In this book the authors establish that democratic constitutional and political transformations in Indonesia after the 1998 Reformasi had been given impetus with the establishment of the Constitutional Court. The work presents comprehensive and critical analysis of the development of constitutional adjudication, and the working of the Indonesian Constitutional Court and its role in the process of the democratic transition and consolidation of the country. Through its decisions the Court has emerged as an important institution in protecting the fundamental rights of citizen and in improving the quality of election. The amendment of the 1945 Constitution from 1999 to 2002 has made constitutional and democratic principles based the rule of law much clearer. With the assistance of the Constitutional Court the nation has successfully conducted peaceful general elections in 1999, 2004 and 2009. There are some weaknesses in the process of elections which been discussed critically in the book. These issues are reminders that the democratic consolidation in Indonesia is not finished yet and there still room for improvement. The book is an essential reference for scholars, students, policymakers and anybody who believes that constitutional reform is an important step in shaping the country to a better way.

IWAN SATRIAWAN is an Associate Professor in Constitutional Law at Universitas Muhammadiyah Yogyakarta (UMY), Indonesia. He is currently the Vice Dean on Research, Publication and Community Service, Faculty of Law, UMY. He also practices as constitutional lawyer at Satriawan Edo & Co, a law firm in Yogyakarta. He is one of the members of Indonesian Association of Constitutional Law and Administrative Law and Indonesian Association of Comparative Law. He received his Bachelor of Law from Gadjah Mada University, Indonesia and Master of Comparative Laws from International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM) with specialization in constitutional law. He obtained his doctorate degree from Ahmad Ibrahim Kulliyah of Laws, IIUM in 2017. He has conducted and published numerous researches on constitution, democracy and human rights. He has presented numerous papers and attended various conferences/law courses in France, the United Kingdom, Japan, Thailand, Turkey, Taiwan, Malaysia, Philippines, Denmark and Indonesia.

KHAIRIL AZMIN MOKHTAR is an Associate Professor at Ahmad Ibrahim Kulliyah of Laws (AIKOL), International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM). He obtained LLB (Hons) and Master of Comparative Laws (MCL) from IIUM), and earned his PhD in Law from University of Aberystwyth, the United Kingdom. He has taught various law subjects to undergraduate and postgraduate students and supervised thesis for PhD and master students in various topics especially on constitutional law and human rights. He has edited several books including 'Constitutional Law and Human Rights in Malaysia' and 'Election Law', and co-authored several books. He has contributed numerous publications which been published as chapters in books and journal articles in international and local journals, and conducted various research including for the Legal Affairs Division, Prime Minister's Department of Malaysia. He also had conducted several research collaborations with researchers from South Korea, Australia, Turkey, United Kingdom and Indonesia. He has won a number of research awards including a Gold Medal and two Silver medals at the International Research Invention Exhibition and had been awarded Most Promising Researcher and IIUM Quality Research Award.
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Chapter 1

Introduction

*Bhinneka Tunggal Ika* (Unity in Diversity) is Indonesia’s national motto. The significance of the motto is very obvious from the country’s geography and demography. The Republic of Indonesia, which lies between the Indian Ocean and the Pacific Ocean, is the world’s largest archipelago with more than 17,500 islands. Beneath the surface of the unique and complex physical structure, Indonesia encompasses three major sections of the Earth’s crust and involves a complicated series of shelves, volcanic mountain chains and deep-sea trenches.

In its various regions lived some two-to-three hundred ethnic groups with their own languages and dialects. More than 700 different dialects and languages are spoken among the communities, which makes it a highly diverse country. Apart from being the world’s largest island country it is also the world’s largest Muslim-majority nation and the world’s third most populous democracy.

As in other Asian countries, local culture, tradition and religion are deeply embedded in the society. To establish unity among the wide and sparse population and to maintain the territorial integrity of this large nation are understandably, extremely challenging. Even among Western and developed nations, the practice of democracy and adherence to constitutionalism are still fraught with difficulties, what else in multicultural societies and developed countries which had been colonialised by Western power for centuries in the east like Indonesia.

The archipelago which now constitutes Indonesia had been ruled by various kingdoms and empires before Western imperialism reached the soil. The ancient kingdoms and empires, similar to the Western monarchs in the early days, are based on absolutism. Idea of democracy emerged after World War II in the midst of its bloody independence from the Netherlands in 1945.

During the early period after its independence, based on the Constitutions of 1945 and 1949, Indonesia was a *de-facto* democracy