

Edward Friedman writes in his Foreword, Taiwan’s “global significance,” or the stakes riding on the island’s fate for the Asia-Pacific and the wider world, underline the importance of promoting global awareness and understanding of its undeniable “historical humane achievements” (p. xvii). In order to do so effectively, however, it is crucial that scholars diligently cultivate their own “self-consciousness” and regard for complexity, especially when dealing with slippery concepts such as “modernity,” “development” and “colonialism.” Showcasing Taiwanese scholars’ capacity for sophisticated, nuanced historical analysis, and their freedom to exercise it – both evident in many contributions to this volume – constitutes one very significant way in which Taiwan can offer a model to other contemporary societies, whether “developing” or “developed.”

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The candidate’s dilemma: anticorruptionism and money politics in Indonesian election campaigns

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Elisabeth Kramer starts her book with a puzzle that has been the subject of scholarly attention in Indonesian politics: why, in an environment where the so-called money politics is perceived to be massive, do candidates use anti-corruption commitments and credentials in Indonesian legislative election campaigns? Rather than addressing this problem however, Kramer focuses on the dilemma faced by the individual candidate with the option of using anticorruptionism as a campaign strategy in such an environment. She examines three cases of national legislative candidate campaigns in the 2014 election in electoral districts in three provinces.

Using extended case study and ethnographic methods, she closely followed three candidates (described with pseudonyms Ambo, Ayu, and Bontor) both on and outside the campaign trail. By doing so, she seeks to uncover the dilemma faced by candidates in a situation where threats to

democratic ideals (that money-driven strategies undermine democracy) paradoxically meet the context of campaigns in which money politics (such as vote buying) is part of a candidate's prospects for success (p. 3). Anti-corruption candidates, in this situation, can be compelled to make compromises. This dilemma, according to Kramer, "... exposes an even more fundamental issue in Indonesian politics: if candidates feel compelled to make such compromises before they even enter the government, how might they behave once in public office?" (p. 4).

Kramer's main argument is that context matters. She writes: "... emphasizing that untangling the influence of context, and how individual decisions interact with that context, can help in understanding how things have come to be the way they are" (p. 6). In other words, an individual election campaign is an ongoing interaction between a candidate against limitations as well as with opportunities provided by the context surrounding him/her. Elaborated further in Chapter 1, context consists of five variables: institutions, campaign norms, salient issues, resources, and identity and values. Facing these variables of context, an anticorruption candidate, depending on his/her commitment to rejecting anticorruption and perception of the utility of anticorruptionism, has four options: acceptance, integration, rejection, or acquiescence. Toward the end of the book, Kramer emphasizes that although context matters, her book moves beyond that simple and possibly trite assertion to also "describe how, and in what ways, context influences the development of individual campaigns" (p. 157).

Corruption as a theoretical and Indonesian issue is discussed very well in Chapter 2. Corruption and anticorruptionism are two persistent issues that Indonesians have to grapple with from one administration to the other. In fact, according to Kramer, "[e]very regime change since the founding of the modern Indonesian nation-state has had some link to Indonesians' dissatisfaction with corruption" (p. 47). Kramer traces historically the issue of corruption and anticorruptionism to the Dutch colonial era which ended with World War II. Anticorruptionism was one of the drivers of the desire for independence among Indonesian nationalists. After achieving independence, however, Indonesians have still had to grapple with entrenched corruption involving government officials and political parties under two authoritarian regimes (1959–1998) as well as in the current democratic era (1998–present). The establishment of the Corruption Eradication Commission (KPK, Komisi Pemberantasan Korupsi) in 2002 is a clear indication of the seriousness of the issue and seriously it is taken by Indonesians. Kramer also shows how this issue resonates with voters. Citing several national surveys, she shows how corruption eradication was a priority issue for many voters leading up to the 2014 election. With this historical context, it is clear why the issue of anticorruptionism is considered an important campaign issue by candidates and political parties.

Chapters 3, 4, and 5 are the heart of the book, where Kramer describes in detail her account of each case. In Chapter 3, she follows the campaign of candidate Ambo from an electoral district in South Sulawesi. Ambo stood for a new party participating for the first time in the 2014 election. Before joining this new party, however, Ambo had been a member of parliament for another party. Before that he was an investigative journalist and an activist against the authoritarian regime of General Suharto (1965–1998). Ambo held a senior position in his party, and ran in his home district in 2014. In short, besides having the experience of winning a parliamentary seat, Ambo was a well-connected candidate both at the national and local level, in his electoral district.

From the very beginning, Ambo was determined to use his anti-corruption persona as his main strategy. As described by Kramer, Ambo faced a dilemma from time to time during the campaign given the mounting pressures not only from potential voters but also from his own campaign team to make compromises in securing enough votes to win him a seat in parliament by giving out, or at least promising, gifts or money to the voters. Relying on his own knowledge, experience, and well-connected network, he was able to maintain his anti-corruption strategy. In the end Ambo did win a seat albeit with a disappointing margin. Kramer labels him a "standing his ground" candidate and places him in the quadrant of "rejection" in her typology of anticorruptionism-based campaigns described in Chapter 6. This means that Ambo was a candidate who had a deep commitment to

anticorruptionism and was able to maintain it until the end of the campaign without buying votes or engaging in money politics.

In Chapter 4, Kramer describes her close observation and interaction with Ayu's national legislative campaign in an electoral district in East Java. Aside from being part of the central network of her party at the national level, Ayu's context was the opposite of Ambo's. She was poorly connected at the local level. She had experience running for office in 2009, but failed, so she reallocated to an electoral district in which she barely had a network to help her campaign. Ayu was therefore not only less experienced than Ambo, but also without a well-connected network on the ground. She was also not well known by the voters in her district.

Like Ambo, Ayu had projected herself as an anticorruption candidate from the early stage of her campaign and therefore faced the same dilemma. Pressures on her to promise or give money were mounting from her own campaign team and from voters. As Ayu saw that her campaign was not succeeding, she shifted her strategy from rejecting money politics to providing gifts and money to persuade voters. Despite this shift in strategy, Ayu did not win the seat, leaving her deeply disappointed, particularly with those who promised to voter for her. Describing Ayu's reflection on her loss, Kramer writes: "... Ayu opined that her electoral district did not support clean candidates and that the election had reinforced the prominence of money politics" (p. 112). In her analysis in Chapter 6, Kramer places Ayu in the quadrant of "acquiescence," where a candidate who had rejected money politics at the beginning in the end bowed to pressures to give money to voters.

Bontor is the third candidate followed by Kramer. His legislative district is in North Sumatra. His story was narrated in Chapter 5. Bontor is not only a very experienced legislator (a member of parliament for twenty years before the 2014 election), but also, understandably, is very well-connected both at the national and local level, particularly in his home electoral district.

Bontor is described as "experienced and pragmatic." Pragmatic means that he accepted from the beginning that giving money to voters is part of the game in electoral campaigns. Therefore, this reviewer wondered what kind of dilemma could be revealed in his campaign. Largely because of his incumbency leverage, coupled with his relaxed attitude toward money politics, Bontor ended his campaign with yet another victory. Similar to Ambo, it seems that experience and well-connectedness, as well as being very well-known to voters, helped secure his victory. Rather than a dilemma, he used vote buying and money politics from the beginning of his campaign. In her analysis in Chapter 6, Kramer places Bontor in the "integration" quadrant, where a candidate simultaneously uses anticorruptionism and vote buying strategies to win.

In Chapter 6, Kramer describes in detail her reasons for stressing the importance of context and its interaction with the candidate. In her view, an individual campaign is an embodiment. The way the candidates run their campaigns reflects who they are and what they stand for. This embodiment is influenced or deeply connected to the campaign pressures, the availability of resources (money, incumbency, social capital, etc.) and how citizens and political decision making are interrelated. This interaction of context and candidate, based on Kramer's three case studies, "has offered a brief typology of possible responses to the negotiation between asserting an anticorruption identity and engaging in money politics: a strong rejection of money politics, an acquiescence to voter demands during the course of a campaign, and an integration of vote buying with other strategies" (p. 156).

Concluding her account, Kramer re-emphasizes context by saying that "electoral campaigns are much more than slogans, speeches, and rallies; they are an incarnation of the contexts that produce them" (p. 157). But context consists of several layers: broad and macro, nuanced and micro, universal, and deeply personal. Within them, it is up to the candidate to decide whether to run a campaign using anticorruptionism rhetoric or not, and how it will be combined with other strategies. Therefore, each decision is individual and nuanced. The dilemma comes from how a candidate reconciles paradoxes, particularly between formal rules that prohibit money politics and informal rules that dictate the importance of vote buying to win a seat. This complexity calls for a focus on individual perspectives when trying to understand candidate behavior.

Kramer's detailed account has several strong points. First, the book successfully uncovers the dilemma of each candidate, although it seems that the third candidate did not face a dilemma at all, because he had long since made his compromises. Using the extended case study method, Kramer was able to explore the nuances of decisions that candidates have to make over time from the earliest stage of the campaign all the way to the post-election stage. On the value of her extended case study method, Kramer writes: "If I had only interviewed Ayu at the beginning or end of her campaign, I would have a very different understanding of her experience. At the beginning, I would have heard from an idealistic candidate who was determined to do whatever she could to remain as clean as possible. At the end, I would have encountered a disheartened candidate who has spent money to induce voters, without the desired result" (p. 164).

Second, the richness of the data is another strength. The author is able to walk her readers convincingly through her analysis from the early steps of campaign preparation to how the campaign was conducted on the ground to how the candidates ended their campaigns. Included in the details are actors involved in the campaign such as the team, the brokers, influential political and social figures, and some voters. The readers can, through this narrative, feel as if they were also present in the field with Kramer. Understanding the candidates' dilemmas is facilitated by such details.

Third, the author's insights have value not only for academics, but also for politicians and political consultants. Reading the story told by Kramer, one will understand the steps of conducting a successful campaign in the Indonesian context and the pitfalls to avoid, from the early stage of planning to the field execution, to making sure that the voters get to the polling stations, until the counting of the election results. The story could serve as a roadmap for a politicians planning to run for public office.

For those concerned with the influence of vote buying or money politics, this book brings some good news. The story of Ambo tells us that it is possible to win without relying on vote buying, if the candidate is able to make the context fit his/her personality. The bad news, however, is that the three cases also tell us that anticorruptionism is not necessarily a winning strategy in an electoral campaign, although admittedly vote buying is not necessarily a winning strategy either.

Candidate Ayu used both anticorruptionism (at the beginning until the middle of the campaign) and vote buying strategies. She lost her election. On the other hand, Ambo won his election with an anticorruptionism strategy, while Bontor also won with his relaxed attitude toward vote buying. One thing that Ambo and Bontor had in common was that both were well connected, relatively well resourced (particularly in social capital), relatively well known to voters, and had relatively strong bases in their districts. All these context variables were relatively lacking in Ayu's case, limiting her chances. This means that using anticorruptionism or not in the campaign seems to be an individual choice, and one that does not necessarily increase the chance of victory.

There is one important local context that Kramer failed to address. As she explained at length in Chapter 2, corruption and anticorruption issues are always salient from one regime to another. Corruption is perceived as a problem at the national level. However, it is not clear whether it is equally as salient at the electoral district level. National elections play out at the local level. However, local contexts can be different from the national one. Bontor may have seen no contradiction in campaign on a platform of anticorruption, but still used money politics. He may have believed, perhaps with good reason, that corruption is not a salient issue in North Sumatra. I suspect that this local context of corruption can be one of the keys to solving the puzzle posed by the author at the very beginning of her story.

Finally, the book holds a theoretical implication of which scholars of democratic decline should take note. In assessing Indonesia's democratic prospects, Kramer identified one agent of democratic failure, i.e. the anti-democratic values of electoral candidates, which, she claims, was neglected in the concept of five key agents of democratic failure proposed by Fish, Wittenberg and Jakli (2018). While her point about the importance of this point is well-taken, we should note that it has previously been argued by Ziblatt and Levitsky in their piece "How Democracies Die" (2018), which identified the contribution of democratically elected political actors who were not committed to democratic ideals.

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Islam in a secular state Muslim activism in Singapore

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This study is rich in details which can only be provided by an insider-scholar who is privy to the intimations of everyday experience and knowledge of his subject-actors and their engagements with the state. Two phrases stand out in this book – “secular state” and “Muslim activism”. I cannot presume that the author intends for the reader to think of the two as contraries, or that “never shall the twain meet”. But the suggestion is there. The research question on the first page of the first chapter alludes to the difficulties faced by Singapore Muslims in navigating “their way through politics in a secular, authoritarian state...” (7). Active Muslim politics are often associated with a slew of “isms”, from “extremism” to “radicalism” to “militarism” to “terrorism”. Hence, why would Muslim activism be any more difficult to navigate in a state with particular feature, be that democratic, theocratic, autocratic or secular? Or, otherwise stated, is it the secular nature of the Singapore state which makes this study on Islam new and uncharted? This raises the question of whether Singapore is the archetype of a secular state. Assuming for now that Singapore does represent such an archetype, does it necessarily follow that the politics around Islam will be distinctive when it functions under the rubric of secularism? The research question seems to imply that Muslim activism takes on particular features, restriction or workarounds when it is under the domination of a secular state, though the book itself is not conclusive on this.

The problem lies in the definition of the key concepts used. If a secular state is the independent variable or new case introduced here, would Muslim activism in constitutionally-secular Turkey take on the same feature as that of Singapore’s? Would a theocratic Islamic state such as Saudi Arabia or Iran be necessarily more tolerant of Muslim activism? The answer to both questions would likely be in the negative. A more rigorous problematisation of the concepts of “secularism” and the “secular state” could situate this study more usefully as to how different national states deal with Islam as politics, rather than Islam as culture. There does not appear to be any sustained discussion and explanation of secularism, despite the concept being central to the thesis of how religious activism functions under it. Just as frustrating is the lack of in-depth discussion of what is meant by “activism”, and whether “Muslim activities” has distinctive features. The reader is left with questions as to whether the activism which is being studied is in the form of a social movement, or of an organised pressure group, or of even an identifiable Muslim civil society in Singapore. This would be helpful in then connecting the concept to that of secularism.