

Jakarta's Local Politics and Its Institutional Lack of Democracy

Okamoto Masaaki
Associate Professor CSEAS

Jakarta's Local Politics?

Urbanization is undergoing rapid progress in Southeast Asia. More than 42% of the total population in the region now reside in urban areas. Yet, the national capital still acts as the center of gravity for all aspects of life in every nation-state of Southeast Asia, with the possible exception of Myanmar. The Indonesian capital city of Jakarta is one such typical case. Jakarta has more than ten million people and still controls 60% of Indonesia's total money circulation. Since the Dutch colonial period, it has been the center of economy, politics, media and culture in Indonesia. Therefore, it is natural that many works on Indonesia actually deal with some aspects of the capital.

Jakarta has a wide range of political infrastructures such as the presidential office, government ministries, a national assembly and political party headquarters. In this sense, there are many academic studies on politics in Jakarta, but these deal with the "national" politics of the city. Jakarta has its governor, local bureaucracy and local MPs and elections to choose them, but local politics per se, is, from my point of view, rarely well researched. There seems to be several reasons for this lack of academic interest. Firstly, it is said that a local politics, independent of national politics, doesn't exist in Jakarta. The boundary between national and Jakartan politics is blurred and both are regarded as being too closely related. This creates difficulties in separating out local politics.

Secondly, Jakarta's politics is too unique to compare with other local politics in Indonesia. Since the democratization and decentralization process started, local politics has drawn the academic interest of Indonesianists, and research on politics at a local level has boomed (for example, see Aspinall and Fealy eds. 2003; Erb and Priyambudi eds. 2009; Nordholt and van Klinken 2009; Hadiz 2010). But, Jakarta's politics has never become a part of this for Jakarta is the national capital of Indonesia and local politics, such as the gubernatorial election, has been considered to be an anomaly within the nation's local politics.

Thirdly, the politics of Jakarta is openly visible to everyone. On a daily basis, all the major national media scrutinize and cover the activities of Jakarta's governor, vice governor and provincial parliament. The daily exposure to them might give the impression that everyone knows how politics functions in Jakarta, thus the topic need not merit a long article or a book. Scholars in Indonesia are satisfied with nothing more than writing short essays on Jakartan politics in newspapers and weekly journals for daily consumption. Yet, they tend to neglect the less democratic character of institutions in Jakarta. In this short essay, I intend to look at what kind of local politics are at work at the heart of the nation and analyze the reason why Jakarta's politics is, from an institutional point of view, so changeable.

Charting the Phenomenal Rise of Jokowi and Ahok in 2012

The emergence of Jakarta's new governor and vice governor in 2012, Joko Widodo (Jokowi) and Basuki Purnama (Ahok) is phenomenal and this has finally led to a subsequent rise in academic interest in Jakarta's local politics. Most of the polling results by influential survey institutes and companies before the 2012 gubernatorial election didn't expect them to win with their predictions centered upon the incumbent and well-entrenched governor, Fauzi Bowo. They were wrong.

Jokowi and Ahok are known for their reformist orientation. Jokowi was a mayor of Solo city in Java, and was well known for his successful governance and participatory approach to the people. Ahok was the district head of East Belitung district in Sumatera, and he was the first Chinese district head in Indonesia. As noted elsewhere, he harshly criticized the local bureaucracy of his small district and introduced innovative policies (Okamoto 2009).



Fig. 1: A populist image of Jokowi from a book written about him.

They were successful at the level of rural areas and only a few in Jakarta expected that Jokowi and Ahok would pair up and run for the gubernatorial election in metropolitan Jakarta. Six months before the election, however, the two opposition parties, the Indonesian Democratic Party of Struggle (*Partai Demokrasi Indonesia Perjuangan*, PDIP) and the Greater Indonesia Movement (*Gerakan Indonesia Raya*, Gerindra) decided to choose them as potential governor and vice governor candidates to defeat the incumbent Fauzi Bowo of the president's party, Democrat Party (*Partai Demokrat*).

Fauzi Bowo and his vice gubernatorial candidate are indigenous Jakartans called Betawi and aimed to draw upon support from this group. The incumbent Fauzi Bowo was also able to mobilize the local bureaucracy. On the other hand, Jokowi and Ahok were outsiders with no political base in Jakarta. Yet, this newness proved to be beneficial to them. The economy in Jakarta was good under Fauzi Bowo, but he was less communicative with the people. The chronic seriousness of problems such as floods, traffic jams and sharp inequality still remained the same or became worse during his rule. His own behavior, and the unsolved problems, degraded his popularity.

As such, Jokowi and Ahok successfully offered some hope for change with their communicative skills and their achievements as local leaders. They took a populist approach by criticizing the local bureaucracy and the elite-oriented economic development scheme and quite frequently went down to communicate with and listen to poor communities. The populist image and reputation they engendered greatly contributed to their win in the election. This showed that Jakartans sought some change in local government.

Change: A Normal Political Pattern in Jakarta?

If we look back over the trajectory of Jakarta's politics, Jokowi and Ahok's success is phenomenal but understandable. Actually, a political change (of actors) is not a rarity and is a frequent phenomenon in the city. In the first general election in 1999 after the fall of authoritarian Suharto regime, PDIP, a nationalist party led by a staunch anti-Suharto leader of Megawati Sukarnoputri, became the largest with 33.7% at the national level. The voters in Jakarta enthusiastically supported PDIP with



Pict. 1: Dewan Kota: the structure and members exist, but function less

a slightly larger vote of 39.3%.

A similar kind of support for change occurred during the 2004 election and the 2007 gubernatorial election in Jakarta. The prominent new political trend in the mid-2000s in Indonesia was the rise of the Islamist party, the Prosperous Justice Party (*Partai Keadilan Sejahtera*, PKS). PKS successfully established its image as a clean anti-corruption party espousing Islamic ethics and morals. Jakarta became a showcase for these trends. PKS rapidly increased its voting percentage from 1.4% in 1999 to 7.3% in 2004 at the national level and it became the largest party in Jakarta with 23% of the total votes. In 2007, the candidate solely supported by PKS lost the gubernatorial election, but fared better than expected against the then vice-governor Fauzi Bowo who was supported by 20 parties.

The winning party in Jakarta changed again in the 2009 election. The *Partai Demokrat* led by the popular president Yudhoyono successfully presented itself as a centrist and catch-all party and obtained the largest number of votes with 20.4% across the nation. *Partai Demokrat* was far more popular in Jakarta with 34.0% of the total votes.

Change: A Rational Choice for Jakartans?

It is quiet easy to find essays in newspapers and journals that attempt to explain the reasons behind this trend for constant change. The most often-cited reason is the rational choice of Jakarta's voters. The majority of voters in Jakarta are highly educated middle- and upper-class people, and rationally choose the parties and candidates based on their programs and track records. Yet essays say that the Jakartan voters consider the incumbent leaders and old parties as having no significant achievements and therefore, they always choose new ones.

Jakarta is also home to the indigenous Betawi, but they occupy just 28% of the total population in Jakarta. Jakartans are ethnically and religiously heterogeneous. Primordial social cleavages are important and often decisive factors in political contestation in other parts of Indonesia, but it is not true with Jakarta. Jakarta's elections are said to be an anomaly within Indonesia. The rational Jakartans, as a voting body, are said to be a decisive factor for constant political change in Jakarta as rational choice theory¹ seems to suggest. I think it is not enough to explain Jakartan local politics. Jakarta has an undemocratic institutional framework that creates and *aggrandizes* the metropolitan "floating mass" who are eager for constant and instant political change. This metropolitan floating mass has no strong political networks and no staunch ideological background and tends to give the votes to a party or a candidate that is able to sincerely or shrewdly present itself or himself/herself as an agent for change. This mass is large enough to be a decisive factor in any of Jakarta's elections.

Metropolitan Floating Mass

The existence of the metropolitan floating mass is not limited to Jakarta and we can find similar masses in other developed or developing major cities. The uniqueness of Jakarta is that the institutional framework is less democratic and that

facilitates the emergence of a metropolitan floating mass.

As the national capital, Jakarta is a special autonomous region. The first law regulating Jakarta in the era of democracy was law no.34/1999 and it was revised in 2007 as law no. 29/2007. The major difference between Jakarta and other parts of Indonesia is the number of tiers of autonomous regions. Jakarta has just one tier of autonomous region at the provincial level while other parts of Indonesia have two tiers at the provincial and district/city levels.

Jakarta has five cities and one district, but they are not autonomous regions. The provincial governor appoints the mayors and district head. Five cities and one district have assemblies, but they are just consultative bodies to mayors and district heads. The bodies are called *Dewan Kota* for cities and *Dewan Kabupaten* for districts. Each *Dewan Kota* has six to ten members and *Dewan Kabupaten* has just two members with each member representing a sub-district. The members are chosen from below, but not through direct election by the constituencies, but through indirect election. The final say about the members of Dewan Kota/Kabupaten are at the provincial parliament. Most Jakartans know nothing about the selection process of members and their activities. I interviewed some members and found out that they were quite disappointed with Dewan because the role is not clear and the mayor or district head doesn't pay much attention to Dewan's opinions. They themselves don't know much as to what they should do as members.

As far as the Jakarta government is concerned, around seven million voters have the right to vote for the governor and vice governor and 90 provincial MPs. Just 92 politicians are accountable to almost 10 million people in Jakarta. The political parties and politicians are institutionally motivated to be less communicative with Jakartans on a daily basis. Jakartan electoral politics is institutionally quite far and aloof from the everyday lives of Jakartans. We could say that they are institutionally motivated to be a metropolitan floating mass.

Reasons Behind Less Democratic Characters

The minutes of the National Parliament (DPR) concerning law no.34/1999 on the special autonomous region of Jakarta can tell us why the Jakarta government is kept undemocratic even in the era of democracy (Djohermansyah *et al.* 1999 and interview with Djohermansyah on 13 January 2013). First of all, it is said that Jakarta needs integrated development as a national capital. If cities and district are given the right to elect their own heads and local MPs, and also the wider authority for various administrative jobs, the Ministry of Home Affairs is afraid of failing to achieve coordination and cooperation among cities and district and the integrated development of Jakarta. Secondly, Jakarta should be socio-politically stable. The Ministry of Home Affairs assumed that the introduction of elections at the city and district levels might activate local politics and destabilize Jakarta. DPR agreed with the idea of the Ministry and passed law no.34/1999. The passing of the law is understandable because it was just a year after the Jakarta riots in 1998. But, the revised law in 2007 still followed the same logic and

didn't give wider authority to the cities and districts. Jakarta has no election for the mayors, district heads, and local MPs until now.

Conclusion

100 days have passed since Jokowi and Ahok took the office. Some have already started to grumble over the performance of their government. It is highly probable that the metropolitan floating mass will look to different actors for change in the next gubernatorial election if Jokowi and Ahok fail to keep their power and popularity by concretely implementing their programs, showing continuous achievements to Jakartans, and shrewdly managing the fragile hopes and expectations of the mass.

It is also highly probable that the metropolitan floating mass will again be the decisive factor for the next election. This mass is powerful in Jakarta. But Jakartans don't recognize that the strength of the floating mass partly depends on the undemocratic institutions in place in Jakarta. It's a bit ironic, but nonetheless real.

References

- Aspinall, Edward and Fealy, Greg, eds. 2003. *Local Power and Politics in Indonesia: Decentralization and Democratisation*. Singapore: ISEAS.
- Djohermansyah Djohan, Andi Ramses, M, and Tursandi Alwi. 1999. *Sejarah dan Risalah Undang-Undang Pemerintahan Propinsi Daerah Khusus Ibukota Negara Republik Indonesia Jakarta: Undang-Undang Nomor 34 Tahun 1999*. Jakarta: Institut Ilmu Pemerintahan Press.
- Erb, Maribeth and Priyambudi Sulistiyanto eds. 2009. *Deepening Democracy in Indonesia? Direct Elections for Local Leaders (Pilkada)*. Singapore: ISEAS.
- Hadiz, Vedi R. 2010. *Localising Power in Post-Authoritarian Indonesia: A Southeast Asia Perspective*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Nordholt, Henk Schultet and van Klinken, Gerry. 2009. *Renegotiating Boundaries: Local Politics in Post-Suharto Indonesia*. Leiden: KITLV Press.
- Okamoto Masaaki. 2009. Populism under Decentralization in post-Suharto Indonesia. In *Populism in Asia*, edited by Mizuno Kosuke and Pasuk Pongpaichit, pp. 144-64. Singapore: National University of Singapore Press.

Note

- ¹ Rational choice theory as a research method concentrates on, and analyzes how actors choose between alternative options.