

# Understanding Asia: Living and Dying

## Democratic Regression and Environmental Politics in Indonesia



**Dr. Dirk Tomsa**

La Trobe University  
Melbourne

Wednesday, 12. April 2023  
16:15 – 17:45  
X-E0-200

For more than a decade, the quality of democracy around the world has been declining, but we still know little about the diverse impacts of this democratic recession on environmental politics. This article provides new insights about the implications of democratic regression for environmental politics in Indonesia, a country that is not only Southeast Asia's largest democracy but also a globally important biodiversity hotspot. Based on an analysis of academic literature, international and Indonesian media reports, as well as survey data, this presentation argues that in Indonesia, democratic decline has had several detrimental consequences for environmental politics. Particularly impactful have been the nationalist framing of infrastructure development, controversial new laws and tightening restrictions on activists and academics working on environmental protection issues. The presentation concludes by highlighting some silver linings that provide hope for both Indonesia's democracy and its embattled environment.

**Dirk Tomsa** is Associate Professor in the Department of Politics, Media and Philosophy at La Trobe University, Australia. His main research interests focus on Indonesian and comparative Southeast Asian politics, especially in the areas of democratisation and democratic decline, electoral and party politics, institutional change and environmental politics. His publications include *Politics in Contemporary Indonesia: Institutional Change, Policy Challenges and Democratic Decline* (Routledge, 2022, with Ken MP Setiawan) as well as two co-edited volumes and numerous journal articles and book chapters on Indonesian and Southeast Asian politics. The presentation is based on a forthcoming article in *Asian Studies Review*, co-authored with Narissa Bax from the University of Tasmania.

---