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Muhammad Asadullah Al Ghozi  
*University of Indonesia*, ma.alghozi@gmail.com

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BOOK REVIEW

## Voting Behavior in Indonesia: Critical Democrats

MUHAMMAD ASADULLAH AL GHOZI\*

Jurnal Politik, Department of Political Science, Universitas Indonesia

Email: ma.alghozi@gmail.com

Mujani, Saiful, Liddle, R. William, Ambardi, Kuskridho. 2018. *Voting Behavior in Indonesia Since Democratization: Critical Democrats*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. doi: 10.1017/9781108377836.

Indonesia's democracy entered a new phase when prolonged demonstrations brought down President Soeharto after his thirty-two years as president. On May 21, 1998, Suharto officially resigned, and Indonesia entered a new era with expectations that the country would become more democratic—than before. Although routine elections during the New Order existed, they were not deemed as democratic because they were merely a tool of legitimacy for Suharto's regime to maintain power. The merge of political parties into two (PDI—*Partai Demokrasi Indonesia* or Indonesia Democratic Party, and PPP—*Partai Persatuan Pembangunan* or United Development Party) and *Golongan Karya* (Functional Groups or known as Golkar), the implementation of floating mass politics, the suppression of the press, as well as intimidation and discrimination against those who were critical to the regime characterized the politics of the regime. After Soeharto's resignation, the responsibilities to fulfil the agenda for democratic governance were transferred to Vice President B. J. Habibie. One year later, the 1999 general election marked the beginning of the country's democratic and clean (*luber jurdil*) elections; an indicator of a democratic system.

Elections during the New Order saw high rates of participation: a minimum of 80% in each election. The question that must then be

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\* The author is the Assistant Managing Editor of Jurnal Politik.

answered is whether high rates of participation equate to a high level of support for the government. There will be many debates over the answer to this question. Do elections during the reformation era reflect support for the government and democracy? Why do voter turnouts vary between elections? This book aims to answer these questions by looking at patterns of voting behavior in Indonesia based on a series of surveys conducted since the country's democratization. To answer these questions, it looks at a range of issues such as voting behavior, participation and elections, sociological and demographic factors, rational voters, and the party ID (party identification) and political leaders.

At first, the authors give their attention to the relation between people and the election as well as the emergence of those who are critical. When a country moves to a more democratic system, people will scrutinize the current system. This phenomenon is defined by Norris (2011) as a "democratic deficit". The authors define democratic deficit, by referring to Norris (1999), as the condition of a group of people who on the one hand consider democracy as an ideal political system, but on the other tend to be sceptical to democracy itself. Democratic deficit in a country can be increasing by time as more and more citizens become more critical to the performance of its government and the democratic system itself. Thus, it is the dynamics of public moods toward the government that determine the emergence of democratic deficit. Norris (1999) identified three conditions for its development, which are the rise of public expectations to government, negative news about the government, and/or poor performance of government.

The book then turns its attention to Indonesia which surely has different context and trajectory. Based on several studies on voting behavior, the patterns of voting behavior in Indonesia are strongly influenced by sociological factors (social class, religion, ethnicity, culture, language) and psychological factors (Party ID, candidate's orientation, the orientation of issues). The results of these several national-scale surveys indicate that the current political system is more democratic than that of the New Order. However, this achievement is not accompanied by a positive assessment of the performance of the overall gov-

ernments by the public. It is necessary to note that the main source of public appraisal for democracy is democratic performance linked to the public perception of the government. Improvement of the government's performance, particularly in the economy, will increase the public's commitment to democracy, and vice versa. This characteristic reflects the emergence of critical democrats within the public that can be optimistic about democracy or pessimistic about its implementation or how the government operates - especially in the economic sector. Thus, looking into these critical democrats in Indonesia is necessary to define the future of its democracy.

According to Mujani, Liddle and Ambardi (2018), the results of the country's legislative and presidential elections can be used to identify the emergence of critical democrats. First, voter turnout declined from 85 per cent in 1999 to 75 per cent in 2009, to around 70 per cent today. Second, the majority of party coalition has always won the presidential election. Indonesia's multi-party configuration, with their increasingly identical in term ideologies and programs, produces a pattern of party coalition in the presidential election that is fluid and not-binding, although it is not always supported by party voters.

Other than that, analysis of critical democrats in Indonesia can also be conducted by looking at patterns of voting behaviour, especially through sociological and demographic factors. The research found that, sociologically, Muslim religious groups are inclusive and contributive to the development of solidarity among both fellow Muslims or other religious adherents. At least there is an effort by religious Muslims to participate in politics by disseminating information in society.

In the demographic factor, there is a distinctive character of voters in rural and urban communities. Rural communities with relatively low educational and economic levels are not considered as critical democrats because of their perception of elections as celebrations, not as ways to achieve (political) goals. Different from their counterparts in the rural, urban communities with higher levels of education, office work, and better economy, are unlikely to vote if they do not have a strong reason to vote. The more prosperous and educated urban voters tend

to stay away for ballot-box in the elections. However, partisan groups play a significant role in determining victories but are inconsistent and also disloyal. Critical democrats tend to look up at the incumbent and demand change. If these conditions are not fulfilled, sociological factors such as regionalism play a major role in voting.

In addition to the sociological and demographic models, the political-economic model also shapes voters to become more rational. The authors explained that the declining trend of voter turnout is due to the increase of rational voters who tend to not vote because there are no benefits for themselves and their interests. These voters comprise of educated voters with middle-upper economic backgrounds. The authors predicted that economic growth and improvement in education will be accompanied by declines in voters turnout. As the result, the rate will become relatively stable like that of developed democratic countries. In these conditions, the biggest factor influencing voter turnout is the assessment of the government's performance, especially in the economic sector. Voters will see the country's recent economic performance as a determinant factor. Evaluation of the economy becomes the biggest factor while developments in other sectors such as social and politics will generate partisan choices. Incumbent candidates' performance in the economic sector will be tested; if the economy is good, rational voters will vote, and *vice versa*. Mujani, Liddle and Ambardi conclude that the development of critical democrats or rational voters will be accompanied by declines in voter turnout in the upcoming elections.

Concerning Party ID, the general elections of 1999, 2004, 2009 and 2014 show that voters in Indonesia have been transformed into rational voters, especially in the 2004 presidential election. The biggest cause of the decline in parties' votes in elections was the weakening of Party ID. Mujani, Liddle and Ambardi argue that the cause of the decline in party votes was the lack of appealing senior party leaders. Senior party leaders fail to attract public attention. On the other hand, a more appealing or reputable party leader has a chance of winning the election, as seen in the case of Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono (SBY). At that time,

SBY was seen as a more competent, honest and friendly candidate, with empathy for the grassroots and integrity.

To observe the development of rational voters, SBY's government can be used as an example. The 2009 elections resulted in SBY and Boediono being elected as President and Vice President. The *Partai Demokrat's* (Democratic Party) votes skyrocketed from 7 to 21 per cent, defeating PDI-Perjuangan and Megawati. The public perceived Yudhoyono's leadership as better in dealing with local and international economic issues. The re-election of Yudhoyono in 2009 for his second term was a form of public appreciation for his leadership in his previous term (Mujani, Liddle, and Ambardi 2018, 227). After ending his term of office in 2014, the *Partai Demokrat* was unable to maintain their voters. On the other hand, PDI-Perjuangan's won the legislative and president candidate, Joko Widodo elected as president. In terms of figure, his name was not as strong as other party cadres such as party chairman Megawati Sukarnoputri. But his success in leading Surakarta brought him to sit as the Governor of DKI Jakarta for two years in 2012-2014. His popularity soared, which lead PDIP nominating him as a presidential candidate in the 2014 election. The status of the ruling party shifted from the *Partai Demokrat* to the *Partai Demokrasi Indonesia Perjuangan* (PDI-P). One of the reasons for the decline of the Partai Demokrat in 2014 is because it suffered from many problems with its leadership and cases of corruption and gratification linked to a number of its prominent members tarnished its image as a clean party with integrity. At the same time, voters always lookout for a new and promising presidential candidate.

These sequences show that Indonesian voters are floating, not-binding, open and rational (Mujani, Liddle, and Ambardi 2018, 229). The weakening of Party ID in Indonesia is caused by voters' tendency to seek candidates rather than parties, despite the party's role in nominating candidates. Voters are increasingly rational because when they wish to vote, they evaluate the democratic performance or governance by the previous government. This book is valuable for providing an understanding of the development of rational voters in the study of

voting behavior in Indonesia. The political-economic model is seen as the best or proper approach in explaining voting behavior. By using the political-economic model, voters shift from sociological or psychological-based voting to rational votings. The development of rational voters in the future is predicted to continue to grow in line with economic improvement and voters' level of education. The rise of rational voters, at the same time, will also be linked to the decline of voter turnout, as experienced by the world's advanced democracies.

A number of studies have also been conducted to investigate Indonesian voting behaviors. For example, an article written by Higashikata and Kawamura (2015) concludes that "*aliran* politics" has disappeared due to change in voting behavior but remains a strong effect in religious cleavages. Meanwhile, Liddle and Mujani (2007) in *Leadership, Party and Religion: Explaining Voting Behavior in Indonesia* argue differently from Higashikata and Kawamura. They argue that sociological factors such as religious orientations do not significantly influence voting behavior. The biggest determining factor is leadership and party ID (Liddle and Mujani 2007, 850). The latter argument in many ways parallel with the authors' argument in this book that voters will look at candidates' character and party orientation. It is not surprising as the authors have been conducting a series of studies on Indonesian voting behavior since the beginning of the reform era. Therefore, it is not exaggerated to say that the book is the later findings of a prolonged study by the authors on the subject.

The value of this book in comparison to other similar works is its detailed and comprehensive analysis, using complete survey data. Besides, this book provides a comprehensive understanding of voting behavior in Indonesia, especially in the reform era. This book emphasizes on changes in voting behavior in Indonesia, from initially being based on sociological and psychological factors to considerations of cost and benefits or the political economy. The biggest contribution of this book is surely its comprehensive analysis of voting behavior in Indonesia since the country's democratization, especially in identifying the symptoms of change in voting behavior. The author's arguments in this book are

presented in great detail with strong arguments supported by data which has become the strongest contribution. It is no easy to find a similar study by using a similar approach to the study of Indonesia. Therefore, it is one of the books that must be read by those who want to understand the development of democracy in the country.

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