations and a falling water table.

Tomek Kobyli?ski says

Worth reading / Very insightful
