

Verena Beittinger-Lee (2009): **(Un)Civil Society and Political Change in Indonesia: A Contested Arena**
New York: Routledge.

Khoo Ying Hooi¹
University of Malaya

(Un)Civil Society and Political Change in Indonesia by Beittinger-Lee is the first book that analyses the other side of the civil society. Her work scrutinizes civil society actors in Indonesia and the main argument focuses on the democratic or anti-democratic effects brought about by these groups. A new term, Uncivil Society Organization (USO) is introduced to differentiate certain aspects of the conventional definitions of civil society from others that are either prone to democracy or do not play a political role. These USOs vary somewhat in their intensity of incivility and come in many forms. In the context of Indonesia, USOs range from militant religious, vigilantes, and paramilitaries to ethno-nationalists. By using Indonesia as the case study, the author affirms that there is no simple correlation between civil society and democratization.

Much attention has been focused on the significant impact of civil society as a promoter of democracy in Indonesia. This book reviews their roles and poses analytical and challenging questions about the conditions and qualities of the processes toward consolidated democracy.

Indonesia's transition from an authoritarian regime to a democracy proposes a different picture. In the wake of democratic surfacing after the downfall of Suharto's authoritarian regime in 1998, Indonesia's political landscape has not only experienced the mushrooming of pro-democratic civil society organizations but it has also been tainted by the eruption of unrest and conflicts, ethno-nationalism, violence and acts of terrorism. The book deals with the possible threats resulting from those parts of civil society that are marked by the "civic deficit". By using Indonesia as the case study, the author contends that the opening up of the public sphere and the unprecedented civil society boom can at the same time impose reverse impacts on democratization processes as well.

The author highlights that even if the USOs are relatively small in number and membership, and unlikely to weaken the state by mobilizing large numbers of people, there is still a danger that they will silently erode liberal values thereby making the liberal democratic regime even more vulnerable. Several reasons for the

¹ Tutor, Department of International and Strategic Studies, Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences.