

Does Institutional Activism Strengthen Democracy? A Case Study of Agrarian and Anti-Corruption Movements in Indonesia

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Does Institutional Activism Strengthen Democracy? A Case Study of Agrarian and Anti-Corruption Movements in Indonesia

HARYANTO, WILLY PURNA SAMADHI, IGNASIUS JAQUES JURU, *DESI RAHMAWATI AND INDAH SURYA WARDHANI

This article discusses institutional activism—the practice in which activists take up formal positions within state institutions in order to advance the cause of their social movement—and whether it can deepen democracy. In this study, democracy refers to popular control, or the extent to which the public can exert control over public affairs.

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The article contributes to the literature by problematizing the extent to which institutional activists can advance their causes through state channels. It does so by investigating the practice of institutional activism in Indonesia's agrarian reform and anti-corruption movements. The findings suggest that institutional activists have limited political capacity to transform their movement's agenda into government policies. They fail to represent the broad and diverse interests of social movements and mobilize popular support, thus rendering institutional activism an inadequate strategy to enhance popular control or strengthen democracy.

Keywords: social movement, institutional activism, popular control, agrarian, anti-corruption

This article explores institutional activism, a phenomenon in which civil society activists try to advance the agenda of their social movements by occupying formal positions within the state bureaucracy and institutions,¹ and its relation to democracy. Its aim is to determine whether institutional activism as a strategy has paved the way for social movements to promote their issues and interests on the Indonesian state's political agenda.

The participation of civil society activists in the state arena is a global trend, especially in the Global South. In Brazil, for instance, feminist activists channelled their advocacy through conventional bureaucratic channels,² and advanced their cause within state institutions.³ In Malaysia, activists have entered the state through electoral politics.⁴ Activists have also entered the state through sectoral agendas, such as agrarian reform in the Philippines⁵ and the anti-corruption movement in India.⁶

In post-*reformasi* Indonesia, it is also a common phenomenon for civil society activists to cross over into the state arena. For

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instance, W. Ichwanuddin has studied how activists in civil society organizations have entered the state by running as legislative candidates.⁷ Dirk Tomsa and Charlotte Setijadi have examined the nexus between civil society and the electoral sector.⁸ Haryanto has explored the strategies and motivations of civil society activists who enter the state,⁹ while Marcus Mietzner has identified three types of pro-democracy activists in Indonesia: politicians who previously participated in civil society activism; reformist activists in political parties; and reformist activists who crossed over into formal politics.¹⁰

This article takes a step further by exploring whether or not such institutional activists have been able to deepen democracy in terms of advancing participation, representation and equality. In doing so, it focuses on the link between institutional activism and the agenda of deepening democracy. Here, democracy refers to popular control over public affairs.¹¹ In other words, we seek to determine whether institutional activism can deepen democracy by serving as a mechanism for “the effective translation of citizens’ demands into the political process via institutional channels”.¹² Institutional activism can thus contribute to the deepening of democracy since it can potentially function as the process through which activists—through their involvement in the state bureaucracy and institutions—can exercise popular control over public affairs. The article thus asks: “How does institutional activism influence democracy?” To answer this question, we examine the strategies of institutional activists in two different movements and their interactions with external activists who remain outside the state.

We explore two cases of institutional activism in post-1998 Indonesia: the first involves the agrarian movement and the second the anti-corruption movement. The selection of the agrarian and anti-corruption movements is based on several considerations. First, civil society actors in these two sectors have long been “boundary-crossers” in penetrating into the state and its institutions.¹³ Second, agrarian reform and corruption eradication became important issues for Indonesia after the fall of the New Order regime in 1998. Activists in these two sectors are often discussed in the context of their contributions to progressive politics in democratic Indonesia.¹⁴ Third, these sectors have two distinct loci, with the agrarian reform movement primarily driven by land interests, and the anti-corruption movement rooted in global norms against graft.¹⁵ The latter cause has significant implications for democratization, since the anti-corruption movement often served as a “home” for pro-democracy

actors protesting against corruption, collusion and nepotism during the authoritarian New Order regime. Thus, while anti-corruption activists focus on issues of governance, agrarian activists tend to use the issue of land reform to criticize developmentalism.

This article aims to contribute to the recent literature on institutional activism by rejecting the view that the boundaries between the state and civil society are dichotomic and impermeable. Drawing from studies on boundary crossings,¹⁶ it provides a better understanding of institutional activism, especially the relationship between activists who are “political insiders” and those who opt to remain as external challengers.

Following the introduction, the article discusses the concept of institutional activism and the idea of political capacity for popular control. It then examines the two case studies of institutional activists in the agrarian and anti-corruption movements, including the effectiveness of their strategy in advancing their respective causes.

The Interaction of Civil Society and the State: An Overview of Institutional Activism

The relationship between civil society organizations and the state has generally been framed as one involving two distinct entities.¹⁷ However, changing political contexts may fundamentally transform the relationship and interactions between the state and civil society. In Southeast Asia, for instance, there has been “increasing political participation” that is paradoxically accompanied by “the narrowing of the channels for political contestation”.¹⁸ Kaniskha Jayasuriya and Garry Rodan conceptualized two different sites of political participation—one sponsored by the state and the other a space created by civil society which is autonomous from the state. Meredith Weiss has, however, criticized this mapping on the grounds that it places the state as the primary agency that determines the inclusion (or exclusion) of civil society within political spaces. According to Weiss, the state-society relations is more interactive than merely determined by the state.¹⁹ Instead, Weiss identified three different sites of participation: an autonomous civil society; an extra electoral state-sponsored civil society; and electoral politics.²⁰

The commonality of the two above-mentioned studies is that the state is seen merely as a political structure that determines the degree and form of civil society participation. However, they overlook the potential for political participation within the state to be used as a tool to advance activist causes. Meanwhile, the

interaction between civil society and the state has also been analysed under the political linkage framework. For example, Cornelis Lay has examined how civil society organizations in Indonesia play a crucial role in establishing a political linkage with the parliament.²¹ However, Lay was only concerned with the political linkage between institutions, and was limited in considering the dynamic of activism within the state.

Relations between civil society and the state are also described in terms of the advocacy coalition framework. Paul A. Sabatiere emphasized the relationship between actors in “policy subsystems”, underscoring the importance of examining the interactions between various agents from different institutions who are interested in a particular policy area.²² However, such an approach tends to focus on the general interaction between actors in the policy arena rather than their engagement of civil society activists and social movements.

In summary, the foregoing studies—invoking the theoretical frameworks of political participation, political linkage and advocacy coalitions—do not adequately address how activists can advance their causes by entering into and operating within the state. Hence, this article aims to contribute to the literature by discussing institutional activism, in which activists formally occupy positions in state institutions as a means to advance their causes. In doing so, the article analyses the relationship between the state and civil society within the framework of social movements.

This article perceives institutional activism as the way civil society actors redraw the boundaries between state and social movements, thus challenging the established dichotomy between insiders and outsiders towards the state. Instead of dichotomizing activists who work inside and outside the state, this article focuses on institutional activists who have access to the state’s resources and power.²³ Rebecca Neera Abers classifies two different types of institutional activism: those with strong ties to social movements; and those who do not have these strong ties but are still interested in the same issues.²⁴

Moreover, institutional activism has also been discussed in terms of its impact on policy change,²⁵ strategies adopted by activists within the state,²⁶ and in the context of specific issues such as civil and women rights,²⁷ environmental policy,²⁸ public health,²⁹ and agrarian reform.³⁰ These studies have generally portrayed institutional activism as a positive force for social change. However, there has been limited exploration into how institutional activism can bolster democracy by enhancing popular control over public affairs. To

discover the extent to which institutional activism strengthens popular control, this article investigates the political capacity of institutional activists to strengthen popular control.

According to David Beetham, “the greatest conceivable degree of popular control is crucial to ensure collectively binding rules and policies over which the people exercise control”. Popular control emerges once individual rights necessary to participate in the collective decision-making process are acknowledged.³¹ It means that popular control requires political equality. Yet, David Beetham does not provide a feasible framework for newly-democratized countries which are still struggling with problems of representation emanating from both elitist institution building and fragmented citizen participation.³²

Thus, rather than simply defining popular control in terms of the balance of political power held by voters vis-à-vis their elected politicians, this article instead focuses on institutional activists’ capacity to enhance citizens’ engagement.³³ It therefore uses political capacity as a framework for understanding the extent to which institutional activists influence democratization. Here, political capacity refers to a movement’s individuals and groups ability to mobilize society,³⁴ particularly in relations with key actors and institutions in the political field.³⁵ Kristian Stokke and Olle Törnquist have identified five political capacities that can be used to promote popular control.³⁶ The first is the capacity to promote inclusion, which refers to the institutional activists’ ability to involve a variety of actors, particularly ordinary citizens, in politics. The second is the capacity to secure legitimacy, which relates to the resources available to institutional activists to access the state and pursue their agenda. The third is the capacity for politicization and agenda-setting, or the ability to transform their sectoral priorities into political agendas. The fourth is the capacity to mobilize the public and create organizations, enabling institutional activists to secure popular support for their goals. The fifth is the capacity to increase participation and representation, achieved by, for example, creating new spaces for public involvement in which citizens can have influence and access to popular representation.

Institutional Activism in the Agrarian and Anti-corruption Sectors in Indonesia

The 1998 *reformasi* movement significantly transformed Indonesia’s political landscape and opened new political arenas.³⁷ In the early

years of reform, civil society activists were described as “floating democrats” who lacked “political influence” and were “fragmented, poorly organised, [and] rather isolated from ordinary people”.³⁸ As a result, these activists found themselves politically marginalized. To address this situation, the activists moved into the political arena to contest the elites’ monopolization of democracy and started to more closely engage the political arena, including the state.³⁹ As Mietzner described, they began “fighting the hellhounds”, seeking to advance their agenda “from within the power centre of the political institution”—including state institutions and political parties—against “patronage-driven career politicians”.⁴⁰ During this phase, it became normal for pro-democracy activists to occupy formal positions within the state and its institutions.

Activists in the agrarian reform and anti-corruption sectors have contributed significantly to Indonesia’s democratization, adopting various strategies to enter political spaces and state institutions.⁴¹ This article assesses the viability of the institutional activism as a strategy by drawing on interviews conducted with institutional and civil society activists from the two sectors between 2019 and 2021. The article also relies on findings from previous research studies that the authors have been involved in.⁴²

The Agrarian Reform Movement in Indonesia

When Indonesia became independent in 1945, land reform and the agrarian sector were fundamental issues. During the Sukarno era (1945–66), social movements advocating for land reform thrived. In 1960, the Sukarno regime issued Law No. 5 on the Basic Agrarian Law, seeking to establish a national land system which rearranged land ownership and utilization for the benefits of the people and the state, by abolishing feudal and colonial land tenure.⁴³ However, due to their close ties to peasant organizations, many of which were accused of being linked to the Communist Party of Indonesia,⁴⁴ these movements faced considerable issues in continuing their advocacy under Suharto’s anti-communist New Order regime (1966–98).

Under the New Order, the agrarian sector was controlled by the military and the oligarchy, while the ideology of developmentalism found fertile soil. The state’s interests were omnipresent in the agrarian sector and land was reduced to a commercial commodity that could be exploited by the military in conjunction with the interests of the private sector.⁴⁵ The developmentalist drive was supported by three pillars of public policy: the manipulation of land

rights, privatization and the oppression of resistance.⁴⁶ During this era, the agrarian sector, including peasant organizations, experienced rapid depoliticization. Only one organization—the Harmonious Association of Indonesian Farmers (*Himpunan Kerukunan Tani Indonesia*, HKTI), which was sponsored by the military and the state—was permitted to exist.⁴⁷

In the 1980s, amid widespread conflicts over land ownership and development, several civil society movements pushing for reforms in the agrarian sector emerged and sought to delegitimize the regime's developmentalism.⁴⁸ These movements eventually consolidated among themselves to lay the foundation for the establishment of the Consortium for Agrarian Reform (*Konsorsium Pembaruan Agraria*, KPA) in 1994. Dianto Bachriadi, one of the founders of KPA, explained that the agrarian movement consisted of four distinct groups whose interests aligned: victims of land eviction; university students who advocated for the victims through solidarity movements; activists involved in organizing advocacy for the victims and protests against developmentalism; and progressive academics who wanted to shape how agrarian reform should be pursued.⁴⁹

Bachriadi identified the Pasundan Peasants Union (*Serikat Petani Pasundan*) as one of the embryonic organizations of the KPA, mentioning its pivotal role in consolidating resistance in the agrarian sector against the New Order regime. They worked together with activists from leading NGOs such as the Indonesian Legal Aid Foundation (*Yayasan Lembaga Bantuan Hukum Indonesia*, YLBHI), university student activists and peasant groups that fought for land rights in West Java.⁵⁰ The alliance was later strengthened with the participation of various organizations.⁵¹

Institutional Activism in Agrarian Reform

The growth of the agrarian reform movement helped to raise the profile of their agenda. After the fall of the New Order regime in 1998, the activists ultimately succeeded in pushing the People's Consultative Assembly to enact Decree No. IX/2001 on Agrarian Reform and Natural Resource Management, which provided a legal framework for the implementation of agrarian reform.

The decree meant that agrarian reform was placed on the state's agenda. Some senior activists were pleased with this development since they believed that agrarian reform could only be undertaken by the state and that social movements lacked the capacity to push

for agrarian reform unless they themselves were involved in state institutions. Iwan Nurdin, a KPA activist who at the time of the interview was working for the Presidential Staff Office, confirmed this view:

The agrarian movement has long understood, politically, that land reform must use the hand of the state. There is no land reform that does not use state power, both in policy formulation and in its implementation. [...] It is well understood that state power is the determining factor.⁵²

However, not all KPA activists agreed with the idea of entering the state. For instance, Dianto Bachriadi argued that the move to enter the state had disadvantages:

Closeness [to the state] makes this movement powerless and we have no alternatives to challenge the state. [...] Collaboration makes us weak in challenging our opponents or partners.⁵³

Bachriadi expressed his disapproval of several agrarian activist group's strategy to collaborate with the state. For him, this weakened the movement because activism loses its critical power once it partners with the state. Despite these difference in views, KPA leaders generally sought to push the agrarian reform agenda through the state. However, during President Megawati Sukarnoputri's administration (2001–4) the government showed no interest in the agrarian reform agenda. This was shown, for instance, by the slowness of the state in responding to conflicts over land between the state and society. The activists then tried advancing agrarian reform through the National Commission of Human Rights (*Komisi Nasional Hak Asasi Manusia*, Komnas HAM), stating that the issue was a human rights issue.

The failure to make an impact during Megawati's presidency incentivized activists to adopt the practice of institutional activism by forging a relationship with state actors. This was to elevate agrarian reform into a priority. Among the KPA activists involved in this initiative were Usep Setiawan, Noer Fauzi Rachman and Iwan Nurdin. To be able to enter the state, senior agrarian activists—some of whom had been involved in activism since the New Order era—used their experiences, advocacy networks and knowledge to secure positions in the administration of President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono (2004–14). For example, Usep Setiawan was appointed as a special staff member at the National Land Agency (*Badan Pertanahan Nasional*, BPN). This was possible due to the KPA's

relations with the BPN chief, Joyo Winoto, a prominent bureaucrat and academic who had a close-knit relationship with President Yudhoyono. Through Winoto, KPA activists had access to President Yudhoyono, thus strengthening their role in his administration's agrarian reform policy-making.

During this period, agrarian institutional activists attempted to strengthen their political capacity to realize the movement's agenda. To do this, they created a link between grassroots agrarian organizations and government officials in order to communicate their demands. This is consistent with the statement of Usep Setiawan, who often accompanied Joyo Winoto on their visits to rural areas to understand local people's concerns and demands regarding agrarian reform:

In many places, I accompanied Joyo Winoto to meet the movement's friends ... The topics discussed were aspirations regarding the importance of agrarian reform. ... Secondly, about the agrarian conflicts. So, the land cases experienced by colleagues in local areas were reported to the head of the BPN, verbally, and the documents [proof of land ownership] were submitted.⁵⁴

The above statements demonstrate institutional activists' efforts to strengthen their political capacity as intermediaries that connected the state with grassroots organizations. However, the institutional activists lacked the capacity to advance the agrarian reform agenda beyond helping grassroots voices be heard. Their role was limited to allowing local perspectives to be voiced in forums hosted by the state. Notably, agrarian grassroots organizations were not engaged in the crafting of policy.

Institutional activists' lack of capacity to mobilize grassroots organizations against anti-agrarian forces within the state was illustrated by the failure to get a proposed Government Regulation on Agrarian Reform passed. Usep Setiawan, who was involved in planning the National Agrarian Reform Programme and drafting the government regulation, explained:

The draft of Government Regulation on Agrarian Reform had been completed. The draft had reached the president's desk but there was political turbulence in 2012. ... The corruption case of Hambalang emerged. The president could not contain the turbulence. The demand to replace the head of the BPN was so strong from [the House of Representatives]. Yet, I personally suspect that the Hambalang issue would be a stepping stone and an entry point for political actors who were opposed to agrarian reform.⁵⁵

The political turbulence began with a corruption scandal in the construction of sports infrastructure in Hambalang, which implicated many politicians from the president's party. The scandal compelled the president to replace several officials in strategic positions, including the Head of BPN. This delayed the enactment of the government regulation on agrarian reform. Under President Yudhoyono, institutional activists were unable to properly advance agrarian reform or enact substantive changes. As a result, agrarian conflicts remained commonplace, as did disparities in the control of resources. For instance, during Yudhoyono's two terms as president, 262 companies were granted 100-year permits for the industrial extraction of forestry products, 303 companies received forest management rights, and 303 companies received oil palm plantation permits. This generated significant disparities in land ownership, with Indonesian families owning an average of only 0.4 hectares of land. As a result, the country experienced 1,520 agrarian conflicts between 2004 and 2014.⁵⁶

Agrarian activists continued the practice of institutional activism under the administration of President Joko "Jokowi" Widodo (2014–present). In particular, they adopted the strategy of actively participating in the 2014 presidential elections. Several agrarian activists, including Usep Setiawan, served as political volunteers for Jokowi and helped to design his presidential campaign platform, "Nawacita" (Programme of Nine National Priorities). In relation to agrarian reform, Nawacita outlines several agendas which were then formalized in Presidential Decree Number 45 of 2016.⁵⁷ The formulation of these agendas is believed to have been influenced by a number of agrarian reform activists serving in the national secretariat of Jokowi's presidential campaign.

Following Jokowi's victory in 2014, agrarian activists drew on their knowledge, networks and political contributions to his electoral success to promote the agrarian reform agenda from within the state. They secured positions in the Presidential Staff Office (*Kantor Staf Presiden*, KSP) and played a role in the implementation of his national programme priorities, thus gaining a new arena. As mentioned above, during this period, agrarian activists were involved in formulating the 2015–19 National Mid-Term Development Plan, an official state document that contained the president's work plan for a period of five years, including an agrarian reform agenda outlined in the presidential decree. According to Usep Setiawan,⁵⁸ these opportunities allowed the activists to elevate the agrarian

reform agenda into a national priority. Here, the activists' political capacity was more visible than ever, as they successfully proposed mechanisms for agrarian conflict resolution, land redistribution, asset legalization, empowerment and institutionalization. However, the government's commitment to implement agrarian reform remained weak. This was because the agrarian reform agenda was narrowly interpreted as the legalization and redistribution of land. This prompted agrarian institutional activists to collaborate with external agrarian movements to push for a special regulation which was more comprehensive in interpreting agrarian reform. These activists, including those in KPA, utilized the Global Land Forum, an event that was attended by President Jokowi. As a result, in October 2018, the Jokowi government issued Presidential Decree No. 86 which contained goals such as reducing inequality in land tenure, resolving agrarian disputes and conflicts, and creating sources of agrarian-based welfare.

Despite these successes, institutional activists had limited political capacity to advance other elements of the agrarian reform agenda, especially in changing the structure of land ownership through redistribution. Rather, the Indonesian state under Jokowi demonstrated a greater interest in land certification, a programme that aims to legalize land ownership, rather than land distribution which would be in line with the agrarian reform ideals. During the tenure of Minister of Agrarian Affairs and Spatial Planning Sofyan Djalil (2016–22), his ministry prioritized this programme because the legalization of land ownership was one of the most prominent issues in land conflicts. However, this legalization presented opportunities for entrepreneurs to monopolize land ownership through the purchase of certified land, which was not aligned with the agrarian reform agenda. Hence, agrarian activists have suspected Sofyan Djalil to be a staunch advocate of the land certification initiative because he had previously worked as a business consultant and commissioner for several companies.⁵⁹

Nevertheless, the certification policy found support among the bureaucracy. Iwan Nurdin, another institutional activist from KPA, stated that:

The World Bank sent many people to schools [i.e., universities] to learn about “market” land registration. And it seems that these people have entered the highest level in the bureaucracy.⁶⁰

Nurdin implied that the bureaucracy supported the policy of legalizing land because many bureaucrats had received scholarships from

the World Bank. As the World Bank is widely known as a major proponent of free-market policies, it is assumed that those who are awarded these scholarships are proponents of the market.

The market orientation of the Jokowi administration's land reform agenda was met with sharp criticism by agrarian activists who worked outside the state, particularly the Joint Committee for Struggle for Agrarian Reform (*Komite Bersama Perjuangan Reforma Agraria*, KBPRA), which is composed of agrarian organizations outside the KPA network, such as AGRA and ARC. This committee has accused Jokowi's agrarian policies of failing to carry out land redistribution for the purpose of proper agrarian reform, instead merely certifying disputed lands that have been successfully controlled by the community through land reclamation.⁶¹

Nurdin thus acknowledged the difficulty that institutional activists face in advocating for a comprehensive agrarian reform programme, even when they hold positions in government. He stated:

The discussion got deeper ... filled with strong debates about the choices [of becoming institutional activists] because we could be considered as traitors, or could be considered as opportunists. That is our risk of bringing the issue of agrarian reform to the "middle" [the state arena].⁶²

Nurdin's statement suggests that the primary challenge faced by institutional activists was criticism from external activists who were not part of the state. This is because institutional activists need to be willing to compromise with the state, and thus their ability to fight for agrarian reforms formulated by external activists was limited. As a result, this decreased the trust of external activists in institutional activists. This was in line with the statement of one of the YLBHI leaders, Arip Yogiawan:

At first, we thought, "wow, there are a lot of activists in KSP". [...] But over time, it [the involvement of institutional activists] was not concrete. It [their involvement] was not clear, and we [external activists] also thought about why we should bring it [agrarian reform agenda] to the KSP?⁶³

The above statement implies that external activists did not view institutional activists in KSP as being very influential. As a result, they saw no benefit in advocating for agrarian reform through institutional activists within KSP.

More importantly, the limitation of institutional activists was demonstrated by their inability to ensure the representation of all

elements of the movement. This was because their relationship with the grassroots organizations should be facilitated by the parent organization that coordinates several groups. In this case, institutional activists needed KPA as a parent organization to identify certain agrarian reform priorities. However, since only organizations affiliated and linked with KPA were consulted, the interests of other elements of the broader agrarian movement were not properly represented at the state level. Surya Tjandra, a labour activist who was appointed by President Jokowi as deputy minister of agrarian affairs, stated that:

There are conflicts [in terms of prioritizing the agrarian reform agenda] among themselves [organizations in agrarian sector]. There were several cases where the “assistants” [institutional activists] were different, and it was “noisy” ... There were many actors involved. ... They are competing [in prioritizing the agrarian reform agenda]. Well, because he might be a former KPA [leader], he tends to be one-sided.⁶⁴

Tjandra’s comments suggest that representation problems may have arisen due to competition between activists. Institutional activists may have focused more on representing the interests of their original organization rather than the broader interests of the land reform movements.

Erasmus Cahyadi, another activist belonging to the National Indigenous Peoples Alliance (*Aliansi Masyarakat Adat Nasional*, AMAN), one of the members of the agrarian reform movement advocating the indigenous peoples in Indonesia, complained that:

Many of us [activists of AMAN] have attended meetings [with institutional activists and state officials], but our voices have not been able to change the text [of the policies related to the agrarian reform agenda]. ... There is a disconnect between what was voiced by AMAN and what was discussed at the palace, at the ministries.⁶⁵

Cahyadi’s complaint reflects the problem of representation, where the presence of AMAN activists in meetings with the state received little to no response. He noted the difficulty for institutional activists to truly represent the broad diversity of the agrarian reform movement.

The weakness of institutional activism in the agrarian reform sector is also reflected in the failure to address grassroots concerns and demands, especially when it comes to resolving agrarian conflicts. For instance, institutional activists were not able to adequately intervene in the Sungai Iyu case in Aceh. Since 2013, the peasants

of Sungai Iyu have been in a dispute with PT. Rapala, a palm oil corporation which claims ownership of 144 hectares of the 1,069 hectares owned by the peasants. In 2017, KSP invited the conflicting parties to a meeting, but unfortunately, this intervention proved to be unsuccessful in resolving the conflict. As Era Purnama Sari, an activist of YLBHI, said:

The KSP has indeed opened its door wide to receive public complaints. ... However, feelings of disappointment are more often experienced because among the cases that have been reported, there has been no solution to anything.⁶⁶

The institutional activists at the national level were also seen as being disconnected from the struggles of local communities and agrarian activists. Handoko, the leader of Omah Tani, a peasant grassroots organization in Central Java and a member of KPA, was sceptical that national-level KPA activists understood the challenges faced by local peasants:

I can't talk about the big issues they [i.e., institutional activists from KPA] launched. ... I'm not an intellectual who likes to sit behind a desk, talk about big things. No. Just let me in the field ... those people [i.e., institutional activists] don't know [if] there is something bad underneath ...⁶⁷

In sum, despite several agrarian activists securing access to the state bureaucracy, institutional activism was not successful in pushing forward the movement's land reform priorities, indicating that it was not able to strengthen popular control over the agrarian sector. This is due to competition between actors inside and outside the state in formulating the agenda, and a lack of political capacity to mobilize the masses and push back against anti-reformist elements. Furthermore, agrarian institutional activists were perceived as being co-opted by the state, leading to a decreased level of aggressiveness in advocating the reform agenda. As a result, the influence of the agrarian reform movement over the political process remains limited.⁶⁸

The Anti-corruption Movement in Indonesia

Corruption eradication is a global norm that promotes transparent management of government and corporate finances. In the post-New Order era, the cause was rapidly embraced by pro-democracy activists aiming to challenge corruption and authoritarianism.

The anti-corruption movement in Indonesia began in the 1970s as a politically-motivated attempt to restore public trust and international

support for the Suharto government. In 1970, the Commission of Four was formed to combat corruption. This commission was composed of politicians and academics, though it was dissolved by the end of the year. Thereafter, President Suharto issued Law No. 3 of 1971 on the Eradication of the Criminal Act of Corruption. Then, a group known as “Petisi 50” was established by activist-academics such as Adnan Buyung Nasution, Arief Budiman, and Emil Salim, in collaboration with retired generals and politicians, to expose government corruption.⁶⁹ Unfortunately, this group was later disbanded by the government.

In the 1990s, an alliance between pro-democracy, civil society, and student activists and Islamic organizations emerged to protest against the corrupt practices of the ruling elites. With the slogan “Abolish KKN” (*korupsi, kolusi, nepotism*, or “corruption, collusion, nepotism”),⁷⁰ they targeted the monopolistic business practices of President Suharto and his cronies. This slogan was also used to push for *reformasi* in 1998. During this period, the Indonesian Legal Aid Foundation (YLBHI) and its local branches (LBH) provided legal assistance for civil society activists who were persecuted for their involvement in the anti-corruption movement. YLBHI and LBH also utilized the anti-corruption agenda as a tool to eliminate corruption, collusion and nepotism in the political system.⁷¹

By the end of the 1990s, some YLBHI/LBH leaders, such as Teten Masduki and Bambang Widjojanto, mobilized their international networks to obtain political and financial support to establish an anti-graft watchdog organization, the Indonesia Corruption Watch (ICW). ICW investigated and exposed acts of corruption within government institutions and state-owned enterprises, and actively pursued the prosecution of such cases in the courts.⁷² In addition, ICW also provided advocacy for labourers and peasants.

ICW’s campaigns spurred public enthusiasm for clean government, thus helping to raise awareness of the importance of maintaining a corruption-free system. Phillip Eldridge described ICW as the “action arm” of a civil society coalition that sought to eliminate corruption in Indonesia.⁷³ This alliance of anti-corruption activists urged President B.J. Habibie (1998–99) to pass Law No. 31 of 1999, which created the Corruption Eradication Commission (*Komisi Pemberantasan Korupsi*, KPK). The coalition also pushed his successor, President Abdurrahman Wahid (1999–2001), to establish the Joint Team for the Eradication of the Criminal Act of Corruption, which included 25 members from civil society organizations.⁷⁴ However, the Constitutional Court dissolved the Joint Team shortly afterwards on

the basis that its creation violated Law No. 31 of 1999. Consequently, during President Megawati's term, the anti-corruption movement pushed for the passage of Law No. 30 of 2002, which formally established the KPK.

Another important civil society organization in the anti-graft movement is the Indonesian Forum for Budget Transparency (FITRA). Founded in 1999 by a group of scholars and activists, including Joe Fernandez, M.M Billah and Laode Syarif, FITRA works to increase public participation in the state budgetary processes, examine the economic impact of corruption, and develop technical instruments, such as certain indicators of the state budget, to monitor revenue management and promote transparency. FITRA has received support from international organizations such as the Open Government Society (OGS) and the Global Initiative for Fiscal Transparency (GIFT).⁷⁵ Beyond FITRA, there are other anti-graft organizations, including Transparency Indonesia (TI) and GeRAK (Gerakan Anti-Korupsi/Anti-Corruption Movement), with similar bodies established at the local level such as the Bali Corruption Watch. Moreover, the anti-graft cause was further supported by the creation of anti-corruption study centres on university campuses, such as *PUKAT* (Pusat Kajian Anti-Korupsi/Center for Anti-Corruption Studies) at the Gadjah Mada University in Yogyakarta and *Pusako* (Pusat Studi Konstitusi/Center for Constitution Studies) at the Andalas University in Padang.

Institutional Activism in the Anti-corruption Sector

The establishment of the KPK in December 2003 was a significant achievement for anti-corruption activists.⁷⁶ Since its inception, the movement has successfully installed anti-graft activists in the selection committee of the KPK, and later on in the KPK itself (e.g., Bambang Widjojanto). The alliance of anti-corruption activists and their affiliated civil society organizations have maintained anti-corruption as a key issue in their agenda.

The active involvement of anti-corruption activists in the KPK drastically changed the relationship between the movement and the state. Rather than being external watchdogs, anti-graft organizations became consultative allies, actively working with the system. According to Bambang Widjojanto, a former director of YLBHI who later served as a KPK commissioner between 2011 and 2015, the repositioning was a new strategy of anti-corruption activists to cooperate with state institutions such as judiciary and police.⁷⁷ He was also one of the institutional activists who encouraged anti-

graft civil society organizations and their activists to work with the state. Luky Djani, an academic and former ICW activist, was another such institutional activist. In 2019, he was appointed as the secretary of the Presidential Advisory Board. He pointed to how activists challenged the technical instrumentality of the government in budget monitoring, data reporting and policy formulation.⁷⁸

Teten Masduki was another institutional activist who helped advance the anti-corruption cause. Appointed as the head of the KSP in 2015, he later became the Minister of Cooperatives and Micro, Small, and Medium Business Enterprises in 2019. Masduki believes that the relationship between activists and political parties is one of mutual symbiosis. Through their collaboration, activists are able to articulate their agendas more easily, while political parties gain valuable insights into potential constituencies. He sought to establish more concrete measures, such as creating a monitoring system of the bureaucracy to eliminate corruption and promote the adoption of ethical governance practices.⁷⁹ To accomplish this, he joined the Indonesian Democratic Party of Struggle (PDI-P).

Some of the leading human rights and anti-corruption activists currently working in the government are Jaleswari Pramodhawardhani, Ihdhal Kasim, Fadjroel Rachman, and Alexander Lay. These activists have been instrumental in working with the president's inner circle to promote their anti-corruption cause. For them, entering the state has been imperative to advance the anti-corruption cause. Masduki described institutional activists as "champions" and "pioneers" of anti-graft reform:

The effectiveness of the anti-corruption agenda in the government is influenced by figures who are included in the government, they are called champions. ... The best people should be pushed into government as director generals, as regional heads, mayors and all kinds of positions, including being members of [the House of Representatives]. Getting into an institution like the KPK is important, but getting into the government to become a champion, a pioneer, to push the reform era—that should be the priority.⁸⁰

In short, anti-corruption institutional activists viewed entering the state as an opportunity, not just to share their knowledge and technical expertise in the fight against corruption, but also to proactively advance and implement their anti-corruption agenda through the state bureaucracy. They believed that their personal successes and track records as activists would afford them more chances to push their anti-corruption initiatives in government policy-making.

Masduki identified the Jokowi volunteers group as one of the most important opportunities for anti-corruption activists. This alliance, which worked with the Jokowi campaign to secure his election, involved numerous activists as volunteers. Even after Jokowi was elected and the secretariat was disbanded, former members continued to offer their expertise, providing the administration with policy recommendations to fight corruption. These efforts culminated in Presidential Regulation No. 54 of 2018, a landmark legislation that enabled the government to more effectively prevent corruption.

To advance the anti-corruption cause, the institutional activists not only shared their expertise, but also developed policy recommendations and devised instruments to implement them. For instance, Luky Djani shared that institutional activists provided advice and help in creating anti-fraud mechanisms in various government departments and state-owned enterprises—an indication of the significant inroads made by the anti-graft movement through institutional activism.⁸¹ The institutional activists also maintained their existing networks with local and transnational civil society organizations to secure political support for the implementation of their recommended programmes. At the same time, they looked to expand their networks by finding new governmental and non-governmental allies to ensure that their recommendations were realized. Moreover, with the support of international organizations and donor institutions, civil society organizations were able to collaborate with the government to accelerate activists' efforts to gain more prominent positions in the anti-corruption and human rights sectors,⁸² thus promoting policy reform.⁸³

Institutional activists from the anti-corruption movement also created mechanisms for the public to monitor the expenditures of provincial and regency governments, as well as the use of village funds for public services provision. Robert Na Endi Jaweng, the former executive director of Regional Autonomy Watch (KPPOD)—an independent organization that monitored local governments' autonomy—and currently a member of the Ombudsman of the Republic of Indonesia, recalled the way he and his peers used to assess public affairs while managing the complexity of the state bureaucracy and the political interests of state actors.

However, the strategy of working from within the state also had the effect of weakening the bonds between institutional activists and their counterparts who remained in civil society. This can be partly attributed to the fact that institutional activists can become influenced by sectoral interests as a result of serving in the

government, leading to friction between institutional and external activists. Luky Djani highlighted the challenges that institutional activists faced in trying to align the movement's anti-corruption agenda with the political priorities of the government. He noted that institutional activists must understand the different priorities of each administration, which can have different policy orientations and policies. Therefore, the strategies of "mainstreaming" anti-corruption agendas by NGOs, such as "save KPK," may not be accepted by the government.⁸⁴

The tension between institutional and external anti-corruption activists was most evident in 2019 when the Jokowi administration sought to revise Law No. 30 of 2002—otherwise known as the "KPK Law" since it was the originating statute that formally created the anti-graft commission. The effort to revise the KPK Law had started in 2010 during President Yudhoyono's second term, with the House of Representatives identifying it as a legislative priority for 2011. At that time, however, the attempted revision was halted as a result of protests against the weakening of KPK.⁸⁵

Shortly after his successful re-election in April 2019, President Jokowi launched his own attempt to revise the KPK Law. This was eventually passed as Law No. 19 of 2019, effectively transforming the KPK from an independent ad-hoc organization into an executive agency under the purview of the president's office, thus threatening the KPK's ability to fulfill its duties. In response, institutional activists sought to avoid problematizing the "weakening of KPK" in discussions with the Third Commission of the House of Representatives, while their civil society counterparts were staging protests against the revision of the KPK Law. Despite their efforts, institutional activists encountered considerable difficulty in advancing their agenda in the House of Representatives, where senior party elites dominated the discourse. As a result, the institutional activists were commonly perceived by politicians as elite activists who lacked the mass support necessary to challenge legislators. Taufik Basari, a current parliamentarian and a former activist and lawyer of YLBHI/LBH from 2006 to 2007, admitted that he was unable to successfully advance a stronger anti-corruption agenda due to his lack of seniority:

I am a new person [in the House of Representatives]. ... So, in a number of ways, I [have to] follow the working atmosphere. ... In the midst of criticism against the omnibus law (the Job Creation Law), and against the revision of KPK Law in the previous period, I have tried to establish communication [and] keep it open with

friends who are [on the] outside, including those who criticize [...] and the opposition, but I have to convey the political reality that it is impossible not to do this.⁸⁶

Taufik Basari obviously faced a dilemma as an institutional activist who sits in the House of Representative. In 2009, Taufik Basari was a lawyer for the KPK leaders who were involved in KPK's conflict with the police. However, in 2019, in his position as a member of the house, he was not able to advocate the KPK Law, nor could he win support from his fellow civil society peers.

Concerning the KPK Law, ICW criticized the relative silence and passivity of anti-corruption institutional activists over the revision of the law. They expressed their disappointment in former human rights and anti-corruption activists who are now in the president's inner circle, such as Teten Masduki.⁸⁷ This tension between institutional and civil society activists can be attributed to their distinct roles and functions. Adnan Topan Husodo, the ICW coordinator from 2018 to 2022, stated in 2017 that the relationship between former ICW activists who later became public officials and the organization was not a subordinate relationship, and that ICW "remained on track as a pressure group, no matter who is at the peak of power".⁸⁸

The institutional activists' limitations in advocating for the KPK Law have become increasingly evident. This was exemplified in the case of Novel Baswedan, a senior investigator of the KPK who was attacked on 11 April 2017, resulting in the loss of his left eye. The attackers, later identified as police officers, were tried but only received brief prison sentences, and the masterminds of the assault were never identified. The workers' union of the KPK condemned the attack as a "barbaric act" and "a form of terror and an effort to weaken the KPK",⁸⁹ while ICW was doubtful that the assault was linked to the high-profile cases Baswedan was investigating.⁹⁰ Following the report of the fact-finding team established by the state, ICW released a statement expressing their doubts about the findings.⁹¹

Furthermore, the technocratic approach adopted by institutional activists tends to focus on technical efficiency while neglecting the social and political dimensions of decision-making. This approach has also distanced them from their civil society peers at the grassroots. Given the bureaucratic nature of their offices, institutional activists tend to concentrate their attention towards designing mechanisms and systems that could eliminate corruption and promote transparency.

However, their proximity to power can leave them more willing to accommodate the interests of administrators, potentially leading to a lack of accountability. There is a risk that institutional activists become overly focused on sectoral issues such as efficiency of state-owned enterprises.

Institutional activists' technocratic bias has led to the misconception that anti-corruption is an issue only accessible to elites, not the average Indonesian. However, civil society activists on the ground adopt a different approach to fill the gap at the local level. For instance, Wasingatu Zakiyah, a former ICW activist who chooses to work at the village level, reflected:

[Is the] anti-corruption [cause] ... still elitist? ... I felt that this (perception) is an important learning experience ... So, what exactly is ... the issue of money politics that circulated during elections in relation to the anti-corruption movement? Matters such as these can be reduced to the lowest level.⁹²

Zakiyah recognized that anti-corruption is often seen as an elitist issue, due to its complexity in terms of government budgeting. As a result, ordinary people, especially those living in rural areas, may find it hard to comprehend. To help combat this, she is currently monitoring how village funds are used to provide services and is actively supporting grassroots anti-corruption activists who are working to educate people about the importance of anti-corruption and to build a culture of integrity at the village level.

In general, institutional activism in the anti-corruption sector has succeeded in introducing anti-fraud mechanisms and monitoring instruments in the state apparatuses. However, this may not have necessarily resulted in the establishment of clean governance in Indonesia. An ICW report released in 2022 revealed the extent of the country's losses, totalling around IDR 81 trillion (US\$5.2 billion) due to corruption between 2017 and 2021,⁹³ indicating that the macro-level monitoring and eradication measures implemented by the institutional activists have yet to yield the desired effect.

Conclusion

By studying the cases of institutional activists working in agrarian and anti-corruption movements, this article provides insight into their political capacity to promote popular control over state policies and agendas. By leveraging knowledge and networks, these activists

have been able to gain access to positions of influence within the state, allowing them to promote their causes.

However, there are key differences in how agrarian and anti-corruption institutional activists ensure representation of their sectoral interests and agendas. Agrarian institutional activists employ specific mechanisms to facilitate grassroots and public participation, such as inviting organizational allies to interact with government actors. This means not all elements of the agrarian reform movement are represented, particularly grassroots organizations not directly affiliated with institutional activists. In the anti-corruption sector, institutional activists lack the capacity to ensure the movement is properly represented and rely more on technocratic approaches than engaging with grassroots organizations. This weakens the ties with their organizational allies, hindering their ability to realize popular representation and participation.

In terms of promoting the movement's agenda, agrarian institutional activists have relatively less capacity to ensure the implementation of their agenda through the state. For anti-corruption institutional activists, they have also failed to develop a solid agenda for their movement. This, in turn, has further hindered institutional activists' efforts to achieve their goals.

The two case studies show that institutional activists in both the agrarian and anti-corruption sectors have faced difficulties in realizing popular control because they lack the necessary political capacity to leverage their presence within the state bureaucracy to facilitate the representation and participation of their fellow activists who remain in civil society. This means that institutional activists are unable to mobilize popular support from their constituencies and networks as well as the general public to achieve their goals.

NOTES

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- ⁷⁶ Setiyono and McLeod, “Civil Society Organisations’ Contribution”, pp. 357–58.
- ⁷⁷ Focus group discussion, Yogyakarta, 30 October 2018.
- ⁷⁸ Author interview with Luky Djani, online, 26 August 2021.
- ⁷⁹ Author interview with Teten Masduki, Jakarta, 27 June 2019.
- ⁸⁰ *Ibid.*
- ⁸¹ Author interview with Luky Djani, online, 26 August 2021.
- ⁸² Purwo Santoso and Indah Surya Wardhani, “Development Aid and the (Re)production of Civil Society Elites: Human Rights and Anti-Corruption CSOs in Indonesia”, in *Civil Society Elites*, edited by Astrid Norén-Nilsson, Amalinda Savirani and Anders Uhlin (Copenhagen, Denmark: NIAS, forthcoming).
- ⁸³ Eldridge, “Nongovernmental Organizations and Democratic Transition”, pp. 148–70; Setiyono and McLeod, “Civil Society Organisations’ Contribution”, p. 349; Jepri Edi and Ayu Setianingtias, “Donor Proliferation and Donor Coordination in Indonesia: The Case of Governance Reform”, paper prepared for the Centre for the Future State, Institute of Development Studies, University of Sussex, 2007.
- ⁸⁴ Author interview with Luky Djani, online, 26 August 2021.
- ⁸⁵ “Busyro: SBY Berani Setop Upaya Revisi UU KPK, Jokowi Cuma Menunda” [Busyro: SBY Dares to Stop the Effort to Revise the KPK Law, Jokowi Only Delays], *DetikNews*, 6 September 2019, <https://news.detik.com/berita-jawa-tengah/d-4696212/busyro-sby-berani-setop-upaya-revisi-uu-kpk-jokowi-cuma-menunda>.
- ⁸⁶ Author interview with Taufik Basari, online, 31 August 2021.
- ⁸⁷ “Suara Para Mantan Aktivistis di Istana Disindir ‘Hilang’ oleh ICW” [The Voices of Former Activists in the Palace are Criticized as ‘Missing’ by ICW], *Kompas*, 14 September 2019, <https://nasional.kompas.com/read/2019/09/14/07474731/saat-para-mantan-aktivis-di-istana-disindir-hilang-oleh-icw>.
- ⁸⁸ “Memperbanyak Senjata Melawan Korupsi” [Increasing Weapons to Combat Corruption], ICW Year End Report 2017 (Jakarta, Indonesia: ICW, 2017), p. 4.

⁸⁹ “KPK Workers’ Union Condemns Acid Attacks on Novel Baswedan”, *Jakarta Post*, 11 April 2017, <https://www.thejakartapost.com/news/2017/04/11/kpk-workers-union-condemns-acid-attack-on-novel-baswedan.html>.

⁹⁰ One of the cases handled by Novel Baswedan was the misappropriation of funds in the multi-million dollar procurement of electronic IDs (e-KTP) in 2011–12. Two high-ranking officials from the Home Ministry had been accused in the trial. However, KPK prosecutors argued that they were not solely responsible for executing their actions. It was alleged that some politicians of the House of Representatives, including the House Speaker Setyanto Novanto, as well as high-ranking government officials were involved. “Indonesia’s House Speaker Allegedly Involved in e-KTP Mega Corruption Scandal”, *Jakarta Post*, 9 March 2017, <https://www.thejakartapost.com/news/2017/03/09/indonesias-house-speaker-allegedly-involved-in-e-ktp-mega-corruption-scandal.html>.

⁹¹ “Politisasi TGPF Novel Baswedan” [The Politicization of the TGPF for Novel Baswedan], ICW, 22 January 2019, <https://antikorupsi.org/id/article/politisasi-tgpf-novel-baswedan>.

⁹² Author interview with Wasingatu Zakiyah, online, 6 September 2021.

⁹³ This is the authors’ estimate based on data released online by ICW between 2017 and 2022.