

ANGELS AND DEMONS

EVERY year, the development industry in Jakarta churns out reports about the progress of democratization in Indonesian local politics. Often these reports deal with the complexity of their topic by focusing on the behavior of individual politicians. Virtually every report picks out a few 'reform-minded' individuals and portrays them as leaders who are 'responsive' to citizen demands. These heroes of reform are then celebrated as pushing forward Indonesia's democratization against the interests of 'old elites' and 'entrenched interests'.

In provinces that have been blessed with such 'good leadership' change is happening, so the story goes. In localities where 'bosses', 'little kings' and 'predatory forces' rule, in contrast, progress is depicted as stagnating.

The simplicity and naiveté of such a worldview have been exposed by developments that have quietly unfolded in Indonesian politics over recent months. Suddenly, one of the good governance heroes has advocated dismantling a pillar of local governance reform, while the predators are proving to be more interested in defending democracy.



In late 2009, the then new interior minister Gawaman Fauzi proposed to abolish direct elections for governors. Such elections had been introduced in 2005 as a way to empower citizens. Now, Gawaman Fauzi argued, direct elections for governors were too costly due to the rampant money politics and vote buying associated with these races. At the same time, such direct elections would facilitate the establishment of local dynasties, he claimed. The new minister suggested reviving the system that was in place before 2005 in which provincial parliaments elected governors.

Ironically, Gawaman Fauzi owes much of his stellar rise in Indonesian politics to these direct elections. Appointed district head of Solok in West Sumatra in 1995, he won (indirect) elections in 2000. In 2005, people elected him as Governor of West Sumatra province, a post he left a few years later to become interior minister.

The main story line in the development industry in recent years was that Gawaman Fauzi's pro-democracy attitude and successful good governance programs had gotten him re-elected as district head, then governor and finally catapulted him into Yudhoyono's cabinet.

Only a few people dared to say that Fauzi's shallow reform

programs in Solok collapsed soon after he had moved on to greener pastures. Most foreign consultants were also unaware of the fact that governor Fauzi had re-introduced an older form of local administration that goes back to pre-colonial times, which excludes women from political decision-making processes. Finally, the fact that Gawaman Fauzi was also one of the most prolific local executives with regard to the adoption and implementation of discriminatory syariah local regulations received no mention at all in development industry circles.

Instead, rarely a donor workshop on decentralisation went by in Jakarta without Gawaman Fauzi speaking in his capacity as a 'reformer'. Fauzi's recent U-turn suggests he was simply a shrewd politician who knew what kind of rhetoric would raise his profile in democratizing Indonesia and eventually pave the way for a career in national politics.



In the face of Fauzi's proposal to wind back local democracy, support for the country's local democratic institutions has come from unexpected quarters. In April 2012, Syahrul Yasin Limpo the head of the Provincial Government Association (APPSI) and South Sulawesi Governor publicly lambasted Fauzi's proposal as undemocratic and accused the interior minister of trying to 'take away rights from the people'. Limpo, of course, is no stranger to observers of Indonesian local politics since he, too, has frequently been in the news over past years, although for altogether different reasons than Gawaman Fauzi.

District head of Gowa between 1993 and 2003, Limpo made national headlines when he was busted in a 2002 drug raid together with a prostitute. Nevertheless, Limpo ran successfully as deputy governor in 2003 and governor in 2008. In 2012, he launched his re-election campaign for a second term as governor. Driving around one of Indonesia's poorest provinces in various high-end luxury cars with a number plate that consists only of his initials SYL, Limpo lords over South Sulawesi precisely like one of the 'little kings' mentioned in donor agency reports.

Flanking Syahrul Yasin Limpo during the press conference in April 2012 in support of local democracy were several other notorious governors: Awang Faroek Ishak from East Kalimantan province, who was named a suspect in a corruption case surrounding the divestment of PT Kaltim



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Prima Coal (KPC) shares in 2010; Teras Narang from Central Kalimantan, who had come up on the radar screen of the Financial Transactions Reporting and Analysis Centre (PPATK) for suspicious payments into his bank account in 2009; and last but not least, Ratu Atut Chosiyah from Banten, scion of one of Indonesia's most corrupt families that has run the local construction industry in a criminal fashion for decades with the help of tens of thousands of thugs organized in martial art associations. In short, the politicians that stood up for democracy were hardly the type one would typically see attending donor meetings at swanky Jakarta hotels.



The reaction of these governors shows, above all, that democratic institutions have become a viable power base for politicians who a few years back seemed least likely to have any interest in them. Fauzi's proposal threatens their power base because many of these governors are rich enough to bribe national politicians and officials to protect themselves from becoming corruption suspects but lack the financial and political connections to influence national party headquarters that would become more powerful if Fauzi's plan is successful. Most of these governors have also established regional networks. Fauzi's proposal would render such local 'social capital' worthless.

There is no doubt that when they publicly attacked Fauzi's plan in April, Limpo and his colleagues had themselves in mind, first and foremost, and not the people. After all, governors' offices provide legal and illegal access to resources.

However, the contradiction between these figures' pious rhetoric and their worldly motives for defending democracy is hardly a reason to abolish direct elections for local executive heads. As the philosopher Immanuel Kant showed in his treatise *Perpetual Peace*, there were always people who believed that "a republic would have to be a nation of angels, because men with their selfish inclinations are not capable of a constitution of such sublime form." Kant refuted this position: "The problem of organizing a state, however hard it may seem, can be solved even for a race of devils, if only they are intelligent." The key thing is for those devils to "establish a constitution in such a way that, although their private intentions conflict, they check each other, with the result that their public conduct is the same as if they had

no such intentions." In other words, the right institutions can constrain the personal agendas of even the very worst politicians, and force them in new directions.

Direct elections for local executive heads in Indonesia are an approximation to the system Kant described. During the New Order, recruitment, promotion and retirement mechanisms for public officials were upward oriented and ultimately regulated by Suharto. The introduction of direct executive elections in the context of decentralisation created a more competitive environment for political elites. As competition re-ordered the relatively stable political structure of the New Order years, political elites have faced new challenges since 1998 to stay in power. To find allies and support for their battles with one another, political elites have now started to 'reach-down' in the political arena. Consequently, new alliances have emerged between political elites and ordinary citizens in the context of direct executive elections.



In short, it is the relationships within elites, not the personal character traits or the behaviors of individual politicians that shape power dynamics in contemporary Indonesian local politics. By competing against each other, 'predatory forces', 'little kings' and 'entrenched elites' have pushed state-society relations in more democratic directions - in spite of themselves.

Direct elections for local executive figures assure such competition. Hence, Gawaman Fauzi's proposal to end direct elections for governors would deal one of the most severe blows of recent years to Indonesia's democratization efforts. Against this backdrop, foreign democracy crusaders may want to read, if not Kant's treatise, then at least Dan Brown's less highbrow novel *Angels and Demons* that introduced a broader public to the world of ambigrams. Ambigrams are words that, when read from another viewpoint or perspective, reveal a word that is different from the original. Such an alternative viewpoint on who are the forces in favour of and against local democratization in Indonesia may be useful when putting together the guest lists for future development industry workshops.

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