DISCUSSION PAPER SERIES

Number 19

Indonesia: from Suharto to Democracy?

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RENGIME CHANGE AND REGIME MAINTENANCE
IN ASIA AND THE PACIFIC

Discussion Paper No. 19

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Published by
The Department of Political and Social Change
Research School of Pacific and Asian Studies
The Australian National University
1997
In recent years there have been some dramatic changes of political leadership in the Asia-Pacific region, and also some dramas without leadership change. In a few countries the demise of well-entrenched political leaders appears imminent; in others regular processes of parliamentary government still prevail. These differing patterns of regime change and regime maintenance raise fundamental questions about the nature of political systems in the region. Specifically, how have some political leaders or leadership groups been able to stay in power for relatively long periods and why have they eventually been displaced? What are the factors associated with the stability or instability of political regimes? What happens when longstanding leaderships change?

The Regime Change and Regime Maintenance in Asia and the Pacific Project will address these and other questions from an Asia-Pacific regional perspective and at a broader theoretical level.

The project is under the joint direction of Dr R.J. May and Dr Harold Crouch.

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INDONESIA: FROM SUHARTO TO DEMOCRACY?

Bob Lowry

'Even despots do not deny the merits of freedom; only they wish to keep it for themselves, claiming that no one else is worthy of it' (Alexis de Tocqueville 1856/1955:xv).

Indonesia is on the verge of political transition. But to where? According to Francis Fukuyama (1992) Indonesia is headed towards liberal democracy; other observers¹ are less optimistic.

The factors which bring about change have been identified in general terms by Huntington (1991) and others. But the circumstances of each society confound attempts to predict with any certainty the direction and timing of transition. This does not mean that useful deductions cannot be made. As de Tocqueville (1856) revealed in his study of the Old Regime in France, the conditions which led to the French Revolution did not appear overnight but evolved and were there to be observed over a period of time. Louis XVI or his predecessors could have modified those conditions, causing French history to take a different course. It took the conjunction of particular conditions at a particular point in time and the variables of human nature to create the outcomes that occurred. It is thus impossible to predict in any detail the course of transition in Indonesia. It is possible, however, to give some idea of the main directions and timing that Indonesia's transition might take.

This paper broadly accepts Fukuyama's equation of human progress with the movement towards liberal democracy, and employs the factors identified by Huntington (1991) in his comparative study of 'the third wave of democratisation' to indicate where Indonesia stands in relation to this progress. Specifically, it considers: where does Indonesia stand on the continuum from authoritarianism to liberal democracy? The concept of transition or progress implies propulsion; where is that
propulsion coming from and how dynamic and cohesive is it? And what barriers are likely to be encountered along the continuum?

**Background**

Almost from the beginning of the nationalist movement early this century, Indonesian society has been trying to reconcile three concepts of progress: liberal democracy, communism and Islam. Ironically, many early nationalists were inspired by the history of the struggle of the Dutch themselves to win their freedom from Spanish rule (Simatupang 1991:24) as well as by events closer to home, such as Japan’s defeat of Russia in 1905. The pre-World War Two nationalist movement was not allowed to gather widespread support but gave rise to a political elite. The questions which most taxed the nationalist cause were: how was independence to be won and what form of regime was the new state to adopt? Colonial power was broken by the Second World War and the subsequent Revolution which thwarted attempts to reassert colonial rule. The form of the regime to replace colonial rule was more contentious.

Since the Netherlands East Indies was 85 per cent Muslim it is not surprising that there were proponents of an Islamic state. There were, however, three fundamental arguments against such a proposal. First, many of the most prominent early nationalists were Dutch-educated and influenced by the political currents then circulating in Europe, particularly liberal democracy (especially its socialist stream) and communism. Religion was treated as an historical hangover and an obstacle to social progress by communists or part of the personal and social domain by the liberals. Nevertheless, Indonesia’s secular leaders, whether personally religious or not, could not ignore Islam as a political force. Secondly, the progress of Islam in Indonesia had been impeded by the resistance of preceding civilizations and by colonial policy. The syncretic nature of Islam in some regions of Indonesia diluted enthusiasm for the literal application of Islamic law. Thirdly, although the non-Muslim minority was small it was comparatively well educated and organized and well represented in the independence movement. It
was also geographically concentrated, particularly in Eastern Indonesia, and might have sought secession from an Islamic state.

There were also demands for a communist state. However, communism could not gather enough strength to overcome the combined forces of Islam, Christianity and the secular supporters of liberal democracy. The Communist Rebellions of 1926 and 1948, for example, were quickly crushed.

This left liberal democracy, which was adopted as an expedient in 1945, partly to curry support from the allies (Legge 1972). After the Revolution, communism reemerged as a political force and Islam remained influential but fragmented. However, the liberal democratic structures adopted in 1945 were eventually overwhelmed by the tide of ideological conflict, the daunting task of providing good government and satisfying inflated expectations with the means available, and lack of commitment to the norms of democracy (Feith 1962).

In 1959 President Sukarno, who had been frustrated by his exclusion from executive power since 1945, decreed the reinstitution of the 1945 Constitution, which provided for an executive presidency, and created ‘Guided Democracy’ under his tutelage. Guided Democracy was poorly institutionalized and relied on Sukarno to balance the competing forces of communism, the army and the discredited remnants of the other political parties. The volatile and personalized nature of Guided Democracy led inevitably to its demise in the 1965 coup d'état and the aftermath of the coup.

Guided Democracy was replaced by another authoritarian regime gradually dominated by the personality of President Suharto, the enduring head of an alliance of elite interests termed the ‘New Order’. Suharto has built a structure of state power which has proven stable and enduring. His personal dominance of these structures of political power and his unwillingness to contemplate political reform is such that no fundamental transition is likely to occur before he departs office.

That is not to say that there is no opposition to the New Order, only that it has not been allowed to grow or cohere to the point where it could overpower the status quo. Neither is the Suharto regime moribund; it has its own vision of progress. The objective of the ideological construct that
is Pancasila. Democracy is summed up in the term ‘the complete Indonesian’ (Manusia Indonesia Seutuhnya), which can be defined as a polity which accepts the structures and norms as defined by the regime. In return the regime pledges to bring economic development and prosperity to all Indonesians. This construct has three interrelated objectives: to preserve the privileges of Suharto and his supporters, to raise living standards generally, and to preserve the unity of the nation within current geographic boundaries.

While Suharto remains president it is unlikely that fundamental change in the nature of the regime will be contemplated. His successor, however, is unlikely to have the same unquestioned authority and will be open to pressures from a number of sources. Global economic forces will provide an imperative for reform. The elite will be jostling for a redistribution of patronage. The middle class will be seeking more open political structures, and all will be seeking mass support for their causes. The role of the army in this situation will be critical.

Succession

The presidential succession will be a crucial event for several reasons. First, it will be only the second succession since 1945. The first succession was the result of a ‘disguised coup’ (Crouch 1988) and although there are constitutional and procedural rules for presidential succession, they have never been tested and the overarching power of the incumbent allows ample scope for manipulation of the process.

Secondly, removing the dominating influence of President Suharto will expose the role of the Indonesian Armed Forces (ABRI) in society and reignite debate both within the ABRI and among the public about ABRI’s political role and how it is to be exercised. Suharto, especially in recent years, has effectively, but perhaps temporarily, neutered ABRI as a political actor and has bent it to his own needs as the backbone of the regime. The question to be answered is: will ABRI reemerge as a powerful national political force in its own right, will it form part of an elite coalition, or will it withdraw from politics altogether? Of more immediate interest, does it have sufficient residual political integrity to
play a role in the succession by, for example, convincing Suharto that it is time for him to hand the baton to another.

Thirdly, the succession will not be a simple matter of changing the leader of a viable regime as might have occurred had Suharto stepped down in the 1980s. His succession will open up broader questions relating to political structures and norms appropriate to the Indonesia in the twenty-first century and the global environment in which it must coexist and compete.

The immediate question for the Indonesian elite is whether they are going to allow Suharto to dictate the timing of his succession and to choose his successor. The events of 1996 seemed to signal the beginning of the end of his reign. The year was marked by questionable economic decisions which favoured his family and ran counter to the general trend of economic policy; a major scandal in the Supreme Court exposing collusive practices and discrediting the judiciary more generally; and his political ineptitude in manipulating the internal affairs of the Indonesian Democratic Party (PDI) and coping with its aftermath. There were also several sporadic social disturbances in the lead-up to the May 1997 parliamentary elections which indicated growing social frustration with some aspects of development and the absence of genuine political outlets for these frustrations.

If significant elements of the elite conclude that Suharto's time is up, how can they organize succession? Many members of the elite have long thought that succession is overdue but they have not acted because of Suharto's overriding powers of patronage and coercion. Even when it is obvious that his time is nigh he is still a dangerous man to cross. Consequently, those who would like to see him go have three broad options. First, they could adopt a direct approach by mustering sufficient support from the elite to make it plain that the presidential elections of March 1998 should be contested and that the outcome could be uncertain, or at least sufficiently contested to puncture his proprietorial image. Secondly, they could adopt an indirect approach. This might take the form of heaping praise on Suharto's achievements and encouraging him to retire with dignity or of encouraging a national campaign in support of renewal which conveyed the same message in a different
form. Thirdly, they could combine both approaches or take advantage of societal mobilization by other political forces to achieve the same effect.

Another form of direct approach would be a military coup d'état. Indonesia has experienced several coup attempts but, with the exception of the disguised coup which unseated Sukarno, they have not been successful. Moreover, the direct control Suharto exercises over senior appointments, the velocity of change in senior appointments, the pervasiveness of the intelligence system, and the fragmentation of command arrangements makes it unlikely that anyone except the minister for defence, the commander-in-chief, or the army chief of staff could mobilize sufficient support to mount a coup. However, unless at least two of them acted in unison such action could lead to civil war. Collusion between any two would be difficult because of their different allegiances and interests. Moreover, unless they were prepared to hold their ground and had the support of troop commanders, Suharto could easily replace them with more pliable officers.

Coups do not always arise from rational political processes but can also arise spontaneously. For example, should there be widespread unrest as a result of economic disparities, perceived injustices of some kind, or during an election campaign, it is possible that troops deployed to quell the unrest might revolt and even side with the protesters. Even if such spontaneous revolts or coup attempts by lower level commanders or their troops were defeated they might still be a catalyst for change. Although the possibility of a coup seems remote, once it is felt that Suharto's reign is in decline the possibilities will almost certainly increase.

Such possibilities will increase the incentive for ABRI to exercise some influence over the succession. If Suharto is left to linger on at the head of a drifting and outmoded regime the danger of political violence and a breakdown in military cohesion will become a growing threat to ABRI's corporate interests. It would, therefore, seem to be in ABRI's interest to have Suharto step aside at the March 1998 presidential elections or soon thereafter and provide a firm base for succession and regime transition. Whether ABRI has the capacity to exercise this degree of influence and control remains to be seen.
Undoubtedly, ABRI has contingency plans to maintain order during the succession. It may also have a very general political contingency plan. However, given Suharto’s dominance, it is unlikely to have a detailed political game plan designed to impose a successor or a plan for subsequent reforms. Consequently, its internal cohesion remains dependent to a considerable degree on the outcome of elite competition (including competition among factions in the officer corps) for the presidency and the spoils of office.

Following his normal practice, Suharto has kept his own counsel and given no indication of his intentions. It is generally believed that he intends to stand for a seventh five-year term in 1998 unless unexpectedly strong opposition arises from within the elite. Bearing in mind Sukarno’s shabby treatment by the New Order, the fate of South Korea’s recent rulers, the number of skeletons in Suharto’s cupboard, and his imperative to vouchsafe the interests of his family, he is unlikely to step down voluntarily. And when he does depart (assuming it is not by death or gross incapacity), he will seek a decisive role in selecting his successor.

The matter of who will replace Suharto when the time comes will be subject to intense political jockeying among elite factions. Any successor is likely to come from within Golkar or the army. Neither the populist PDI nor the conservative United Development Party (PPP), are likely to have credible presidential contenders, even as compromise candidates, because of the number of appointed members in the legislatures, controls on mass mobilization, and lack of support from within the army. Although the choice of successor will influence the character of the government and the direction and speed of change, whoever is selected is likely to be forced along the path of transition by the mounting tide of social and economic change that has swept Indonesia since 1965.

**Transition**

Suharto’s successor is unlikely to command the personal political authority Suharto has gathered unto himself. His successor will be faced with the daunting tasks of gathering the reins of power and implementing society-wide reforms. The challenge will be to build on the progress
achieved so far while at the same time broadening political space, reforming the instruments of state, and opening the economy to a wider range of domestic and external forces.

Whether authoritarian and liberal democratic regimes are opposite ends of a continuum or whether they are two independent and unrelated states, they are separated by a process of change. Huntington (1991:11-12,305) takes a dichotomous approach but allows the notion of semi-democracy. In a recent article Huntington (1995) gives further recognition to degrees of democracy but does not recognize them as enduring alternatives. Case (1992) used the concept of semi-democracy to describe the political system of Malaysia. In Malaysia the journey towards liberal democracy, according to Case, has become bogged-down temporarily by irreconcilable racial cleavages and the coincidence of elite interests. This is consistent with Huntington’s (1991:25) observation that progress towards liberal democracy is not necessarily a straight line but might, at different periods, involve withdrawals, marking time and sideways movement as well as progress. Consequently, it is important to identify the obstacles Indonesia will confront because they will influence the direction and rate of progress.

Huntington (1991) analyzed what he termed ‘the third wave of democratization’ by searching for the causes and processes involved. The first wave of democratization occurred between the end of the nineteenth century and the end of World War One with the break-up of the Austro-Hungarian and Ottoman Empires. The second wave rose after World War Two and the third wave began in 1974 and ended in 1990 when his book was written. The first two waves suffered reverses, the first caused mainly by the rise of fascism, and the second as a result of post-colonial tensions and ideological conflict. Although the third wave has lost momentum, there is no sign of it being reversed on the same scale as its predecessors, despite the evident tensions in South Africa, the states of the former Soviet Union and Eastern Europe.

Huntington (1991:33) attributed third wave democratization to changes in global power, rising levels of economic development, snowballing [following the example of others], and its being seen as a cure for a range of maladies ranging from inflation and economic
recession to military defeat and the breakdown of law and order. He defined the three processes by which democratization occurred as transition, replacement and transplacement. Transition is the process by which elites bring about democratization; replacement occurs when opposition groups take or seize power and effect change; and transplacement occurs when there is a relative balance of power between government and opposition and they negotiate to effect change.

Why Transition?

Transition occurred in 16 of the 35 countries in Huntington’s third wave and by transplacement in 11. Transition is the most likely course for Indonesia because:

- the New Order elite remains relatively strong and united;
- the opposition is relatively weak and fragmented;
- the most influential supporters of change come from liberalizers within the regime rather than democrats;
- there is no economic crisis on the horizon;
- there is a general recognition that political reform is long overdue;
- the elite has a strong interest in keeping control of the process, combined with an underlying fear of the mobilizing power of politicized Islam;
- the military shares power, is relatively united, and is a major faction, if not the dominant component, of the elite, and
- there is fear of upheaval in a society that has experienced a lot of upheaval in the past.

Liberalize or democratize?

Huntington (1991:36) concluded that democracy comes when elites want it. Determining why elites want change is not easy but generally relates to
external developments and changes within society which force the elite to compromise to preserve its advantage. Where does the Indonesian elite stand on the need for change? No attempt is made here to define the elite other than to say that it comprises that group of civilian and military leaders who take an active part in shaping and promoting their visions of Indonesia’s political future, including senior members of government and the bureaucracy, some members of the legislature, some members of political parties and associated organizations, some business leaders, senior ABRI officers, some retired officers and their associations, and some research institutions (such as the National Sciences Institute (LIPI)). Comprehensive research on the composition, structure and opinion of the elite has not been allowed and any assessment of the strength and vitality of the structures of power is obscured by Suharto’s overweening influence on them. Some tentative observations, however, can be made.

It is possible to classify and analyse the officer corps according to several criteria including: race, ethnicity, religion, social class, military class, generation, service, corps, patronage groups, and ideology. However, the inability to conduct comprehensive research prevents detailed analysis of the officer corps. A generalized description of the officer corps would probably show that: its origins are predominantly middle class; it is mostly nominal/secular Muslim with strong Christian minority representation; it is representative of ethnic diversity but mostly Javanese, because of differences in population size and historical advantage.

Racial and ethnic differences exist, as in any mixed social group, but they do not represent significant cleavages in the officer corps. Nevertheless, there are fluid informal networks, mainly concerned with personal advantage, based on these divides. Military classes produce some continuing bonds but they are attenuated by dispersion after graduation, the mixing of classes in postgraduate training, and cross class/generation patronage networks. With the ascent of the Military Academy graduates to the most senior command positions in ABRI after 1988, the generation gap between the 1945 and bridging generations has disappeared within the active officer corps.
During the Old Order the army was largely immune to religious tensions because it had been purged of Muslim fundamentalists. Tensions between the nominal Muslim majority and the Christian minority began to build in the early New Order period as Suharto used Christian officers in politically sensitive posts. Christian officers, like Panggabean, Sudomo and Murdani did not represent a political threat to Suharto and were dependent on his patronage. However, this apparent favouritism of Christians, together with the perceived anti-Islamic approach of early New Order governments, led to a backlash which Suharto, in later years, was able to exploit to balance the power of the army and muster support for Golkar and his continuation in power.

The decline in the fortunes of Christian officers has had little effect on the active officer corps because of the minority status of Christian officers and their reliance on continued patronage from their Muslim seniors. However, it has caused disquiet which is reflected in the retired officer corps, both Muslim and Christian. They fear that the conscious promotion of Islam and the preference given to the promotion of Muslim officers could exacerbate the social and religious tensions they have been trying to suppress since 1945. They also fear that the promotion of such tensions undermines the ideological legitimacy of the New Order.

The main means of promoting personal and group interests remains hierarchically structured patronage groups. The composition of these groups changes as officers are moved around, promoted and retired or fall from grace. The patron derives his power from his ability to influence promotion, postings, overseas schooling, and financial support for his clients. Once the power of patronage is lost the client must quickly find another patron if he is to continue to prosper. While these relationships are by definition fickle they have great force while they last, as evidenced by the apparent threat the networks established by Generals Murdani and Wismoyo posed to President Suharto. The attitude of the patrons of the day to political transition will be crucial in the immediate post-Suharto era.

Organizational expression of corporate interests comes mainly from the commander-in-chief, the army chief of staff, and the chief of social-
political staff at ABRI headquarters. Their current pronouncements reflect the doctrinal line of the regime as approved by Suharto but they are forced to analyse and reflect on the global and domestic changes occurring around them in order to protect the regime. There is a great deal of frustration that many of the forces driving change — for example ‘the market’ and the internet — have little structural form, which makes it difficult to isolate the nation and the ideological construct of the New Order. Consequently, once the imperative of protecting the person of Suharto from political challenge ceases to be the prime function of ABRI, its attention will shift to the reforms necessary to preserve the New Order and to maintaining internal cohesion.

ABRI was the creator of the New Order and has been one of its major beneficiaries and its custodian. Personal and corporate interest will ensure that it tries to preserve its place in the post-Suharto era. But it will be subject to the currents of change affecting the middle class and the elite, of which it is part. As the new president is unlikely to have the monopoly on policy that Suharto has exercised, the question of the structure and boundaries of the New Order will come into sharper focus. Within ABRI there will be differences of opinion on these questions but they will be differences of degree between what Huntington (1991:9,121) has classified as ‘liberalizers’ rather than between liberalizers and democrats. These differences will be played out between contenders for power and their patronage networks.

ABRI will probably be unable to address such questions in isolation and will be forced to involve elements of the civilian middle class and elite. The civilian elite is much more diverse and fragmented. The major holders of capital are the Chinese minority who generally support the status quo. They have been the major beneficiaries of economic liberalization but are still constrained by the socialist streak still evident in political circles, from the president down, and a bureaucracy which acts as the guardian and beneficiary of the control it exercises over the economy (Schwarz 1994:81). Chinese business would be wary of any political reforms which threatened to unleash pent-up antipathy to the Chinese community. While they would accept that change is inevitable
they would probably prefer reform of the current regime to a hasty process of democratization.

The bureaucrats would be wary of reforms which undermined their political influence and access to economic rents. The encouragement of indigenous business is a double edged sword from this perspective. On the one hand it ameliorates antipathy toward the Chinese but on the other hand it creates a larger and more influential indigenous middle class. Many of the current indigenous capital holders have family or patronage relationships with the bureaucracy which provide access to government contracts and protection from Chinese and foreign business.

Plans to privatize government enterprises have been moving very slowly. Many are unprofitable and rely on state subsidies and protection. Privatization would mean the loss of jobs at all levels and diminution of bureaucratic control of the economy. Privatization is also linked to debates about state protection of high technology industry which will, it is claimed, allow Indonesia to take technological leaps into the future rather than follow the step-by-step approach of conventional liberal economic theory.

Indigenous capitalists, however, are not a united group. Those not well connected to the bureaucrats would be keen to see the power of the bureaucracy curbed and government contracts more open to competition. They would also like to see more competition in partnering foreign investment projects. Nevertheless, they would be wary of political reforms which advantaged big capital. All these groups share a desire to see the maintenance of a strong state, if for different reasons. None of them would benefit from rapid democratization which could undermine their economic advantage. At best they would be reluctant liberalizers.

There is not a high degree of overlap between private enterprise and political parties. The government party, Golkar, is dominated by ABRI and the bureaucracy (including state enterprise interests). But private enterprise interests are represented through functional groups, like the chambers of commerce, and linkages with ABRI and the bureaucracy. Although Chinese capital dominates the economy, the pariah status of the Chinese mean that they cannot take a prominent position in politics, although their financial support is important to Golkar. The other two
parties do not enjoy business support on anywhere near the same scale. Golkar provides Suharto with electoral legitimacy but once he departs office internal tensions are likely to deepen existing cleavages. There are few democrats among Golkar members but there appears to be some support for liberalization of the political structure. Most, however, are likely to want Golkar to remain the party of government.

Of the other parties, the PDI (Indonesian Democratic Party) and those mass organizations sympathetic to its populist politics range from strong advocates of liberalization to democrats. While this group is relatively weak it has potential to grow and will at least push the liberalizers along the road of reform. The PPP (United Development Party) is more problematic. Despite efforts to take religion out of politics, the PPP is generally supported by a core of conservative Muslims and radical Muslim reformers. Some of its members still hanker for an Islamic state and would support reform which allowed the party to prosper, but it would not necessarily support democratization, except as an expedient.

Although liberalization might benefit PDI and PPP it would also unleash internal cleavages dating back to the forced amalgamation of the parties in 1973. Current party officials, many of whom owe their positions to government patronage, would also be potential losers; but they would find it difficult to resist internal demands once government manipulation of party leadership was loosened.

With the demise of communism as a credible alternative, and given the syncretic and fragmented nature of Indonesian Islam, the only credible threat to liberalizers and democrats alike would be a military coup d'état in support of the status quo. Although this cannot be ruled out, it would be against the general world trend and would probably not endure for long. However, given the political and military power of ABRI, most candidates are likely to seek the military's acquiescence, if not its active support.
Forces for change

What is propelling this desire for reform and why is there little support for democracy among the elite and middle classes? The factors propelling change range from global political change occasioned by the end of the Cold War and globalization of the economy to domestic and social change and Suharto's failure to accommodate them. With the end of the Cold War the US no longer has to court Indonesia's support and can give greater vent to the promotion of human rights and democracy. There has also been the demonstration effect of the apparent victory of democracy over authoritarianism, with books like Fukuyama's (1992) postulating that the end of history is liberal democracy. Whether true or not it has given heart to democratizers and spurred standpatters (Huntington's term for supporters of the status quo) and liberalizers into action to stem the democratic tide. Closer to home, democracy has been reestablished in the Philippines and is maturing in Japan, South Korea and Taiwan and there are indications of increasing liberalization in the semi-democracies of Singapore, Malaysia and Thailand.

Globalization of the economy has not only expanded market opportunities but has intensified the competition for capital and markets. This has the effect of squeezing out inefficiencies in the economy, including protection, patronage and corruption which are important tools of authoritarian control of the middle class. President Suharto has adapted grudgingly with ever more liberal economic reform packages. These have made his reversals, usually in support of his family's business interests, seem even more aberrant, highlighting the need for a change of leadership and political reforms.

Domestically, there has been rapid economic growth, diversification from reliance on primary production to manufacturing and service industries, accompanied by increasing urbanization and a growing middle class. Urbanization has mostly affected Jakarta and to a lesser extent Surabaya, Medan and Bandung. Urbanization of the capital, as de Tocqueville (1856/1955:75) observed in the case of Paris prior to the French Revolution, can prove a potent and unstable combination of middle class intellectual stimulus and working class manpower. As yet
there is no indication that this potential is being harnessed but it is a contingency reflected in the concentration of ABRI units around the capital and plans to increase ABRI’s manpower (Lowry 1996).

Huntington (1991:311) observed that democratization rarely succeeds in countries with very low per capita GDP and that ‘[p]overty is a principal and probably the principal obstacle to democratic development’. As a result of successful economic policy, Indonesia’s per capita GDP is about $US1300 putting it at the bottom of the window within which successful transitions are possible (ibid.:272) and on a par with the Philippines.

Economic growth has been accompanied by an exponential growth of the middle class. The result has been the creation of a middle class overhang beyond the demand of employers and beyond the resources of government to coopt. This middle class overhang is fertile ground for groups seeking greater political openness and accountability, law reform, and genuine competition for business opportunities.

As foreign capital is increasingly called on to play a greater role in economic development the pressure for transparent government processes and practices, and reform of the legal system makes the ill-disguised nepotism of Suharto seem ever more anachronistic. However, law reform and reduction of the bureaucracy cannot be effected without tearing away the pillars of authoritarian rule.

Most of the elite and middle class have little sympathy for liberal democracy. They accept the dogma of the Old and New Orders that liberal democracy was the cause of Indonesia’s problems during the Revolution and in the 1950s. While this view is genuinely held by some people, the prime rationale for denigrating democracy is to prevent its re-emergence as an alternative regime. Opponents of democracy point to the geographic and ethnic fragmentation of the nation, economic inequalities (including Chinese dominance of the economy), its uneducated and ignorant masses (Massa Bodoh) who are incapable of making informed political choices, the undeveloped economy, and the need to improve the people’s welfare before addressing lower order needs like democracy. Needless to say, there is also the fear of demands
from the Massa Bodoh for greater equalization of national wealth and services.

Consequently, while vociferous student groups, non-government groups and the populist supporters of the PDI who advocate liberal democracy are often heard, they are still in a minority. Although they add to the impetus for change, none of Huntington’s third wave democratizations occurred solely as a result of student action. General public support was essential and was almost always expressed in mass public rallies (Huntington 1991:204). To date, Indonesian political activists have been unable to draw broad middle class support for such rallies.

The National Sciences Institute has undertaken a study of Indonesia’s political system. The study accepts that some sort of liberal democracy is inevitable. Consequently, it proposes a phased transition over twenty years, commencing with minor procedural and structural reforms and ending with substantive reforms which would see the emergence of liberal democracy prior to the APEC target for open Asia-Pacific markets in 2020. Suharto has rejected this deliberate, almost apolitical, approach to democratization but the debate is indicative of elite perceptions of the need for change and the challenges confronted.

Challenges

Although the forces of change are present and will be responded to in various ways when Suharto departs office, there is a number of challenges confronting both liberalizers and democratizers. These include the relationship between government, party, and regime; the role of parties and limitations on voter mobilization; the role and command arrangements of ABRI; and the challenge of regionalism and religion.

As Lawson (1991:21) has pointed out, the distinction between government, party and regime is usually deliberately blurred in authoritarian regimes. Suharto made this point clear in 1980 when he quashed an attempt by the commander-in-chief to distance ABRI from direct support for Golkar in the 1982 elections. His view was that only Golkar represented the true interests of the New Order and that ABRI, as
creator of the New Order, had no choice but to support it. Implicit in this view was that Suharto, as the leader of Golkar, was the embodiment of the New Order and that all else, including the other parties and ABRI, were obliged to support him (Jenkins 1984:157). This view is consistent with Lawson’s (1991:17) description of the organic state.

To avoid this situation being perpetuated, the liberalizers have advocated that in future the presidents be limited to one or two terms. This would entrench periodic replacement and open up competition for the top job within Golkar on a regular basis thus drawing a clear distinction between the party leader and the party. But what of the relationship between Golkar and government or the executive head of government and the legislature? The legislature cannot exercise its oversight of executive government if the dominant party is a mere cipher of its leader. Limiting the term of presidents might help this process by ensuring that no future leader becomes the proprietor of the party with the overwhelming powers of patronage and punishment wielded by Suharto.

Implementing law reforms to ensure independence of the judiciary and permitting judicial review of legislation and executive fiats would also encourage legislators to exercise their responsibilities without undue fear of reprisal. The presence of other political parties in the legislature, allowed to compete on equal terms at elections, would encourage the legislature to perform its role as a balance to executive power.

Golkar has effectively been the government party, or the electoral vehicle for the New Order. However, in 1985 all parties were forced to expunge promotion of alternative ideologies or regimes from their party constitutions and enshrine adherence to Pancasila democracy as the basis of the party program. In theory, all three authorized parties should then have been eligible to compete on an equal footing at the five-yearly elections. In practice the government has refused to allow this reform to take effect and has continued to treat the other two parties as pendamping (accompanists), not alternative lead players. The question for the liberalizers is should this practice continue or should the other parties be allowed to compete on an equal basis according to the doctrine, as opposed to the practice, of the New Order?
The former course means the continued enforcement of what is in effect a one-party state. The latter potentially opens up the road to liberal democracy. The main contest will be between the standpatters seeking to perpetuate the status quo and liberalizers trying to rejuvenate the regime. To the extent that the current New Order is in fact the Suharto Order, the standpatters have the ground cut from under them. The perpetuation of the status quo is impossible unless they can find another figure who can take over where Suharto leaves off. As that is unlikely, the liberalizers would seem to have some freedom of movement.

Accepting that standpatters and liberalizers have the upper hand, what changes can the latter make without undermining the foundations of the regime? Current control mechanisms include:

- mono-loyalty for the bureaucracy, according to which they are expected to support, campaign and vote for Golkar if they know what is good for their careers;
- prohibition on members of the military from joining, supporting or voting for political parties in return for a proportion of seats in national and regional legislatures;
- implicit and constant campaigning on behalf of Golkar by the bureaucracy and ABRI;
- prohibition of party mobilization below district level (the so-called ‘floating mass’ concept);
- prohibition of electioneering outside declared election campaign periods;
- manipulation of political party and mass organization leadership elections;
- government vetting (BAKORSTANAS) of party electoral lists;
- the appointment of one third of the members of the senior legislative body (MPR);
• executive supremacy and the absence of any functioning separation of powers between the executive, legislature and judiciary.

Obviously, compared with a definition of democracy which provides for political parties campaigning freely on an equal basis, a broad non-discriminating franchise, people voting without fear according to their own judgements, and the majority party or coalition of parties forming a government and exercising control of state power (Lawson 1991), Pancasila democracy has some shortcomings.

From a standpatter or liberalizer's perspective, which of the control mechanisms listed above could be discarded without endangering the dominance of Golkar? The first two controls are critical to Golkar's continual dominance. ABRI's seats provide a firm base for the regime but without the mono-loyalty provisions to lock in the bureaucracy there would be a drift to the other parties; in combination they could conceivably, over time, garner sufficient support to outvote ABRI and Golkar in the election of a president.

In theory that would not be inconsistent with doctrine and should not be of concern because the law on referenda effectively rules out constitutional changes not agreed by all parties and factions. However, the loss of the powers of patronage available to the presidency would mean the loss of many jobs held by Golkar supporters or switches in their allegiance and would almost certainly further undermine Golkar's prospects of electoral recovery.

The critical factor in this conundrum is ABRI, which created Golkar in 1964. Golkar consists of three streams: ABRI, the bureaucracy and functional groups (representatives of walks of life, professions and the business community). Active ABRI members are prohibited from participating in Golkar except for nominated senior officers who hold ex officio appointments on Golkar's national and regional councils. ABRI is primarily represented in Golkar by its retiree organizations. These organizations interact with the active military through social-political councils which coordinate their stance.
The question therefore is: would the active ABRI be prepared to step away from Golkar and allow the three authorized political parties to compete equally? Would it feel that its quota of parliamentary seats and the restrictive legislation on referenda allowed it sufficient control to stand aloof from the electoral process and accept the peoples’ verdict? This question will not be addressed until Suharto is unseated, but if General (Retired) Rudini (1994) is any guide, at least some members of ABRI would be prepared to take that route.

This then raises the question of ABRI’s relationship to the executive and the legislature. According to current dogma ABRI is subject to the executive head of state in his role as supreme commander for defence against an external foe. However, in domestic politics ABRI’s first loyalty is to the Pancasila state; it is supposedly above day-to-day politics. In reality it has been subordinated to President Suharto and has not been able to exercise any discretionary judgement since at least the late 1970s, although efforts were made a various times by Generals Yusuf and Murdani to uphold the integrity of ABRI.

Will ABRI allow the next president the same degree of control? If not, how will it limit executive control? How will it limit control of personnel matters currently exercised by the president? How will it decide its attitude to issues of liberalization or democratization and how will it resolve differences if its attitudes are incongruent with those of the new president? Who will select ABRI’s legislative representatives? Who will instruct them on policy positions? Will ABRI still have the task of screening candidates for political office?

All that can be said now is that ABRI itself will come under greater pressure and will need to figure out how to separate its monopoly of the means and application of coercion from its political role. It is debatable whether ABRI can establish an apolitical ethos within the forces while at another level being actively involved in politics. More importantly, will the public see it as an impartial force? If not, the rationale of its doctrinal position of standing above the fray of day-to-day politics will be undermined.
Obstacles

What obstacles, then, are likely to influence the attitudes of ABRI to liberalization and democratization? ABRI is an enduring institution and a political actor which shares with Suharto an ingrained disposition to retain the reins of power both for its own benefit and from a belief that only authoritarian rule can hold the nation together. How the problem of ‘Unity and Solidarity’ are addressed by the different interests involved will determine the scope and pace of change and whether Indonesia will be detained at some semi-democratic staging post, like Malaysia and Singapore. This conundrum has to be addressed whether it is a genuine concern or one that has been cynically perpetuated to justify continued authoritarian rule.

Concern for unity and solidarity stems from a number of factors, the main ones being regional disparities and ethnic and religious diversity. It is still conceivable that regionally based parties could emerge, demanding independence, autonomy, or greater return of economic rents (see Booth 1992). This spacial reality is compounded by ethnic differences and the archipelagic nature of the country. The state has struggled to overcome this centrifugal tendency by several means, including: forcing imports and exports to be channelled through Java; centralizing the administration; indoctrination; concentrating economic development — especially process industries (by commission or omission) — in Java to balance the resource wealth of some areas of the seberang (other islands); limited economic development in the seberang; and making local government dependent on central government financial subventions and services. All these measures have worked to some degree to inculcate Indonesian nationalism but they have not necessarily subordinated all ethnic and regional loyalties. Moreover, some of these measures are no longer economically rational and have been phased out.

Ethnic tensions are now of a different order to those which prevailed in the early years of the Republic. The emergence of ethnic independence movements on Java is no longer conceivable and ethnic loyalties in many other areas have been subsumed within an Indonesian identity. There is little doubt that some regions would seek independence if a liberal democratic regime were adopted, particularly East Timor and 22
Irian Jaya. There is equally little doubt that other areas would demand greater decentralization of political power and economic development. However, these centrifugal tendencies should not be overrated. Most ethnic tensions could be overcome by political compromise.

In economic terms, Hal Hill has argued, Indonesia has been comparatively successful in managing ‘sub-national diversity’ (Hill 1996), but large variations in regional economies remain. However, Hill’s definition of region is based on provincial government boundaries which bear little relationship to ethnic boundaries or potentially viable independent states. On an island by island basis, according to Hill’s figures, only Sumatra, Kalimantan and Irian Jaya have gross regional products above the average on a per capita basis. Of these only Irian Jaya has any potential to form a united island-wide party which might seek independence; such a move in the other islands would probably be defeated by ethnic and regional diversity. How demands for regional autonomy would be expressed and accommodated is a matter for politicians but they would have to be prepared to address these issues if they were to become agents of transition.

Adding to the inertia towards reform is the question of religion. By definition, in a liberal democracy there can be no bar on political parties using religion to mobilize support for their cause although limits can legitimately be placed on the means used to garner that support. Nevertheless, allowing the reemergence of religion as a basis for political mobilization might have two effects. It might exacerbate centrifugal tendencies in the eastern reaches of the state, and it could lead to demands which are antithetical to liberal democracy, such as restrictions on freedom of religion and freedom of political competition, and demands for the application of religious law — a sort of ‘Algerian dilemma’ where transition might open the possibility of a theist state rather than a liberal democracy.

The danger of a theist state emerging in Indonesia is probably overstated, given:

- the fragmentation and schisms of all religions;
- the syncretic nature of Indonesian Islam in important regions;
• the attraction of the freedom inherent in liberal democracy amongst the young;

• the inherent demands for political and legal certainty in an open economy (although not necessarily inconsistent with Islam, there are no examples to prove the point), and

• the fact that international examples of Islamic states, like Iran, have not provided an attractive model.

Moreover, much of the New Order structure and norms have been deliberately constructed to contain and dilute the latent challenge of Islam. The New Order has adopted a position defined as secular but God-fearing. There is no nominated state religion, but having a religion is mandatory; the use of religion for political mobilization has been banned. These measures were designed to counter communism, to convince the Muslim community of the regime’s religious credentials, to deny political space for religious extremism, and as a means of inculcating conformity.

Some micro studies of Islamic opinion tend to suggest that banning the use of religion for political mobilization in 1985 has changed the voting behaviour of Muslims (for example Turmudi in Sofyan 1995:21-41). Now that there is no overt Muslim party, Muslim leaders have been coaxed in greater numbers to shift their allegiance from the PPP (prior to 1985 the Islamic party) to the government party, Golkar. Another effect of this strategy has been to diminish the political influence of Muslim leaders. When Islamic leaders are seen to promote different parties it is difficult for them to claim divine guidance for their choice of party without evoking some puzzlement from their followers. Such measures have added to the domestication and fragmentation of political Islam under the New Order.

However, the absence of an overt Muslim political party does not mean that Islam has been tamed forever as a political force. Some members of the elite share Bloom’s (1995:228) rather alarmist view that Islam is a ‘meme [ideology] grown ravenous’ intent on imposing its domain on all nations and disposing of competing ideologies. Therefore,
if containing the ideological challenge of Islam and retaining the current boundaries of the state are to remain political imperatives, other means of containing the challenge will have to be found that are compatible with more pluralistic state structures and norms if the fear of Muslim fundamentalism is not to become an obstacle to democratization.

A related aspect of liberal democracy which worries the military is the fear that democratic mobilization will get out of control and that they will not be able to maintain social order in a more dynamic and fluid society. They also worry that democratically elected governments will not be able to provide the long-term stability provided by the present regime. Such concerns may be dismissed as rationalizations but they draw on the perceived failures of constitutional democracy in the 1950s and a lack of understanding that liberal democracy is not without limits.

The regime’s simplistic critique of liberal democracy suggests that there are no constraints on individual or sectoral interests and obscures the fact that liberal democracies depend on a general commitment to uphold the rules of democratic behaviour as laid down in the constitution and enabling legislation. There is little recognition that in a democracy there must be a commitment to peaceful means of mobilization and change, a willingness to surrender government, tolerance of opposition, and recognition of the conditional use of state power (Lawson 1991:13).

In a liberal democratic state, freedom to profess or not to profess religion is a fundamental right, even though the state may hold a particular religion in first place. But again this does not mean that there are no limits. Many liberal democracies have enacted laws to minimize discrimination based on race, ethnicity, religion and the like in the interests of equality and community harmony. These are fundamental considerations for regime transition which were left in abeyance in March 1957 in the constitutional debate which preceded the declaration of martial law and the imposition of Guided Democracy in July 1959.

The Liberalizers’ Agenda

The liberalizers are likely to be at the forefront of reform in Indonesia because the democrats have not been able to mobilize broad-based and sustained support from the middle classes. Nevertheless, the democrats
provide some of the motivation necessary to propel reform. There have been seminars and discussions on the post-Suharto era but a comprehensive agenda for reform has not been put forward because of regime pressures and divisions of opinion on the subject. However, General Rudini, Chief of Army Staff 1983-86, Minister for Home Affairs 1988-93, and currently head of the Indonesian Institute for Strategic Studies (LPSI) has provided the outline of a liberalizer’s agenda. This agenda is both a critique of the New Order and a thinly disguised political manifesto for a presidential aspirant.

Rudini’s view is that if the system is not fulfilling the aspirations of the people or supporting development then, to avoid political turmoil, perhaps modification is more appropriate than changing the system (Rudini 1994:13). He claims that the structure and laws are in place but that their application is too restrictive (ibid.:18,36) and that future presidents must strive for democratic, clean and respected government (ibid.:15,19). He describes the faults of the system as the recent emergence of exclusivism, primordialism and neo-feudalism (ibid.:19) and suggests that the regime needs to be more open to criticism (ibid.:61). Although the editors (Sunaryo, Nasihin Masha and Perry Umar Farouk) of Rudini’s book comment that his answers to Indonesia’s problems are too general and cliched (ibid.:vii) it is worth listing his proposals and silences. Rudini proposes that:

- it is time to review and reform the institutions of state, including the legislatures (MPR [People’s Consultative Assembly], DPR [National Parliament] and DPRD [regional parliaments]), the presidency, the judiciary, the Supreme Advisory Council (DPA), the Financial Audit Agency (BPK) and provincial government (ibid.:12);
- it is time for Golkar and the other authorized parties to stand on their own feet without guidance or influence from external forces (ibid.:50);
- *dwi fungsi ABRI* should stay but be adapted to social, scientific and technological advances (ibid.:72);
- Indonesia needs to retain a strong executive to cope with its size and heterogeneity (*ibid.*: 16);
- the five laws passed in 1985 to govern political parties, mass organizations, elections, referenda, etc. should be reviewed (*ibid.*:175), including a proposal to extend party representation to village level (*ibid.*:43);
- the MPR should meet more regularly as a means of curbing presidential prerogative and of keeping the incumbent in touch with popular opinion (*ibid.*:16); and
- the system should be capable of changing its leadership according to the wishes of the majority (*ibid.*:55).

Rudini predicts that if these things are done the regime will survive. In keeping with his liberalizer approach, Rudini acknowledges the role of a free but ‘responsible’ press in promoting and vouchsafing openness (*ibid.*:85), as well as freedom and openness for the arts ‘in the service of building society’ (*ibid.*:153). He still sees politics as a top down activity and is ambivalent about abolishing the ‘floating mass’ concept which prevents parties from establishing grassroots support bases (*ibid.*:24-28,49) while at the same time acknowledging that this structure advantages Golkar (*ibid.*:42).

He also supports retention of a unitary state, citing the break-up of federal states such as the USSR and Yugoslavia as evidence of the failure of federal structures (*ibid.*:11). Rudini makes no mention of limiting the number of terms of the president but does recommend that provincial heads of government be limited to one five year term unless their performance has been exceptional (*ibid.*:142).

Rudini makes no direct reference to qualitative reforms such as the separation of powers between executive government, the legislature and the judiciary, or government prerogatives to exclude party electoral candidates, although they may be inferred from his more general proposals. His discussion of the armed forces is cursory, with no attempt being made to redefine their role in the reformed structures. Moreover, no attempt is made to define the boundary between Rudini’s liberalized
Pancasila state and a liberal democratic state. Where would he draw the line and how would it be enforced?

In a subsequent conversation, in October 1996, General Rudini elaborated on some of the proposals above, making the following points:

- *dwi fungsi* should not be confused with the seconding of ABRI personnel to government posts (*kekaryawanan*); these could be reduced or totally discontinued without detriment to the concept of *dwi fungsi*;
- ABRI should be represented in the People’s Consultative Assembly only;
- ABRI should not support a political party, but the KBA [Greater ABRI Family] should continue to be a pillar of Golkar and retired ABRI members should continue to support Golkar;
- bureaucrats should be prohibited from joining political parties, including Golkar, but should be free to vote for the party of their choice;
- future presidents should be limited to one or two terms;
- once elected, a president should have to resign from any political party offices held;
- there was probably not sufficient cadre for three political parties at this stage let alone more;
- the vetting of party candidates (*litsus*) should be scrapped.
- Rudini also confirmed his support for the ‘floating mass’ concept but did not think the name appropriate.

Most of these points are consistent with the general tenor of his book but the proposal to depoliticize the bureaucracy would seem to undermine a vital pillar of the regime, namely the continued dominance of Golkar. This measure was probably included with a view to preventing the bureaucracy from filling the vacuum created by the proposed
withdrawal of ABRI from the DPR, the eventual reduction of seconded ABRI personnel in the bureaucracy, and the withdrawal of ABRI representation (by serving officers) on Golkar councils.

Rudini is a member of Golkar and it is clear that he sees Golkar remaining the dominant party in the post-Suharto era. However, he has not articulated how he would maintain the boundaries of his liberalized version of the New Order. His proposals might be a significant advance on current conditions but it would be no easy task to carry out a major overhaul such as this and at the same time keep the democratizers down.

In the face of declining legitimacy, Huntington (1991:55-57) found, authoritarian regimes adopted one of five options. They either ignored it, increased repression, provoked external conflict, adopted the semblance of democracy or introduced a democratic system. The first two options will not be available to Suharto's successors, except as short-term expedients. Provoking external aggression would also be more likely to intensify internal divisions than shore-up the regime. The liberalizers' approach as exemplified by Rudini is to adopt the semblance of democracy either as a stepping stone to democracy or to preserve the status quo. However, if Fukuyama is correct, the fifth option will arise in due course once the obstacles have been cleared.

Given that there is no indication of the obstacles to liberal democracy in Malaysia and Singapore being cleared in the near future, why should it be expected that Indonesia will be more successful? Possibly because the Chinese do not represent a major political block in Indonesia as they do in Malaysia. Indonesian governments could adopt policies to assist acceptance of the Chinese minority and open business opportunities to all Indonesians without undermining the contribution of the Chinese to the nation's economic health. Unlike Singapore, Indonesia is a big country with a wealth of natural resources and has no need of the siege mentality which energizes Singapore's Chinese majority. The major obstacle to democracy in Indonesia remains the place of Islam. Given the nature of Indonesian Islam, it should not be beyond the capacity of Indonesia's politicians to find a workable solution to this problem, despite the failure of such efforts in 1957.
Conclusion

There is unlikely to be any significant political reform, let alone progress towards liberal democracy, before Suharto departs the presidency. When, how and under what conditions he leaves office will depend on the unfolding of contending political forces in the lead-up to the presidential elections in March 1998 and following them if he is re-elected.

The direction and rate of progress thereafter will largely depend on the attitudes adopted by ABRI in the face of increasing community pressure for change and reform. There appears to be support for liberalization within ABRI but what this entails has yet to be identified and agreed in any detail. However, once liberalization gets underway it will develop a momentum of its own and will expose the fundamental constitutional questions left largely unanswered by Guided Democracy and the New Order. None of them are irreconcilable with liberal democracy but they will require broad community debate and consensus.

Meanwhile, liberalizing the current regime in the post-Suharto era could provide a firm base for reform and securing peaceful progress towards liberal democracy. Although there are substantial obstacles, it could occur much more quickly than now seems possible.

Notes

1 Hyug Baeg Im (1996:279-291) provides a useful survey of the debate.
2 Jacques Bertrand (1996) provides one explanation of why this is so.
3 Wibisono (1997) says there are still 165 state-owned companies with 400 subsidiaries.
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