

Keanu Shui

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Professor Lussier

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Analytical Research Report

Indonesia, the largest island country by area in the world, has had a complex history which has left long lasting effects on the present and the ability to form a fully-fledged democratic state. Due to continual historical powers attempting to control Indonesia for their own desires, the state has struggled to transition to democracy which has had several moments of authoritarian rule throughout its history. The framework of agency-based structures which specifically focuses on the differences between transition and survival in institutions is crucial to analyze the impact of decentralization policy, its complex history, and increased civil liberties in how contemporary Indonesia achieved and is sustaining democracy when given the ability to focus on transition rather than survivability (Levitsky & Way, 2010).

I will be classifying contemporary Indonesia as a hybrid-regime due to its lack of a fully successful transition into a democratic regime, civil liberties, and political rights rating by the 2024 Freedom House Country Report (Freedom House, 2024). This important political regime categorization will help decipher the current governmental structure and previous effects in Indonesia under its most recent authoritarian rule. Krzysztof Trzeciński of the Polish Academy of Sciences shares the impact of the contrasting political ideologies called centripetalism and consociationalism that appear to be present today in Indonesia in “*Hybrid Power-Sharing in Indonesia*.” Centripetalism is a theory of governance that argues for the usage of centralized authority and broad inclusion to allow democratic institutions to operate best. Consociationalism is power sharing from elites from different social groups (Britannica, Sabine Saurugger).

Trzciński describes this transitional phase of Indonesia a necessity to understanding contemporary Indonesia based on decentralization policy. Trzciński shares, “Most institutions of Indonesian power-sharing are typical of centripetalism” and many are part of their described “The Centripetal Territorial Structure” (Trzciński, 174, *Hybrid Power-Sharing in Indonesia*). The Centripetal Territorial Structure describes the breakdown of segmented provinces of Indonesia formed by votes and based on political tensions from a fear of succession. The agency-based framework focuses on Indonesia’s transition to democracy once centripetalism was dismantled and new formation of provinces. The importance of this transition allowed for the successful allocation of resources by the “decentralization of a highly centralized state” to bridge significant inequities from formerly concentrated resources in specific states. This usage of decentralization in Indonesia via segmented provinces to provide equitable means for the general populus is an indicator of Indonesia’s pursuit of unusual methods to achieve democracy. Decentralization policy helped Indonesia to break away from its survival-orientated authoritarian rule in 1998.

Priyatno Harsasto and Susilo Utomo in “Democracy, Decentralization and Efficiency: A Study of Bureaucratic Reforms in Indonesia” continue to emphasize the effects of decentralization policy and Indonesia’s transition into democracy yet slightly differently than Trzciński. Harsasto and Utomo argues due to decentralization policy, Indonesia is now one of the most pluralistic democracies in Southeast Asia and how “[...] decentralization in Indonesia, with its local direct elections and wide representation of different interests in power structures, is necessary but might not be a sufficient condition for solving NKK (Nepotism, Collusion and Corruption) (Harasto, Utomo, 2018, 1). Although decentralization has had positive effects on representation, this policy has led to the failure to combat instances of corruption that undermine political freedoms. This failure is seen in the 2024 Freedom House Country Report of Indonesia’s ¼ rating of the question, “Are safeguards against official corruption strong and effective?” with Freedom House claiming how “Corruption remains endemic in the national and local legislatures,

civil service, judiciary, and police.” (Indonesia Freedom House Country Report, 2024). This continues Indonesia’s struggle to achieve democracy and dire need for policy reforms.

The article, “Fragmenting Indonesia: A Nation's Survival in Doubt” by Bernard Estrade in the fall of 1998 describes the transitional period from the resignation of the former authoritarian president Suharto and why Indonesia has struggled to achieve democracy. The International Non-Governmental Organization Forum on Indonesian Development (INFID) made clear to the successor President (Habibie) after the resignation of the authoritarian leader Suharto that INFID views President Habibie as "a mere continuation of the Suharto regime and as such not credible and unable to fully cope with the political crisis” (Estrade, 1998). This shows not only a lack of international trust in the government of Indonesia but even in the highest position of power demonstrating a significant correlation between Habibie’s international image and Suharto’s authoritarian regime which was only able to focus on survival.

Fascinatingly, in contemporary Indonesia, this transitional period continues to show substantial increases in political and civil liberties allowing for a high polyarchy score for free, fair, and frequent elections. Indonesia’s partly-free score of 57/100 shows a correlation between Indonesia’s ability to focus on transition and the newfound political and civil liberties in a hybrid-regime, once the struggles of survivability in an authoritarian regime began to dimmer (Dahl) (Freedom House, 2024). I would also like to analyze how the recent Jakarta court decision to delay the 2024 election into 2025 had sparked mass student protests (Aljazeera) due to a failure of upholding voting equality. This shows a potential correlation between student reactions and the fear of returning to declined political and civil liberties such as seen historically under Suharto. From my analysis, it appears that these student protests show high self-expression values and is an indicator of maintaining democracy; as “weak self-expression values imply strong survival values” (Welzel, Inglehart, 2005)

The Lowy Institute is an Australian nonpartisan think-tank that focuses on international trends. The “Politics in Indonesia: Resilient elections, defective democracy” analysis by Ben Bland of The Lowy Institute shares how on April 17, 2019, “There are more than 245000 candidates running for over 20000 seats in what may be the most complicated single-day election the world has ever seen.” showing a mass attempt of citizens aspiring to sustain democracy by utilizing political participation affecting electoral democracy, which is Dahl’s procedural minimum. Bland describes this moment to occurring around 20 years after the resignation of Suharto. This example of the agency-based structure which focuses on transition versus survival allows for the ability of a hybrid regime to sustain democracy due to citizens expressing their civil liberties rather than fighting for survival under the former authoritarian regime (Bland, Lowy Institute, 2019, 2).

The framework of survival versus transition is a more representative agency-based structure rather than the structural-based frameworks such as long-run factors and modernization theory. “Modernization Theory primarily suggests that rather than initiating democratic trends, an increase in economic prosperity generally contributes to the stabilization of existing democracies” (Coppedge, Edgell, Knutsen, Lindberg, 2022). Although increased economic growth is beneficial to a country, it fails to account for the contemporary environment in which a state is in. For example, an authoritarian country may still indulge in trade with close allies. The term, linkage is described as “the concentration of ties between a country and the E.U., U.S. and/or Western dominating multilateral organizations” while leverage is “Governments vulnerability to external democratizing pressures” (Levitsky, Way, 2010). The U.S. has capitalized on Indonesia’s vulnerability by emphasizing high leverage spreading democratic influence and increased maritime security (USINDO.org). Estrade shared, “This is not the first time the bold Indonesian NGOs, the only channel for popular expression allowed in Suharto's Indonesia, have emphasized the need to link economic assistance to continuing fundamental political reform” (Estrade, 1998, 79). This need for economic reform has last decades as with the recent 2015 enhancement of the U.S.-Indonesia Comprehensive Partnership which provides billions of dollars to support economic

endeavors such as addressing supply chain issues by Indonesia. However, the framework of Modernization Theory which in this example was supported by high leverage and linkage between the U.S. and Indonesia is a less effective lens to analyze a democratic transition such as the agency-based framework of transition versus survival. If a country is transitioning to democracy, it is much easier for it to be distinguished from a country that is only focusing on survival such as seen in Indonesia's authoritarian regime under Suharto. Only once then the people of a state can focus elsewhere instead of solely on survival, can the populus truly attempt to enjoy their civil liberties. A few instances that showed the extent of Indonesia's increased civil liberties were the Lowy Institute's statistic of a mass number of candidates for few seats and how there were 4 different presidents in just 4 years after Suharto's resignation.

The journal article, "*Enhancing the U.S.-Indonesia Strategic Partnership*" by Brian Harding and Andreyka Natalegawa discusses observations since the fall of President Suharto to analyze trends, alongside the impact of agency-based structures of the United States to create policy recommendations. During the 1991-2005 era, Natalegawa and Harding describe the U.S.-Indonesia defense relations as a "deep freeze" due to U.S. sanctions because of human rights abuses by the Indonesian armed forces and how "today over 170 bilateral military-military engagements are held each year between the United States and Indonesia" (Natalegawa, Harding, 2018, 3). This is an example of how high linkage and leverage from these agreements show the binational gains due to pacts as seen in Estrade's analysis to "link" economic assistance to political reform. This shows that Indonesia's attempt of achieving democracy can be argued that an indicator of leverage and linkage through contemporary pacts can advance economic prosperity to stabilize democracy by Modernization Theory's framework. However, this fails to represent the setbacks and the contemporary state of a regime, specifically if a country must focus on survival values or instead transition. When a country is only analyzed through economic growth, it judges a regime type simply from a hypothetical correlation between economic prosperity and establishing a democracy while not considering how the framework of transition versus survival allows for the

consideration of historical background and deeper analysis. This framework allows for the considerations of complex issues like Indonesia's previous authoritarian regime, international opinion, and impact of decentralization policy in contemporary Indonesia. The structural-explanation framework Modernization Theory does not account for the ways in which democracy was able to succeed and solely bases its explanation on if economic prosperity had occurred.

The framework of the agency-based structure transition versus survival has a more effective lens than other frameworks such as structural explanations to understand why democratization has been able to be sustained in Indonesia. This includes structural explanations such as "Long Run Factors," in *Why Democracies Develop and Decline* by John Gerring. He argues "that religious diversity has a negative impact, and ethnolinguistic diversity a *positive* impact, on a polity's propensity to develop and maintain a democratic system of government." yet Freedom House's 2024 Country Report for Indonesia appears to counterargue how Gerring's diversity claims show a failure of representation by how "Ethnic Chinese are poorly represented in politics and often abstain from voting. Two parties that then had ethnic Chinese leaders [...] contested the April 2019 elections; neither exceeded the 4-percent parliamentary threshold for seats" and how "Some local governments have discriminated against religious minorities [...]" and "LGBT+ people are poorly represented in electoral politics" (Indonesia Freedom House Country Report, 2024). The framework of transition versus survival allows for the analysis of complex attempts to maintain civil liberties such as in the Freedom House's findings which have historically been oppressed under Suharto. The juxtaposition between Freedom House's findings and Gerring represents the theoretical practice of religious and ethnolinguistic diversity versus the actual on-the-ground-impact of failures of maintaining adequate representation of an ethnolinguistic minority obtaining seats. As the agency-based structure focusing on transition versus survival allows for the considerations of concerns such as lack of diversity representation while a structural-explanation such as Modernization Theory would overlook these concerns entirely.

In conclusion, the agency-based framework of survival versus transition is the best framework to analyze an attempt of democratization and why contemporary Indonesia can sustain democracy after authoritarian rule. Democratization was able to be achieved and maintained in Indonesia due to the increased civil liberties from a hybrid-regime, deliberate transition attempts such as decentralization policy in Indonesia's provinces, and the complex history which has shaped Indonesia into the hybrid-regime of today. (1997 words)

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Associate Professor Danielle N. Lussier, Department chair of Political Science, Department chair of Russian, Central European, and Eurasian Studies (2024).

Scott Lee, Grinnell College Student (2024)

Estella Newton, Grinnell College Student (2024)