

Activists in Transition: Progressive Politics in Democratic Indonesia

Convenor: Professor Michele Ford, Sydney Southeast Asia Centre, The University of Sydney

Panel Abstract:

Studies of regime change have shown that progressive social movements disseminate ideas about democracy amongst the wider population and mobilize opposition to undemocratic regimes. Less attention has been paid to the fate of social movements once that regime change occurs. Focusing on the students, labour, the urban poor and the anti-corruption movement, the papers in this panel track the trajectory of different social movements' engagement in the political sphere from the short-lived period of openness in the late 1980s–early 1990s and the twenty-year anniversary of the fall of Indonesia's New Order regime in 2018. In locating progressive social movements at the center of their analysis, they do not seek to privilege them to the exclusion of elite proponents of democracy. Many have argued that the country is controlled by an oligarchy whose powerbase is rooted in pre-democratic times, and even assessments that challenge the fatalism of such accounts acknowledge the ongoing influence of long-established political and economic elites. There are also deep-seated features of Indonesia's political system, like clientalism, that hinder democratic practice. Nevertheless, progressive social movements have continued to fight for what Beetham (1999, 91) describes as the "basic" principles of democracy, namely "control by citizens over their collective affairs and equality between citizens in the exercise of that control."

Presenters:

Professor Michele Ford (University of Sydney, Australia) / Professor Teri Caraway (University of Minnesota, USA) [Labour Studies + Political Science]

Dr Elisabeth Kramer (University of Sydney, Australia) [Political Sociology]

Dr Yatun Sastramidjaja (University of Amsterdam, The Netherlands) [Anthropology]

Dr Ian Wilson (Murdoch University, Australia) [Anthropology]

Single session