INDONESIA’S PATH TO LIBERAL DEMOCRACY: LESSONS FOR THE MIDDLE EAST

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INTRODUCTION

Indonesia emerged from authoritarian rule in 1998 and quickly descended into widespread chaos. Deadly violence escalated as ethnic, religious and regional groups clashed. At the time, many observers predicted the sprawling archipelago would spiral out of control. However, Indonesia subsequently transitioned into a remarkably stable democracy that completed its fourth free and fair election in 2014. The respected think tank Freedom House now rates Indonesia as ‘fully free’, a designation it has held since 2007. But just as remarkable is the nature of the party system that has developed in this divided society. Rather than ethnic and religious parties forming around conflict-prone identity groups, inclusive parties won elections with largely centrist, policy-based appeals while Islamist parties moderated their rhetoric and joined governing coalitions.¹

This counterintuitive outcome is why many observers have argued Indonesia’s political transition and governing model could provide important lessons for the Middle East’s newly democratizing regimes. Indonesia is the Muslim-majority world’s only ‘fully free’ democracy, according to Freedom House. It constitutes a rare counterpoint to the ‘Islamic exceptionalism’ thesis, which argues that Islam is inherently incompatible with liberal democracy.² Australian Ambassador Greg Moriarty said in 2011 that Indonesia has “shown the world democratic transitions can be made, that Islam and democracy are compatible” (Alford, 2011). He lauded the political system for avoiding the “marginalization of groups on ethnic or religious grounds.” The Economist editorialized that Islamists in Indonesia “have shown that they can learn the habit of democracy” (The Arab Spring, 2013). Similarly, British Prime Minister David Cameron argued in 2012 that Indonesia proves that “democracy and Islam can flourish alongside each other” (Watt, 2012).

Descriptively, this Southeast Asian nation shares many similarities with countries of the Middle East. Muslims are 90% of Indonesia’s population, which corresponds to the demographics of, for example, Egypt and Syria. Furthermore, Indonesia has politically and socially significant religious minority communities and a Muslim majority that is both divided doctrinally between secular and orthodox interpretations of the Quran, and divided tactically between democratic participation and violent rejectionism. Just as in the Middle East, Indonesia suffered European colonialism and decades of secular authoritarian rule that co-opted and oppressed Islamist resistance. However, Indonesia’s extreme ethnic diversity is distinct from the Arab world. The country has over 300 ethnic groups, none of which constitutes a majority of the population.

¹ Portions of this chapter’s narrative are also in Macdonald (2013).
² Ernest Gellner, Fouad Ajami, Bernard Lewis, and Samuel Huntington are among the prominent exponents of this thesis.
The religious and ethnic mosaic of Indonesia presents a unique challenge for liberal democratic institutions. In deeply divided societies, building inclusive, moderate parties is ideal. Constitutional design scholar Benjamin Reilly argues that political parties are "intimately linked to the rise and fall of conflict." He argues further that because "multi-ethnic parties need to appeal to a broader support base" they "tend to have a more centrist impact, aggregating diverse interests and de-emphasizing mono-ethnic demands" (Reilly, 2006, p. 811). The key question is how to build an electoral system and constitutional arrangement that incentivize centrist as opposed to identity-based politics. Indonesia's constitutional designers implemented a complex institutional design that successfully achieved this result. As a model, it could provide an interesting example for Middle Eastern regimes.

However, the success of liberal democratic institutions is inextricably tied to culturally embedded values and norms. Political institutions that have no grounding in socially shared conceptions of governance will likely face significant legitimacy problems. Therefore, in order to evaluate the applicability of the 'Indonesia model' for the conflict-prone, Muslim-majority nations in the Middle East, one must situate Indonesia's democratic design in its historical and social context. This paper will first outline Indonesia's unique institutional arrangement. Second, it will provide an in-depth process tracing the evolution of secular nationalism in Indonesia. Finally, it will assess Indonesia's political culture in comparison to the Middle East. In short, it will argue that while Indonesia's constitutional design provides a useful template to manage and protect diversity for the Middle East's newly democratic regimes, the country's political development created a precedent for secular, liberal, and pluralistic inclusion unparalleled in the Middle East. This certainly does not mean democracy is doomed in the region, only that the rote adoption of the Indonesia model is not a democratic panacea.

THE INDOONESIAN ELECTORAL MODEL: INCLUSIVE MAJORITY RULE

Indonesia's institutional design has several features that encourage inclusive, centrist politics. Its hybrid electoral system coupled with strict party regulations mandate that political parties have broad-based support. In addition, Indonesia's transition from a unitary state to a highly decentralized state has pushed national-level parties to compete for provincial and municipal power, making them responsive to and inclusive of a diverse set of local issues spread across the country. These two features push parties away from particularistic politics and toward the political centre where votes can be maximized.

The Electoral System and Election Rules

Indonesia's hybrid electoral system is among the most complicated in the world; however, its combination of majoritarian and proportional features with strict party rules creates a strong incentive for broad-based, nationalist political parties. Indonesia's three national-level elected bodies/positions operate under three separate electoral systems. The national parliament, called the People's Representative Council (DPR), is elected from 77 multimember districts using open-list proportional representation. A second national-level body called the Regional Representative Council (DPD), which has limited powers over regional issues, is elected using single non-transferable vote in 77 four-member districts. Finally, the president of Indonesia is elected in a direct, two-round (if necessary) election in which the winner needs a majority of the vote.

This complicated mix of electoral systems is coupled with a set of strict party laws. For DPR elections, each party must surpass a 3.5% threshold (recently increased from 2.5%) in order to win a seat and must open party chapters in all provinces as well as in no less than 75% of all regencies/municipalities in each of the provinces and in no less than 50% of all districts in each of the regencies/municipalities. For presidential elections, the winning candidate must also obtain at least 20% of the vote in more than half
of the provinces. Additionally, only a party or coalition of parties that wins at least 25% of the vote or 20% of the seats in the DPR can nominate a presidential ticket.\footnote{In 2004, only parties that won 3% of the seats or 5% of votes in the DPR election could nominate a candidate.}

This convoluted set of rules and regulations was designed for one overarching purpose: to generate inclusive, broad-based political parties and competition. First, only parties with substantial electoral support can nominate presidential candidates. This limits presidential competition to comparatively large, national parties. Additionally, because generally no single party controls a majority in the DPR, parties are forced to align in order to nominate a single candidate, which inherently weakens ideological messages. For example, President Yudhoyono’s secular-nationalist Democrat Party aligned with several religious parties for the 2009 presidential election, including the Islamist United Development Party (PPP) and Prosperous Justice Party (PKS). Second, by requiring a winning presidential ticket to have 20% of the vote in at least half of provinces, candidates are forced to compete in less populous and more diverse provinces, which encourages multiethnic and multi-religious appeals.

Party rules for DPR elections also hurt small, identity-based parties. First, a 3.5% party threshold precludes small, particularistic parties from winning seats and encourages the formation of multiethnic coalition parties or nationalistic, non-ethnic parties. Second, every party must open party offices across the country, which forces parties to demonstrate not only widespread geographic support but also requires a relatively large fundraising capacity. This again favours large parties over small particularistic parties that have neither the support nor organizational capacity to meet the requirements.

In sum, Indonesia’s election rules incentivize broad-based and inclusive politics, which produce political parties that must control more than 3.5% of the vote and have party headquarters across the country, but that are ideologically broad so as to allow for charismatic and ideologically diverse candidates. Benjamin Reilly writes that Indonesia’s “political reformers have introduced majority-favouring electoral systems and political party laws that encourage nationally focused political competition and that restrict parties which base their appeals upon regional or ethnic ties” (Reilly, 2007, p. 43). Consequently, political parties rely on charismatic candidates and catch-all rhetoric to generate votes across Indonesia’s ethnically and religiously diverse landscape.

**Decentralization**

Indonesia complements its electoral system/election rules with significant decentralization of power. Indonesia is formally a unitary state; it rejects the term and structure of ‘federalism’ because of its association with Dutch divide-and-rule tactics. Therefore, its power-sharing laws are called ‘decentralization’ and have largely skipped over the provincial level – the traditional site of federal powers – and gone to the local level, where the dramatic decentralization of power has enhanced the moderating effects of electoral rules. After Suharto’s fall in 1998, a new scheme of local power sharing was implemented through a ‘big bang approach’ that precipitously transformed centre-state relations (Crouch, 2010, p. 92). These decentralization reforms were extensive. They included making regencies and cities the focal points of provincial power rather than governors; transferring a number of administrative and financial functions to regencies and cities; granting local parliaments control over their budgets; and introducing revenue sharing between central and regional (Hadiz, 2010, pp. 78-79). Through these reforms, Indonesia was “transformed from a highly centralized state into one of the most decentralized in the world” (Buehler, 2010, p. 268). Decentralization counter-intuitively enhances the national character of political parties. By raising the stakes of local elections, parties aim...
to be strong not only at the national level, but also at the provincial and municipal level. This forces parties to cultivate ideological inclusion in order to compete across the largest portion of the country. In the province of Aceh, standard decentralization efforts were inadequate. The northwestern-most province of Indonesia is unique from the rest of the country. Its Muslim majority is mostly ethnically Acehnese – a regionally concentrated group – and is significantly more conservative than the rest of country. Aceh had a parallel nationalist movement that rejected mainstream secularism and advocated strict Islamic law. The province’s restive population waged intermittent secessionist violence against the central government for decades until a peace deal was reached in 2005. The ceasefire arrangement absolved Aceh from the strict party regulations that governed political competition elsewhere. This allowed regionally-based political parties to win elections in Aceh, placating the province’s uniquely stubborn particularistic demands. Indonesia’s asymmetrical decentralization is a significant element of its institutionally embedded conflict management. In combination, Indonesia’s election rules and decentralization of power strongly encourage inclusive politics. Various regulations for legislative and presidential elections force parties to demonstrate significant and diverse support. Bolstering this imperative, decentralization has made parties more responsive to local issues. This joint incentive for moderation is shown most clearly in election outcomes. Despite the presence of conflict-prone identities – both religious and ethnic – which around the world often induce outbidding strategies and divisive, particularistic politics, inclusive and nationalist political parties have dominated Indonesian elections since 1998. This outcome is exactly what constitutional designers hoped to achieve.

**The First Juncture Point of Inclusion: The Nationalist Movement**

Islam entered the deeply heterogeneous archipelago in the thirteenth century. Yet the process of assimilation was not equal throughout the country. Some areas, such as the central island of Java, had longer periods of Islamic integration than others. This produced varied Islamic traditions that continue to define the country’s syncretism (Ricklefs, 2008). Portuguese colonialists arrived in the early 1500s and gave way to Dutch colonialists during the 1600s. At the same time, Islamic states were emerging in other parts of Indonesia. Johor and Aceh, both Islamic states, were major powers. Yet despite the potentially unifying enemy of European colonialism, Muslims remained divided.
Indonesia’s electoral system and constitutional design incorporate ethnic and religious diversity within a political framework of secular nationalism that has a strong historical foundation.

The consolidation of Dutch control precipitated the emergence of disparate nationalist movements and community organizations by the early 1900s. Three streams of nationalism took hold: upper class and western-oriented, religious, and radical. Islamic, socialist and communist organizations and parties began to organize Indonesians against colonial rule. By 1920, the term ‘Indonesia’ began to appear in party statements for the first time (Vickers, 2005). However, rather than uniting Indonesia under a common identity, the ethnic basis of these new organizations only illuminated the combative diversity of Indonesian politics.

During the late 1920s and 1930s, a truly inclusive nationalist identity began to form. Cooperation with the Dutch had been exhausted and a new secular elite emerged as the next generation of Indonesian leadership. In 1927, a young activist named Sukarno founded and chaired a political party called the Indonesian Nationalist Party. Sukarno believed deeply that nationalism and independence from colonialism was the ultimate goal and that the competing ideologies of Islam, Marxism and secular nationalism should be combined into a multiethnic movement (Ricklefs, 2008). Sukarno coordinated a multi-religious pact that unified secular, Christian, Muslim, and Chinese organizations in the name of Indonesian nationalism. "Muslims must not forget that capitalism, the enemy of Marxism, is also the enemy of Islam," Sukarno wrote (quoted in Vickers, 2005, p. 80).

The Japanese invasion and occupation of Indonesia during World War II ended Dutch control over the archipelago. At first glance, Indonesia had been liberated: the Dutch-named city of Batavia was renamed Jakarta and street names were changed into the local language. But Japanese rule was hardly benevolent. Its goal was to reorganize the Indonesian economy to support the war effort and eliminate any existing western influence from the country. In early 1943, Japan began training Indonesian military forces, youth leagues and teachers, as well as suppressing Islamic organizations in order to reshape Indonesian society (Ricklefs, 2008).

In March 1945, with Allied forces bearing down on Japan, the Japanese created an elite committee to prepare for Indonesian independence. Sukarno, a committee member, pushed his vision for a multi-ethnic, secular Indonesian state through an ideology called Pancasila. To become the official philosophy of independent Indonesia, Pancasila laid out five principles: belief in god, nationalism, humanitarianism, social justice, and democracy. To appease Islamic conservatives, the committee approved the Jakarta Charter, which obliged adherents of Islam to carry out Islamic law. The committee then drafted Indonesia’s first Constitution, which created a unitary state with an exceptionally powerful president.

In August 1945, Japan surrendered to the Allies, who had not yet retaken Indonesia. This left the nation temporarily free from foreign control. Nationalist leaders Muhammad Hatta and Sukarno seized the moment. On 17 August, Sukarno read Indonesia’s declaration of independence before a small audience outside his own home: “We the people of Indonesia hereby declare the independence of Indonesia. Matters concerning the transfer of power, etc., will be carried out in a conscientious manner and as speedily as possible. In the name of the people of Indonesia” (quoted in Ricklefs, 2008, p. 260).

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4. Indonesian nationalists later reneged on the Jakarta Charter, which remains a contested issue in Indonesia.
The Allies finally arrived in Indonesia to accept Japanese surrender and reinstate the Dutch regime, but the newly self-proclaimed independent Indonesians began a four-year war against the returning colonial powers. The new government in Jakarta quickly formed a leadership structure around Sukarno and Hatta as president and vice president respectively. The Dutch did not have the military forces to control Indonesia, but internal divisions and ethnic diversity made the independence movement highly fragmented. For the Indonesian masses, the notion of freedom from foreign dominion was appealing, but there was still no substantive political culture or deep understanding of what democracy and independence actually meant (Hellwig & Tagliacozzo, 2009).

Continued guerrilla resistance and international pressure ultimately forced the Netherlands to relent. On 27 December 1949, the Netherlands formally transferred sovereignty to the Republic of Indonesia. The country was still not a cohesive nation, but the anti-colonial movement and its charismatic leadership had created a foundational national mythology around unity and secularism. Though significant disagreement still existed with Islamist leaders who sought more explicit Islamic values represented in the state, a precedent of compromise and unity had been set.

**The Second Juncture Point of Inclusion: Democracy**

The process of inclusivity within the nationalist movement was formalized with the creation of a democratically-elected parliament, which replaced the existing provisional legislature. Indonesia’s first election in 1955 was dominated by four main parties, which each took approximately 20% of the vote. Sukarno’s secular-nationalist Indonesian Nationalist Party (PNI) won the election with 22%. The three other top-performing parties included two Muslim parties and the Communist Party (PKI) (Feith, 1964).

Though inclusive, democratic elections did not bring unity. The 28 different parties and groups that won seats formed themselves into seventeen factions in the assembly. The three largest parties in parliament – PNI, Masyumi and NU – formed a ruling coalition in order to exclude PKI. The deeply divided cabinet produced only deadlock. Simultaneously, Islamic militants continued their struggle against the perceived secular proclivities of Jakarta. Joined by the province of North Sumatra in 1950, Aceh separatists began an open rebellion for independence in 1953. The election also exposed a geographic divide: there remained a clear division between Java and the outer islands. Masyumi performed exceptionally well in the outer islands, while the three other parties largely split the Java vote.

With ethnic separatism and divided central rule threatening the country’s nascent inclusive political system, Sukarno began to discuss publically the concept of ‘guided democracy’, which could replace ‘western’ democratic procedures and parties with elite-driven, consensual governance. This proposed Java-centred power consolidation led to a revolt among army leaders in the outer islands. As political disarray grew, Sukarno dissolved the cabinet and declared martial law in March 1957; thus ending the brief period of post-colonial parliamentary democracy in Indonesia.

Despite the centrifugal pulls that took hold during this period, a multiethnic and multi-religious Indonesian identity had been created. Nationalism was aided by the continued Dutch control of Irian Jaya, which was extremely unpopular, as well as the legacy of Dutch ‘divide and rule’ policies, which discredited separatism and federalism as ‘western’ (Ricklefs, 2008). The abandonment of democracy in Indonesia actually solidified – albeit artificially – a unifying multiethnic and multi-religious sentiment. Sukarno believed deeply in a cohesive Indonesian state that combined secular and Islamic values. Hard-line religious fundamentalists opposed this vision. Although the next democratic election would not take place until 1999, Indonesia’s failed democratic experiment managed to create a common inclusive identity that would...
tenuously stabilize society through decades of dictatorship.

The Third Juncture Point of Inclusion: Authoritarianism

The process of inclusivity was counter-intuitively bolstered through authoritarian rule. Political parties were on the defensive during the Guided Democracy period. Despite strong opposition to Sukarno’s executive power grab, the parties remained too divided to mount a unified defence of the parliamentary system. PNI and NU officials aligned in the new cabinet. Masyumi rejected the arrangement while PKI and the Indonesian Socialist Party (PSI) were fully excluded. The failure of United Nations efforts to end contested Dutch control of Irian Jaya precipitated a spasm of anti-Dutch protest, which was encouraged by Sukarno to enhance his domestic standing. Nevertheless, regional rebellion continued. Leftist movements challenged government authority around the country. In Aceh, a shaky ceasefire held but rebels remained armed. In the face of this unrest, Sukarno further consolidated his power by reinstating the 1945 Constitution, which enshrined vast powers in the president. The Constitution, which lacked any governmental imperative to implement Islamic law, infuriated conservative Muslims. Sukarno pushed his concept of ‘NASAKOM’,5 a national doctrine that combined communism, nationalism, and religion. He also made great efforts to emphasize Indonesia’s ancient and potentially unifying multiethnic history (Vickers, 2005).

By 1960, economic chaos befell Indonesia. Sukarno presided over the devaluation of the rupiah and a reduction of the money supply. As inflation skyrocketed, economic and political chaos destabilized his rule. On 30 September 1965, military officers executed four generals. The rebelling officers claimed to be protecting Sukarno from the generals, who were said to be plotting a coup. Amid the chaos, an Indonesian general named Suharto took control of the non-rebelling troops and put down the internal revolt. The event signified a deepening political crisis that pitted the civilian leadership against the military. The abortive coup of September-October 1965 hastened the end of Sukarno’s Guided Democracy. During the period of 1950-1965, social divisions reified around communal rather than class boundaries. In East Java, ethnic tension rose as Islamic NU activists slaughtered communists with the help of the military. In Jakarta, pro- and anti-Sukarno youths fought in the streets. Amid continuing unrest, Suharto convened the parliament in the summer of 1966. Under his control, the parliament banned the PKI and Marxism, stripped Sukarno of his status as ‘President-for-Life’ (conferred in 1963), and forbade Sukarno from issuing presidential decisions. Sukarno was placed under house arrest and the period of Guided Democracy ended. Suharto took over as ‘Acting President’ having formal power conferred through rigged elections in 1971.

Like Sukarno, Suharto was a nationalist who maintained multiethnic and multi-religious unity through authoritarian tactics. A new electoral law allowed the government to appoint a large percentage of the previously elected representatives, effectively giving the state power to block constitutional amendments. In 1970, the government announced that state employees could not join political parties and were pressured to join Golkar, a joint army-civilian coordinating body. Existing political parties were consolidated into approved – and impotent – opposition parties. Islamic parties were forcibly combined into the United Development Party (PPP) and non-Islamic parties were consolidated within the Indonesian Democratic Party (PDI).

By the mid-1970s, Suharto had fully consolidated his one-man rule. Military allies helped crush opponents while Suharto bought support by distributing state funds to his associates and family. Virulent anti-

5. NASAKOM is an acronym combining the Indonesian words for nationalism, religion, and communism.
communist propaganda was used to suppress leftist mobilization. In the wake of the Iranian Revolution in 1979, the New Order began to view Islamic organizations with greater concern. The regime moved to create or exacerbate divisions within the already heterogeneous Islamic community. Power became increasingly centralized in the state, which continued to voice slogans of national unity while rigging elections every five years. The peak of the New Order’s power was from 1976 to 1988. Despite student protests and an abysmal human rights record, Indonesia experienced a rise in its standard of living because of oil export windfalls. This success was accompanied by increased efforts to create ideological homogeneity. In the late 1970s, the government began compulsory citizen indoctrination programmes in the state ideology of Pancasila. The government also required all organizations to adopt Pancasila as their official ideology.

The Fourth Juncture Point of Inclusion: The Fall of Suharto and Return of Democracy
The end of the Cold War unleashed more resistance to the state. In Aceh, where large-scale separatist violence had been suppressed since 1982, the Independent Aceh Movement (GAM) attacked military outposts and ratcheted up militant activities. In East Timor, economic and political exploitation by the military, long hidden by the Cold War’s shadow, now came under international scrutiny. Suharto’s relationship with the military was also souring. After his election to a sixth term, the military, which had been designated seats in the parliament, nominated a sympathetic vice president to protect its interests. Suharto responded by appointing a cabinet led by a military adversary. Behind the scenes, the military began to plan for Suharto’s successor.

With social and political conflict growing, the economy also began to falter. By the early 1990s, Indonesian debt was massive, corruption was driving away foreign investment, and interest rates were high. The government’s large role in the economy exacerbated problems, as corruption and ineptitude only lined the pockets of Suharto’s family. The mid-1990s saw more identity-based conflict: riots spread in East Timor, anti-Chinese and anti-Christian sentiment grew, Dayaks and Madurese immigrants were targeted, and independence demonstrations expanded in Irian Jaya.

In 1997, the Asian financial crisis ravaged Indonesia’s economy. Indonesia accepted a $43 billion loan from the IMF, but public opinion turned against the regime. Suharto, who suffered a minor stroke in 1997, became more isolated. A turning point arrived when military forces violently suppressed protesting students, who only redoubled their agitation in response. Suharto then called for a period of reform and new elections, but these concessions could not sustain his rule (Lloyd & Smith, 2001). On 21 May 1998, Suharto transferred power to his vice president, Habibie, in a hastily organized ceremony. In 1999, Indonesia’s second democratic election put the party of Megawati Sukarnoputri, Sukarno’s daughter and an ardent secular nationalist, in power in the parliament. The momentum of the inclusive, nationalist movement had continued to carry its political descendants to power.

The process of inclusive, secular inculcation was reaffirmed at each critical juncture point in Indonesia’s political development: the anti-colonial movement, the first democratic transition, the authoritarian era, and the second democratic transition. In sum, the process of inclusive, secular inculcation was reaffirmed at each critical juncture point in Indonesia’s political development: the anti-colonial movement, the first democratic transition, the authoritarian era, and the second democratic transition. However, this sentiment — exemplified by Pancasila — was not uncontested. Various ethno-nationalist and Islamist movements challenged the proponents of secular
nationalism for control of the state. However, *pancasila* continued to triumph, becoming more embedded in the political ethos of Indonesia at each juncture point. This historical foundation of secular nationalism created the setting for Indonesia’s current institutional design, which attempts to encourage catch-all political parties that will retain the country’s secular character in the face of persistent, though low-scale, resistance.

**POLITICAL CULTURE, TOLERANCE AND DEMOCRACY: INDONESIA VERSUS THE MIDDLE EAST**

The narrative outlined above shows the progression of elite-level secularism in Indonesia’s political development, which led into its second democratic transition. However, the extent to which these sentiments shaped mass-level attitudes is an important empirical and theoretical question. Scholars have long noted a connection between values and democratic strength. Much political science literature argues that successful democratization relies on a set of attitudes either toward democracy itself or toward the principles that undergird it, such as tolerance, trust, political activism, or orientation toward authority (Verba, 1965; Schmitter & Karl, 1991; Inglehart & Welzel, 2005). However, there remains debate about the sequencing of political culture and democracy: must a ‘positive’ culture precede democracy or can it emerge after a democratic transition? Regardless, Mark Tessler and Eleanor Gao conclude, “…there is general agreement that sustainable democracy ultimately depends not only on the commitments and actions of political elites but also on the normative and behavioural predispositions of ordinary citizens” (Tessler & Gao, 2009, p. 197).

Building on this premise, this section compares the political cultures of Indonesia and two Middle East countries – Tunisia and Egypt – at their respective moments of transition. Using data from the World Values Survey’s (WVS) 1999-2004 wave and 2010-2014 wave for Indonesia and the Middle East respectively, one can identify values and norms at the fall of Suharto and during the Arab Spring. Although political culture can certainly evolve, the attitudes and dispositions of a society at the time of transition constitute important building blocks of democracy. For this analysis, selected WVS questions were organized around attitudes toward democracy, tolerance, and religion.

**Indonesia’s Political Culture During its Democratic Transition**

Indonesians entered the post-Suharto era with a strong belief in democracy. Nearly 90% of Indonesian’s believed that democracy was a “very good” or “fairly good” way of governing the country. Less than 4% said it was “bad” or “very bad”. Similarly, over 70% disagreed with the statement that democracies are bad at maintaining order or are indecisive. And over 60% agreed that democracy was the best form of government despite its problems. Around 75% said having a strong leader that can ignore parliament or elections was bad. These beliefs are particularly important given Indonesia’s tumultuous politics after Suharto’s fall. Nearly 70% of Indonesian’s were “not very” or “not at all” satisfied with the way democracy was developing at the time of the survey.

Tolerance, as measured by attitudes towards women, homosexuals, and ethnic/racial minorities, was mixed in Indonesia. When asked which group of people you would not want as a neighbour, 34.8% said people of different race, 37.8% said people of different religion, and 54.8% said homosexuals. Nearly 95% said homosexuality is “never justifiable”. Indonesians were also conservative regarding women’s rights. Nearly 80% of respondents agreed that a wife’s duty was to obey her husband and 83% claimed being a “good wife” is a “very important” trait for a woman. Furthermore, a slight majority agreed that

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6. The WVS online data analysis tool is available at http://www.worldvaluessurvey.org/wvs.jsp
men have more right to a job in times of economic hardship.

Indonesia was and is a highly religious society. Over 98% of respondents said religion was “very important” in his or her life and nearly 100% said they gained comfort and strength from religion. Despite this religiosity, many Indonesians believed in a separation between religion and politics. Nearly 90% agreed that religious leaders should not influence government decisions while 86% agreed that religious leaders should not influence how people vote. More recent survey data from the Pew Research Center in 2013 show a high level of support for Sharia law in Indonesia (The World’s Muslims, 2013). 72% support making sharia the official law of the country. A smaller majority (66%) support empowering religious judges to adjudicate family law and property disputes.

Political Culture in the Middle East During the Arab Spring

In Tunisia and Egypt – two countries that made a full transition from authoritarianism to democracy (at least temporally in the case of Egypt) – there was a relatively strong belief in democracy as a process. Over 85% of Egyptians and over 62% of Tunisians rated the importance of democratic governance, with an 8 or above (on a 10-point scale). Similarly, over 70% of Tunisians and 85% of Egyptians said free elections were an essential characteristic of democracy. However, both Tunisians and Egyptians showed an affinity for strongman politics. A plurality of Tunisians (27%) and a large majority of Egyptians (71.1%) said having a strong leader who does not bother with parliament and elections was “very good.” Similarly, only a small plurality (25%) in Tunisia7 said army intervention in the political process was “not an essential characteristic of democracy”.

Levels of tolerance in Tunisia and Egypt were mixed. In Tunisia, nearly 70% said they would not want a homosexual neighbour and nearly 30% said they would not want a neighbour of a different religion. 87% of Tunisians said homosexuality is “never justifiable”. On women’s rights, both Egypt and Tunisia are conservative societies. Over 70% of Tunisians and over 80% of Egyptians said men have more right to a job than women during economic hardship. Furthermore, small majorities (approximately 52% and 59% in Tunisia and Egypt, respectively) said “women have the same rights as men”, a score of 8 or higher (on a 10-point scale). Trust is very low in both countries. Just over 15% of Tunisians and 21% of Egyptians said “most people can be trusted”. And over 86% of Tunisians and nearly 60% of Egyptians said they did not trust people of other religions “very much” or “at all”. Nearly 90% of Tunisians agreed with that “the only acceptable religion is my religion”.

Egypt and Tunisia are highly religious societies. Well over 90% of respondents in both countries claimed religion was “very important” in life. Tunisians and Egyptians were split on whether religious authorities should interpret law in democracy. In Tunisia, approximately 49% of the population agreed more than disagreed. In Egypt, a small plurality (17.1%) said this was “an essential characteristic of democracy” and nearly 60% agreed more than disagreed. The Pew Research Center’s data showed strong but different levels of support for sharia law. 74% of Egyptians and 56% of Tunisians supported making sharia the official law. In Egypt, 94% said religious judges should decide family law whereas 42% of Tunisians said the same.

Comparing Indonesia with Egypt and Tunisia

Though ostensibly disconnected, the answers to these questions regarding tolerance, democracy and religion constitute important values that correlate with democratic performance across the world. When comparing Indonesia with these

7. This question was not asked in Egypt.
two selected Middle Eastern countries, we see important similarities and differences. The populations of all three countries have high levels of support for democracy as a process. However, Indonesians appear to be more sceptical toward strongman politics than either Tunisians or Egyptians. All three countries display low levels of tolerance for women, religious minorities and homosexuals, though the rates of intolerance vary. Finally, Indonesia, Tunisia and Egypt are all highly religious societies with majorities that support sharia law — a legal code inherently discriminatory toward non-Muslims. However, there is significant variation in these attitudes. Tunisians’ support for sharia is markedly less than among Indonesians or Egyptians.

The World Values Survey data do identify potentially important differences between Indonesia and the Arab world. Though Indonesians are highly religious, their political value system includes limiting the power of religious leaders and strong scepticism toward authoritarianism. These democratic attitudes are potentially vital for sustaining democracy during tumultuous periods of political competition when religious, military, or other elites are likely to advocate their own undemocratic intervention in the process. Despite sharing social conservatism with the Middle East, polling suggests Indonesians have a deeper respect for pluralistic politics. Recent events in Egypt potentially demonstrate this difference. Many liberals upset with the democratically-elected Muslim Brotherhood encouraged the intervention of the military. Respect for both the means and ends of democratic competition is fundamental to the preservation of democracy.

Indonesia’s constitutional design and election rules represent an interesting model of conflict management for all divided societies, not simply for Muslim-majority countries in the Middle East. Its party rules and election requirements force political parties into the political centre. At the presidential level, regional vote distribution requirements compel candidates to demonstrate geographically dispersed appeal. At the parliamentary level, a minimum vote threshold and party organization requirements preclude small, particularistic parties for competition. Together, these election rules induce broad-based, catch-all political parties that use moderate, policy-based appeals to mobilize the electorate.

**THE INDONESIA MODEL AND THE MIDDLE EAST**

While Indonesia does present a hopeful example of democracy and minority rights for the Middle East’s transitioning regimes, the unique character of its political development limits the lessons that can be drawn from it. The historical evolution of its secular political culture appears distinct from the Middle East, which has not undergone a similarly slow gestation of inclusive political values. However, there is no single culture that makes democracy work and cultures change over time. In the short term, though, Indonesia provides an adaptable model of inclusivity that should be considered in the Middle East.

Indonesia’s constitutional design and election rules represent an interesting model of conflict management for all divided societies, not simply for Muslim-majority countries in the Middle East.
standing discontent and protest against authoritarian regimes, the Arab Spring seemed to emerge precipitously and out of nowhere. A fruit vendor’s immolation in Tunisia sparked a revolutionary contagion that in only a few months ended several of the region’s longest surviving autocrats. The pluralism and democratic spirit undergirding the Arab Spring had few historical antecedents. The succession of the Ottoman Empire to European colonialism to secular dictatorships occurred without the consent of the region’s inhabitants. When authoritarian regimes fell in 2011 at the hands of secular and inclusive people’s movements, this represented a radical rather than gradually-building shift in the Middle East’s political development.

This contrasts significantly with Indonesia. The mass protests that precipitated the fall of Suharto fit within Indonesia’s historical narrative. Centuries of colonial rule formally ended in 1945 after a nationalist armed resistance movement won the country’s independence. Though fleeting, Indonesia’s brief experiment with constitutional democracy in the 1950s institutionalized a secular state. Unlike in the Middle East, the secular authoritarianism that began in 1965 under Suharto was not an artificial implant. From colonial resistance to democracy to authoritarianism, the ideological underpinning of the political elite remained predominantly secular. Thus, when student protests ushered in the current democratic period, which included the electoral reforms outlined above, there was nothing particularly foreign about them. They had a strong precedent in Sukarno’s ideology of *pancasila*. Indeed, the leading figure of the pro-democracy movement was Magawati Sukarnoputri, Sukarno’s daughter.

A persistent political culture of secularism is represented in survey data from Indonesia. Indonesians are strongly sceptical about authoritarianism and prefer religious leaders to stay out of politics. These sentiments are layered over a deep religiosity, exemplified by elevated support for Sharia law and antagonism toward women and religious minorities. Nevertheless, this cultural separation between religion and the state is an important democratic norm. Although Tunisians appear more secular than Indonesians according to some indicators, a closer examination of Tunisia’s political history would be required to fully compare its experience with secularism to that of Indonesia. The “twin toleration” (Stepan, 2000) of religion and secularism that buttresses Indonesia’s democracy has deep historical roots, which make it likely to persist. Contrastingly, the rapid and radical nature of the Middle East’s democratic change could portend a regression into authoritarian modes of governance in some countries.

**Indonesia’s political development suggests that though inclusive democratic institutions can be designed, their success cannot be separated from sui generis historical and cultural factors.**

In sum, Indonesia’s current pluralistic, tolerant and liberal democracy was partly nurtured and partly in its nature. Though some interreligious and interethnic violence continue at the local level, the moderate character of national-level politics and policy was induced through institutions. Yet the success of these institutions cannot be understood without recognizing the conducive social setting in which they are embedded. Syncretic Islam and political secularism were present at the state’s founding moment, persisted through authoritarianism, and now reinforce Indonesia’s liberal democracy. Indonesia’s political development suggests that though inclusive democratic institutions can be designed, their success cannot be separated from sui generis historical and cultural factors.
REFERENCES


