"Elites, Masses and Democratic Decline in Indonesia"

SYNOPSIS

Indonesia’s democracy is in decline. Most analysts blame this shift on the actions of illiberal and reactionary elites; the public, meanwhile, are often cast as a democratic bulwark. Yet, like in other fragile democracies, moments of regression in Indonesia have come at the hands of popular and democratically-elected politicians. So, just how democratic are Indonesian citizens when compared to the politicians they elect? We answer this question using an original, representative survey of Indonesia’s provincial legislators, which we compare to a general survey of the Indonesian population. We find significant differences between how elites and masses conceive of democracy, and between their level of commitment to liberal democratic norms. Contrary to expectations, we find elected elites are systematically more democratic and more liberal than voters. These findings challenge widely-held assumptions about the illiberal character of Indonesia’s political class. But they also suggest a public that is either indifferent to, or supportive of, an increasingly illiberal democratic order in Indonesia.

This paper is co-authored with Edward Aspinall (ANU), Diego Fossati (City University of Hong Kong), and Burhanuddin Muhtadi (State Islamic University, Jakarta, Indonesia).

SPEAKER’S BIO

Dr Eve Warburton received her PhD in 2018 from the Department of Political and Social Change at the Australian National University. Her thesis was a comparative political economy study of resource nationalism in Indonesia. Eve is currently a research fellow at the Department of Political and Social Change, Australian National University, and from July 2019 she will take up a postdoctoral fellowship at the Asia Research Institute, NUS.

Speaker:
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Department of Political Science
National University of Singapore

ALL ARE WELCOME!

Moderator:
Dr Deepak Nair