

Surabaya at a Crossroads

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The Regional Social and Cultural Studies program at ISEAS-Yusof Ishak Institute (Singapore) adopts a sociological and anthropological approach to studying Southeast Asia, including on local communities and those at the fringes, beyond the macro perspectives. Analyses of Indonesian politics, state, and society overlook local dynamics and tend to be Jakarta-centred.

The three contributors of this collection are scholars working on Islamic trends in Indonesia, but they are also observers of changes and issues surrounding them. The pieces demonstrate how a province such as Surabaya, which in Indonesia is probably the second largest metropolis after Jakarta, is at a crossroads in managing political

contestations, highlights the tension between local and national identity, and foregrounds issues of environmental management and crime. The articles posit that Surabaya has come a long way in grappling with these issues. While some, such as managing diversity, have made inroads, others, such as managing climate change and crime,

require more work. The articles go beyond describing the problems, and provide solutions to improve existing conditions.

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Surabaya's Javanese "Egalitarianism": Why It Matters for Democracy

Pradana Boy Zulian

Javanese society is known for its high-context culture. In cultural studies, high-context culture is defined as a type of culture in which communication between people tends to rely on being implicit and indirect, and in the form of symbols, signs, gestures, and clues. High-context culture is "a culture that prioritises group harmony and well-being over individual achievement."¹ High-context culture features a common ground for the Javanese people. However, within this broader cultural context, Surabaya embraces a distinctive cultural vibe that fosters a more democratic atmosphere within Javanese society.

While Java is often characterised as feudalistic and aristocratic, the way culture is practised is not monolithic, and internal variations exist. Ayu Sutarto, for instance, identified various cultural sub-regions (known as *tlatah*) within East Javanese society.² These are characterised by distinctive systems of religion, community organisation, knowledge, livelihood, economics, language, art, and technology. This demonstrates that Javanese society is plural and dynamic. These sub-cultures include the *Mataraman* culture, which represents a stratified and feudalistic society as a result of the Mataram Kingdom's influence; the Madura Island culture, which exhibits frankness, durability, and to some extent, resistance; *Pandhalungan*, which is

associated with the successful acculturation of Javanese and Madurese cultures in the eastern part of East Java; and the *Pangarekan* culture, which dominantly encompasses the city of Surabaya and surrounding areas. The inhabitants of this area who embrace its culture are popularly labeled as *Arek Surabaya*, which literally translates into the "Folk of Surabaya." In a more technical context, the term also refers to those who follow the values, practices, and ways of life associated with the people of Surabaya.

The Arek culture in Surabaya and the egalitarian spirit

In Surabaya, the *Pangarekan* or *Arek* culture is distinctive. Abdillah,³ Winiasih,⁴ Jauhari⁵ and Sriyanto and Fauzie⁶ have significantly studied the *Arek* culture. Historically, the *Arek* culture originated from a village community characterised by its egalitarianism, openness, democracy, and high levels of solidarity. The term *arek* is derived from the Old Javanese language *ari-ika*, which means "younger brother/child." However, the term's meaning has been culturally transformed to encompass the qualities of courage, fearlessness, and unwavering resolve.

Furthermore, the *Arek* culture also appears to exhibit a less pronounced hierarchical structure. For example, the relationship between children and parents is characterised by a high degree of fluidity. Most children and adolescents in Surabaya utilise the *ngoko* language (used by peers) when conversing with their seniors. Accordingly, the culture of Surabaya is also distinguished by the common use of swear words, which other cultures may perceive as offensive. Expressions such as *jancuk*, *cuk*, *hancik*, *jangkrik*, and *diamput* are commonly used to express closeness among comrades. These swearing words employ a model that refers to various things and do not always express anger. Instead, they may also express regret, sadness, disappointment, admiration, humiliation, surprise, intimacy, or humor, among other things. The utilisation of swearing language, particularly in expressing disillusionment, indignation, and rejection of political decisions that contravene the people's will, exemplifies the *Arek* culture's endorsement of people's capacity to challenge social norms.

How does the Surabayan culture impact the democratic culture in Javanese society? In general, it can be said that the distinct cultural character of *Arek Surabaya* has allowed independent actions and democratic public participation both in social, political, and economic dynamics. Moreover, it has been able to provide the social capital that enables society to have a healthy democratic culture.

Politically, in this democratic and egalitarian culture, *Arek Surabaya* is actively involved in supporting, monitoring, or rejecting government policies, especially those relating to the organisation of public spaces. The degree of democracy within a region can be gauged by the extent of public participation. Unlike other Javanese societies, the *Arek Surabaya* culture, which has traditionally encouraged a high degree of freedom, actively shapes public spaces in the people's favor.

Economically, the distinct culture of Surabaya has triggered public economic initiative. This can be observed in the trend of urbanisation since 1967. They have played a pivotal role in transitioning from a subsistence economy to an urban economy,

by establishing "home-based businesses" in *kampung-kota* (urban-village), which specialise in a diverse range of products, including bag embroidery, clothing, and cakes.

Furthermore, *Arek Surabaya* utilise public land for their people's needs and as an additional source of income for the community. Private landowners attempt to lease their unused land to fish farmers in exchange for one-third of the profits, allowing the farmers to benefit from fish sales. They also utilise the city's parks, which now number approximately 100, as places for meeting, trading, playing, and other socialising activities. Another initiative has focused on processing waste materials to create economic value. This is achieved through the establishment of 663 waste banks across the city, which successfully allowed most residents in Surabaya to have access to waste banks. This is a positive development for democracy and citizen participation in the organisation of urban space.

Surabaya stands out as a distinctive culture within the broader Javanese society. It is characterised by egalitarianism, openness, and democracy, which have positively impacted increased public participation across various social, political, and economic domains.

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Fig. 1 (above): Tugu Pahlawan (Heroes Monument) in Surabaya, Indonesia. [Photo courtesy of Wikimedia user Iuvvisual, reprinted under Creative Commons license, 2016].

Fig. 2 (right): A crowd in front of a large house, presumably some kind of revolt, in Surabaya, circa 1900-1910. [Photo courtesy of Royal Netherlands Institute of Southeast Asian and Caribbean Studies (KITLV) and Leiden University Library via Wikimedia, Public Domain].





Life After Risma Mayorship: Surabaya's Performance on Environmental Issues

lim Halimatusa'diyah

As one of the cities in East Java with a higher gender development index vis-a-vis its neighbours,¹ Surabaya made history by having the first female mayor elected in Indonesia through the direct regional election. Tri Rismaharini (popularly known as Risma) was the first female mayor of Surabaya. First elected in the 2010 local election (*pilkada*), she continued to serve in the post for two terms. In 2015, she was re-elected with a solid landslide victory of 86.22 percent.²

As the first female mayor in the country, Risma has successfully proven that women are capable of becoming great leaders. She brought positive changes to the region, too. For example, Surabaya won various awards under her leadership; she also received many awards, demonstrating her excellent leadership. Among the awards that Surabaya received were the adipura kencana – which it won for eight years in a row from 2011 to 2018 – for the metropolitan city category, as well as the adipura paripurna in 2016,³ designated for regions that implement sustainable environmental development.

In 2012, Surabaya was awarded the best city in Asia Pacific for its success in environmental governance and increasing public participation in environmental management. In 2017, Surabaya also received the Global Green City award at the Global Forum on Sustainable Settlements and Cities event from the Global Forum on Human Settlements (GFHS), in New York, United States.⁴

In 2015, the World City Mayors Foundation regarded Risma to be the third-best mayor in the world for her efforts in transforming Surabaya into a greener and well-organized city. For her remarkable breakthroughs on environmental issues, she was also named one of Fortune magazine's 50 influential figures in the world along with other figures such as Facebook CEO Mark Zuckerberg and Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi.⁵

Some of Risma's programs and policies during her leadership included the development of protected areas of Surabaya's East Coast (Pamurbaya) as Green Open Space (GOS), covering an area of 2,871 hectares to protect the city from floods. Her other initiatives included the construction of reservoirs and urban forests for water supply, the development of 420 city parks across the city of Surabaya,

the "green belt" with a total of 35 hectares to absorb carbon dioxide emitted by vehicles, and the construction of 26 units of compost houses in several places that both reduce landfill waste and can even generate electricity to light up the park and the surrounding areas.

The public was also trained to produce compost independently for personal urban farming or community income generation. The landfill in Surabaya was also utilised as a waste power plant to generate electricity. Additionally, to increase public participation in environmental management and mass transportation, Surabaya has established the Suroboyo Bus on the main road, allowing people to access it in exchange for plastic waste.

Where does Surabaya's environment stand after Risma stepped down? To be sure, Surabaya's performance in environmental

Fig. 1 (left): Tri Rismaharini hands over compensation to flood and landslide victims in Nagari (village) Sungai Durian, Patamu District, Padang Pariaman Regency, West Sumatra. [Photo courtesy of Ministry of Social Affairs of Republic of Indonesia, 2024, Wikimedia, Public Domain.]

Fig. 2 (below left): Suroboyo Bus. [Photo courtesy of Wikimedia user Mujjonmaruf and reprinted under Creative Commons licence, 2021.]

Fig. 3 (below right): Surabaya seen from its waterways. [Photo courtesy of the Government of Surabaya, 2020, Wikimedia, Public Domain.]

aspects has deteriorated. Under Risma's leadership, Surabaya's Environmental Quality Index (IKLH) data – measured by the quality of water, air, and green land cover – consistently ranged over 60 (from 2017 to 2020). After Risma left office, there was a drastic spike in 2021, especially due to the effects of COVID-19, which restricted people's physical mobility. However, in the subsequent years, Surabaya's environmental quality index experienced a significant decline to 56.97 and 54.52 in 2022 and 2023, respectively.

Additionally, various flood prevention and mitigation programs that Risma had implemented to minimize the incidence and impact of floods are no longer as effective as they were under her leadership. Floods in Surabaya occur more frequently and have a larger scope and impact. In February 2024, for instance, there was a major flood that paralyzed around 23 points in the city of Surabaya.⁶ Apart from the high rainfall, flood prevention policies and programs are no longer optimally executed.

The incumbent mayor, Eri Cahyadi, plans to re-run in the 2024 elections. His candidacy has garnered criticism from the public due to his inability to make progress. Some public criticisms or comments circulating online include those related to flooding, the absence of progress for Surabaya, and the performance of the incumbent mayor compared to Risma as the previous mayor.

Why do environmental policies that were successfully implemented and achieved positive impacts no longer perform well when the leaders of the region are replaced? One reason is that regional leaders assume much power and influence in the running of their constituents. One study shows that when local leaders such as district heads and mayors enjoy autonomous power, a policy's success becomes highly dependent on personalities.⁷ In the same vein, local bureaucrats relied heavily on their directives in every policy decision and implementation.

Furthermore, the discretionary power that often prevails is the frequent rotation of officials at the regional level, which impacts the development of a good bureaucratic culture for achieving successful policy outcomes. The current mayor, for example, rotated 231 Surabaya government officials by the end of 2023, including nine heads of departments.⁸

In short, the discretion of power has made policy sustainability strongly dependent on the ability and commitment of the local leaders, not on the ability of the local government bureaucracy to sustain and maximize the policy's achievements.

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The Drug Problem in Surabaya's Ghetto

A'an Suryana



On 18 April 2024, 11 people were arrested for drug consumption in Jl. Kunti, Surabaya. This episode serves as a stern reminder that drug circulation and addiction remain rampant in the second-largest city in Indonesia. In 2023, drug cases topped the city's crime rates, accounting for 787 of the total 2,156 criminal cases (36 percent).¹ Vehicle theft (25 percent) and aggravated theft (15 percent) make up the other crimes. Jl. Kunti has often been regarded as a drug-ridden *kampung* (village). Eradicating the drug problem in this area remains a challenge. How can the city be drug-free?

Surabaya residents and those living around Jl. Kunti associate the area with various kinds of drugs, especially methamphetamine (locally known as *sabu-sabu*). The police frequently arrest drug traffickers and consumers in the area, with the biggest recent bust taking place in March 2021. Four hundred and fifty security personnel, including police officers, raided the *kampung* to arrest three drug dealers. However, the raid was unsuccessful as two suspects had fled the scene due to prior knowledge through an information leak. The regular failures of security personnel enforcing the law further cemented Jl. Kunti's reputation as a drug haven.

Jl. Kunti remains popular for drug dealers or traffickers because it provides facilities for addicts to consume drugs. Traffickers would normally erect makeshift huts made

from wooden poles and tarpaulin sheets in different small streets or alleys in the *kampung* for consumers to freely take drugs. Others provide rooms in their houses for consumers.² Consuming drugs on the spot is known in local terms as "andok." The area has been a popular spot for taking drugs for nearly 25 years.³ Addicts felt safe consuming drugs in the area since they were protected by drug dealers and residents.⁴

The economic benefits underlying the drug trade make eradicating the trend difficult. For many, selling drugs is a livelihood, whether part-time or full-time. For instance, an individual who ran a petrol retailer shop in Jl. Kunti also served as a drug trafficker to earn additional income.⁵ Although the police eventually caught him, his case highlights that economic motivations remain a decisive factor for the persistence of drug trafficking in the area.

More importantly, corruption within law enforcement agencies significantly hampers efforts to combat the drug problem effectively. Some police personnel were involved in the circulation of drugs in Jl. Kunti and its surrounding area, making it even more challenging to eradicate the drug problem. These officers shielded drug traffickers operating in Jl. Kunti and in other parts of Surabaya, allowing them leeway in distributing drugs across the city. In March 2021, three police personnel were arrested for receiving kickbacks (regularly for six months) from drug traffickers at Jl. Kunti. There is enough evidence showing some

police officers protecting drug traffickers in the area. Despite the arrest, drug trafficking continued to thrive, which suggests that these disciplinary efforts were ineffective in deterring corruption among other officers.

Deeper involvement by local people and police personnel prevented Surabaya metropolitan police from rooting out the practice entirely. In October 2021, the Surabaya metropolitan police conducted the biggest raid in Jl. Kunti with 450 police personnel involved in the raid.⁶ The police interrogated hundreds of people who lived in areas surrounding Jl. Kunti. They combed the area thoroughly but could only arrest one out of the three drug dealers who were the subject of police's target. The escape was possible due to a tip-off, either from corrupt police officers or residents who have an interest in maintaining the drug trade in the area.

While the complicity of police personnel complicates efforts to resolve the drug problem in the area, alleviating the issue is not entirely impossible, as demonstrated in Jakarta's experience of successfully transforming the "drug *kampung*" in Kampung Bali, Central Jakarta, into a drug-free area. Between 1995 and 2005, Kampung Bali became a popular spot for drug traffickers, but it has since gradually become a drug-free area. Cooperation among various government stakeholders was needed to ensure the success of the anti-drug movement. In the case of Kampung Bali, the police established a post in the area to monitor its security and crime situation, and to deter drug traffickers from operating. The police also organised frequent, random anti-drug tests on residents and conducted regular raids. In addition, the Jakarta metropolitan police organised monthly evaluation to assess the effectiveness of their programs.⁷

The Jakarta government, residents, and the National Anti-Drug Body (*Badan Narkotika Nasional*) also collaborated to provide job training for drug traffickers to help them find alternative jobs to sustain themselves economically. This was important because joblessness and economic reasons were major factors causing many to turn to drug trafficking. One of the trainings provided by the government and stakeholders included bringing trainees closer to the Betawi culture, which

Fig. 1 (above): Police station in Surabaya. [Photo courtesy of Wikimedia user inBaliTimur and reprinted under Creative Commons license, 2017]

is native to the people of Jakarta. Following that, former drug traffickers and addicts were hired to perform Betawi songs or dances in Betawi-style weddings or other cultural events in areas of Greater Jakarta, including Depok, Tangerang, and Bogor. These initiatives serve as a more sustainable source of income for former drug traffickers and recovering addicts.

While much remains to be done in eradicating drug issues in Jl. Kunti and its surrounding area, the Jakarta experience in alleviating its drug problems is worth noting and emulating by stakeholders in Surabaya, including the Surabaya Metropolitan Police and the city mayoralty government.

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Fig. 2: Postage stamps from Indonesia, promoting a campaign against drug abuse in villages. [Photo courtesy of Post of Indonesia via Wikimedia, 2019, Public Domain.]