

*Living standards* is a book for experts. It is a paragon of careful, cautious, fully caveated scholarship, which experts rightfully admire; and which undergraduate students, policymakers, and general audiences typically cannot abide. Booth never jumps to conclusions. She tiptoes, very carefully. The introductory chapter, for example, lays out the questions of the book in painstaking detail but provides few clues and little foreshadowing of what the answers will be. Very little in the book is ever summarised. The final chapter ‘What have we learned?’ lays out with clarity the main conclusions that Booth comes to through her analysis. But it remains an extended and detailed discussion. The book requires careful, slow reading to fully take in Booth’s vital arguments. For all that, it is a landmark analysis of the living standards across Southeast Asia over the twentieth century. If there is still good social science—and economic history—being done throughout the twenty-first century and beyond, *Living standards* will be a cornerstone of such work.

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## Indonesia

*Constraining elites in Russia and Indonesia: Political participation and regime survival*

By DANIELLE N. LUSSIER

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Transitions to democracy tell us little about subsequent trajectories or political change and by no means guarantee the institutionalisation of democratic politics. In *Constraining elites in Russia and Indonesia: Political participation and regime survival*, Danielle N. Lussier sets out to demonstrate that democracy can survive only when citizens are able to place meaningful limits on political elites’ power. In comparing post-Soeharto Indonesia and post-Soviet Russia, the book addresses two outliers in democratisation theory. In the literature, Indonesia has been characterised as an instance of democratic consolidation and post-Soviet Russia as a case of democratic failure. Taking an ‘agent-centric’ approach (p. 28), Lussier argues that distinctive patterns of political participation in Russia and Indonesia explain their deviations from global democratisation trends.

*Constraining elites in Russia and Indonesia* is an artfully conceived, skilfully conducted, and nuanced comparative analysis of this tale of two nations. The analysis of Russia and Indonesia consists of an overview of each country’s contemporary political histories, focusing on the periods of democratic transition and post-transition, as well as a cross-national and multilevel analysis of subnational developments. Distinguishing citizens’ elite-constraining behaviour from elite-enabling behaviour, the analysis seeks to illustrate this distinction and its referents in the two countries. Specifically, Lussier defines elite-constraining political

participation as participation that either ‘constrain[s] political elites from overstepping their constituted authority or hinder[s] them from undertaking unpopular policy decisions’ (p. 17). Such activities include supporting opposition parties, engaging in acts of contentious politics, and demanding adherence to democratic rules and procedures (p. 43). By contrast, elite-enabling political participation is deemed to ‘empower elites to enhance their formal or informal political authority by building loyalty among select constituents, who may be willing to tolerate an expansion of elites’ power in return for certain public or club goods’ (p. 17). Contacting officials to ‘generate the resource of public support for a representative to use without necessarily strengthening democracy’ is a case in point (p. 84). The book’s verdict is that while Russians have failed to constrain their political elites, Indonesians have successfully learnt to use new democratic institutions to manage conflict and channel popular preferences for governance.

This comparative insight into the impact of masses’ political engagement on democratic quality in Indonesia and Russia seems broadly valid, as the democratic gap between the two countries remains significant. But this gap should not be overstated. In the scholarly and policy literature, Indonesia’s progress in institutionalising democracy is a subject of doubt. In fact, it is now widely agreed that Indonesia’s democracy is regressing and illiberal. So the questions that arise for Lussier are whether, to what extent, and why Indonesian masses’ ability to impede their political elites from abusing democratic norms and procedures has declined.

The book’s dependence on public opinion surveys in measuring what constitutes elite-constraining and elite-enabling participation also raises concerns for the analysis. First, Lussier admits, ‘behavior cannot be classified as political participation until a person takes a specific action to attempt to influence a political outcome’ (p. 80). Second, it is difficult to understand why Russians’ behaviour of contacting elites is viewed as particularised (that is, elite-enabling), but Indonesians’ contacting elites as social (that is, elite-constraining) (p. 107). Shouldn’t the assumption that ‘officials can be responsive without facilitating democracy’s survival’ (p. 112) be extended equally to both Russia and Indonesia? On the basis of public opinion data, Lussier claims but does not wholly explain what makes Indonesians ‘more inclined to view elite-constraining participation as efficacious, while Russians find elite-enabling acts more effective’ (p. 20). This begs the following questions: By which mechanisms do Russians ‘chose not to expand elite-constraining participation’ (p. 67) and by which mechanisms have ‘Indonesians used their freedoms’ to constrain elites (p. 71)? Might it be the case that citizens are willing to maintain their interest or passive belief in elites simply because they have no realistic alternative?

Another set of questions arises as a result of the book’s emphasis on the procedural aspects of democracy. If democratic survival is defined and measured in procedural terms—that is, ‘institutionalizing democratic rules of political competition and access to political power’ (p. 8), it is difficult to explain why the Russian leaders who earned ‘Russians’ trust have attacked democracy, while those earning Indonesians’ trust have advanced it’ (p. 139). Elites’ decisions may be bound by masses’ expectations but also and perhaps more so they are shaped by inter-elite conflicts. If Indonesian democracy’s paradox is a continuing high level of elite

competitiveness accompanied by democratic backsliding, the paradox of Russia's authoritarianism is in its electoral mandates, which provide legitimacy.

Russia and Indonesia reflect divergent trajectories of democratic transition, but elites in both countries have used elections as a means to commandeer public resources for personal gain while limiting the potential free actions of citizens. The complexity of democratic deepening lies not just in the masses' ability to constrain political elites from abusing democratic norms and procedures but perhaps more frequently in political elites' ability to 'easily roll back democratic gains, threatening democracy's survival' (p. 8). In fact, Lussier also contends that '[u]ltimately, decisions by political elites are the last step in a causal chain that determines whether democracy persists over time' (p. 15). While Russia's quick democratic reversal was neither shocking nor shameful to many Russians, for whom democracy rather meant impoverishment and injustice, Indonesia's democratic survival has relied on clientelistic transactions between elected elites and citizens.

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## Indonesia

### *Savu: History and oral tradition on an island of Indonesia*

By GENEVIÈVE DUGGAN and HANS HÄGERDAL

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The island of Savu, located in eastern Indonesia between Sumba and Timor, is perhaps less well known than its larger neighbours. With a land area of just 460 square kilometres, including the small adjacent islands of Raijua and Dana, it is also considerably smaller, once even described by a nineteenth-century Dutch visitor as 'a lump of stone in a vast sea'. Yet as Geneviève Duggan and Hans Hägerdal demonstrate, Savu has much to offer scholars, particularly those with an interest in comparative Austronesian studies, oral tradition and the history of Island Southeast Asia. The book is also unusual in that it is a major collaborative and interdisciplinary study by an anthropologist (Duggan) and historian (Hägerdal) who have combined their talents and knowledge to present us with a detailed history of Savu over the last five centuries, based on local oral sources and European records and accounts, and a detailed ethnographic picture and analysis of indigenous institutions and traditions.

Savu's bilinear kinship system and extensive oral genealogies are fundamental to the book and to understanding Savuese society. Patrilineal clans and matrilineal moieties coexist in this system and descent is traced comprehensively, but separately, from both, although it is worth noting that those traced through women are perhaps older and more secretive. All Savuese belong to one of a number of male clans (*udu*) through the father, and to one of two exogamous female moieties (*hubi*) through