Book Review

Aris Ananta; Evi Nurvidya Arifin; and Leo Suryadinata. *Indonesian Electoral Behaviour: A Statistical Perspective*. Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies (ISEAS). 2004, xxx+429p.

This is a second book prepared by the same authors that in April 2003 published their first book in the new ISEAS publication series on Indonesia's population, entitled *Indonesia Population Ethnicity and Religion in a Changing Political Landscape*. In his message, the director of ISEAS, K. Kesavapany, stated that the series is the outcomes of the major ongoing project that utilizes statistical analyses to understand the cultural, socio-economic and political state of affairs in Indonesia. The available statistical information of Indonesian 2000 population census apparently provides an impetus to launch this major research project at ISEAS where the three authors currently reside. The authors reflect an ideal combination of statistician-demographers (Aris Ananta and Evi Nurvidya Arifin) and a historian-political scientist (Leo Suryadinata). The books can be seen as representing a new perspective in studying Indonesia in which demographic changes and configurations are perceived as having causal-effects relationship to politics. The political-demography approach introduced by Myron Weiner in 1972 however has never been developing into major framework within both demography and political science disciplines. In the light of emerging new perspective on political demography in Southeast Asian region the books should be welcome by the academic communities that concern vast social transformation in this region.

The nexus of demography and politics in Indonesia has been generally recognized both by practitioners and scholars particularly given the social fact that demographically Indonesia is the fourth largest country in the world after China, India and United States of America. Before disin-

tegrated into a number of countries in the aftermath of the Cold War Soviet Union were ranked fourth in terms of the population size that is now occupied by Indonesia. The breakdown of Soviet Union that attracts many of the so-called "sovietologists" to explain the causes and its apparent consequences should have a significant lesson for Indonesia that in several demographic characteristics resembles Soviet Unions. The dominant of Russian in demographic configuration of Soviet Union for instance could be compared to the important role of the Javanese in Indonesia. The Soviet's centralistic political system proved to be incompatible with the rising political aspiration of its population that demand more local autonomy and openness. In this regard Indonesia's post-Suharto political elites seem to learn from the experience of Soviet Union by introducing new laws on regional autonomy that are supposed to provide more power to the regional governments. Yet with the current political tensions in Aceh and Papua probable disintegration is still lingering and could be escalating if the implementation of the new regional autonomy laws can not be properly established particularly as the central government is still preoccupied by its hidden agenda to control the resource rich regions like Aceh and Papua.

Indonesia's political transition is entering a new stage now as general election is currently underway. In this context the publication of the book that analysed the electoral behaviour of the Indonesian voters should be welcome as it could serve to both analysts and practitioners to reflect and to predict possible outcomes of the coming general elections. The 2004 general election as many observers argued is an important political test case on whether or not the political transition could genuinely enhance the consolidation of democracy in Indonesia. The pessimistic views that in some respects are reflected in the book in which 2004 general election will still be mainly dominated by the so-called Javanese based political parties namely PDIP, PKB and GOLKAR could be caused

by the way the authors treated the two main variables, namely ethnicity and religion. In their analysis, the authors simply follow the conventional breakdown of the Indonesian voters into three dichotomies: ethnically, Javanese vs. Non-Javanese; religiously, Islam vs. Non-Islam and geographically, the island of Java vs. Outside Java. The adoption of these simple dichotomistic categories obviously prevents the more meaningful analyses of Indonesian electoral behaviour that is supposed to be diversified following the recent proliferation of political parties. The adopted statistical analysis that is based on the outcomes of the 1999 general election could also overlook the important role of new political figures that only emerged recently such as Susilo Bambang Yudoyono that in several polling survey shows a strong public support.

The book, almost 450 pages length is divided into 10 chapters. More than two-thirds of the pages consist of tables and graphs — this might be the reason to put "A Statistical Perspective" as the book's subtitle. In the first chapter a brief review on the literatures on the Indonesian election is presented and the contribution of the book is shown. The limited references to Indonesian experiences only, however, demonstrate the narrow perspective adopted by the authors in analysing what the authors define as Indonesian electoral behaviour. It would be very useful if the authors venture into a comparative perspective in political demographic analyses to other countries that are also utilizing information on ethnic compositions such as Australia and United States. The comparison will provide a better understanding on the interconnection between demographic configuration and politics in general and with voting behaviour in particular. The authors' preoccupation on the Indonesian previous elections is perhaps also contributed into the way the interpretation of the statistical analysis is undertaken in which conventional understanding on Indonesian politics is strongly reasserted.

It would be useful for the readers if the authors explain that statistical information derived from population census is principally conceived as knowledge that is constructed by the state from above. In this regard scholars working on census data should explicitly state several limitations embedded within their analysis. Among the serious limitation of the census data is its reductionistic manner of human behaviour into categories and numbers. Census information on ethnicity in particular should be clearly understood as a social category that is constructed by the officials and not by the people themselves. It is therefore very important for the authors to acknowledge that its essentialist approach that they adopted can not be wholly perceived as representing the reality in the society. Furthermore, the employment of simple dichotomistic categories of ethnicity and religion could also hinder the pluralistic configuration of the Indonesian population.

The political demography is a new approach to the study of politics in Indonesia and therefore constitutes a real challenge for scholars that attempt to relate demography and politics. Unfortunately, the authors of the book tend to avoid the adoption of this political demographic approach. Instead, the authors continue analyzing the statistical data in the conventional demographic manner without attempting to use more rigorous theoretical framework. While the book suffered from an absence of the meaningful analytical framework, however, it has its own merit and is very useful for the public as it provides detail information—up to the district level on ethnicity (Javanese vs. Non-Javanese) as well as religion (Muslim vs. Non-Muslim) of the Indonesian current population. In this sense, the book should be particularly welcome by the political parties think tank and its political analysts, as it provides raw materials on the Indonesian demographic characteristics that can potentially be developed into their party's strategy to win the population's votes.

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